

France's Stand on the 2003 US-led War on Iraq: *Analysis and Perspectives*

الموقف الفرنسي من حرب الولايات المتحدة الامريكية على العراق عام
2003: تحليل و آفاق

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20-06-2005

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This thesis was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters Degree in International Studies from the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Birzeit University- Palestine

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To my **father**, for bringing me up a proud Palestinian

To my **mother**, for her unconditional love

To my sisters **Dima** and **Dunia**, for their care and support

To my **High School friends**, for always believing in me

To **Tami**, my mate in this journey of self-discovery

To **Dr. Roger**, for teaching me in ways he never knew

To my **homeland**, for helping me rediscover my identity

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Abstract

This thesis traces and explains the French stand vis-à-vis the 2003 US-led war on Iraq. It highlights how using its identity and its emphasis on adhering to an international framework outlined by the norms disseminated through global institutions, France displayed its institutionalist identity, which proved to play a pivotal role in why France took this anti-war stand during the run down to the war on Iraq.

Realism, while essential to understanding the French behavior during this time, proves not suffice to explaining Paris's complex stand and is supported by incorporating the theories of institutionalism and constructivism to correct it for a full picture of the state of international relations in 2002-2003.

With its emphasis on norms and the identity, constructivism helps us formulate a more comprehensive sense of what shapes national interests and in turn foreign policy in France. Constructivism cannot be detached from institutionalism because norms are transmitted through institutions, which affect the behavior of states and are deemed by France as sources of legitimacy.

The study proposed here will thus show that while realism, with its emphasis on the balance of power, are deemed the essence of the French stand vis-à-vis Iraq, it will show how institutionalism and constructivism are altogether pivotal to gaining a multi-faceted, comprehensive understanding of why France stand stood up to the world's hegemon in this less lucid unipolar order.

The thesis will also trace the Gaullist era and will shed light on a possible correlation between French Presidents Charles de Gaulle and Jacques Chirac. It will also show how de Gaulle contributed to the framing of contemporary French foreign policy and highlight how part of the French stand regarding war is part of historical fundamental French suspicion of unchecked international power or hegemony.

.2003-2002

Preface

The post 9/11 era has been one dominated more than ever by the United States and the demands it has been making on other states. Bush gave many clues as to what this new era would look like. During his State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress on January 29, 2002, the US President equated the attack on Afghanistan with preserving freedom—a universal concept that made his administration's personal battle seem like a global quest.

“Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there,” he said, with a clear emphasis that the US will not be satisfied with punishing those behind the 9/11 assault but will also go after others not necessarily linked with the attacks.¹ This hawkish new policy meant adverse repercussions not only to Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda's hub, but also to what President Bush referred to in his January 30, 2002 State of the Union address as the “axis of evil;”² namely, Iraq, Iran and North Korea- none of which were linked to the 9/11 attacks.

A passage in his speech struck a French (and European) nerve- an ultimatum that was clearly a threat to Washington's allies and non-allies alike. “Every nation, in every

¹ Nicholas Lemann, “The War on What? The White House and the Debate About Whom to Fight Next,” in *The Iraq War Reader: History, Documents Opinions*, ed. Micah Sifry and Christopher Cerf (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 283.

² Text of President George W. Bush's State of the Union address before Congress on January 29, 2002.

region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists,” he asserted.³

Despite asking for support, Washington made it clear that it would lead the way in what it referred to as “the war on terrorism,” which would target probably Iraq next. Many saw its unenthusiasm for its allies’ show of support as dismissive and even contemptuous of their ability to contribute significantly to a US retaliatory operation against Al-Qaeda. This attitude had a negative reception in Europe in general and in France in particular, a country that takes pride in its military capability.⁴

The European allies’ initial vexation at being dismissed was vindicated three days after the attacks. In his speech at the National Cathedral in Washington, Bush stated that the US would not hesitate to act alone and would act preemptively to prevent future terrorist threats.⁵ This implied that the post-9/11 order would be characterized by an administration willing to use its military might with or without its allies’ help and to dictate its own agenda using the unpopular “stick without the carrot” method.

All this strengthened lingering feelings in Europe that the Americans were only interested in their allies’ contributions on an *à la carte* basis with relatively nothing in return. (Chirac made this clear during a visit to London in November 2004, when he said that

³ Quoted in Lemann, “The War on What?” 285.

⁴ Christina Balis and Simon Serfaty, ed., “Visions of America and Europe: September 11, Iraq, And Transatlantic Relations,” *CSIS Significant Issues Series* 26, no. 3 (2004): 118.

⁵ See William Shawcross, *Allies: The US, Britain, Europe and the War in Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 63 and Jay Bookman, “The President’s Real Goal in Iraq,” in *The Iraq War Reader*, 347.

Britain had gained nothing in return for supporting the US over Iraq and that he did not think "it is in the nature of our American friends today" to pay back favors.⁶⁾

In France, it also reawakened a long-held skepticism of US motivations in general, dating back to the US' taciturn attitude toward Vichy and the free French during WWII; the successful US effort to thwart the UK, France and Israel during the Suez crisis in 1956; and, more recently, the questionable pre-9/11 US support for some Islamic fundamentalist groups fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.⁷

Moreover, the French were highly skeptical of the dubious justifications given by Washington to justify launching a military strike on Iraq. The Bush administration used the following pretexts: that it wanted to end Saddam Hussein's contemptuous defiance of the UN and international law, to stop his tyranny over his own people and to destroy attempts to acquire Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs).⁸

Wanting to see a multilateral approach used to deal with the conflict over Iraq, France began to build closer ties with Germany, reflecting what seemed to be a return to the Gaullist rejection of the ever-growing US power or "*hyperpuissance*" as the French call it. The message France relayed to the US was clear: the issue of Iraq should be left to the UN and not to any one particular state.

⁶ Jon Henley, Amelia Gentleman and Michael White, "US Does Not Pay Back Favors, Says Chirac," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2004.

⁷ Balis and Serfaty, "Visions," 119.

⁸ Shawcross, *Allies*, 73.

No WMDs have been found and Bush's own contempt for the UN and multilateral institutions has become evident over time, most notably in his choice of UN-basher John Bolton as United Nations Ambassador and Paul Wolfowitz, a top neoconservative hawk who supported launching a war on Iraq even before 9/11, as head of the World Bank.

European countries were furious at President Bush not only because he named a symbol of the US administration's contempt for multilateralism and world public opinion but also by the unilateral way he did it. The French daily *Le Monde* called the selection a "manifestation of American arrogance... and disregard for Europe."⁹

Post-Cold War Reality

There is no doubt that the end of the Cold War paved the way for the European-American spat (and the French-American rift) that resulted from the 2003 war on Iraq. Soon after the collapse of the USSR in the 90s, the US acknowledged that there no longer existed a "traditional" enemy to fight and from whom to protect the European continent.

The dissolution of the USSR took down with it the bipolar system and left the US as the world's only superpower. Unchallenged in military and economic terms, the US sought to change the international system in a way that suited its vision and ambitions. Moreover, the US realized it was free to move forward with its envisioned foreign policy without being restrained by public or diplomatic opinion in Europe.

⁹ *Le Monde*, "Choice of Wolfowitz Shows Bush's Disregard for Europe," March 20, 2005, <http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3208,36-402263,0.html>, trans. <http://www.watchingamerica.com>.

In spite of this new status quo and the fact that the US was the sole superpower, the Americans nonetheless continued- to some degree- to work together with their European allies through the multilateral venue of the UN. The US also continued to assume its traditional role of European protector, as it did during the crisis in Serbia.

But while still supportive of international institutions and cooperation, it became increasingly evident- especially with the election of George W. Bush- that the United States was shifting its policies in accordance with the actual distribution of strategic power in the world, which differs dramatically from the power balance during the Cold War, when many of today's international institutions took shape.¹⁰

This has had an effect on the way Washington perceived and dealt with the UN. As we know, the UN was created to restrain powerful states from clashing with one another to avoid the state of bloodshed and destruction that plagued the world for years. Both the US and former USSR restrained weaker states within their realm and both used the UN to keep each other in check.

But with the USSR disintegrated, the US became the only great power the UN had to keep an eye on. And with the new neo-conservative administration running the White House, things changed dramatically. The 9/11 attacks gave the new administration the necessary pretext to reinstate full-scale power politics into US foreign policy. This policy

¹⁰ Carl Conetta, "Burning Down the House: How the Iraq War will Affect the International System," *Project on Defense Alternatives Briefing Report # 15* (Cambridge, MA: Commonwealth Institute, May 5, 2003), 8, <http://www.comw.org/pda/0305br15.html>.

change reflected the belief in Washington that the United Nations was becoming irrelevant.¹¹

France's anti-war stance can be linked to this total disparagement of the international system and norms. France did not believe that Saddam Hussein posed any threat to the international community nor that he was in any way linked to the 9/11 attacks. The Bush administration launched the war on Iraq using false premises—the alleged weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam had something to do with the attacks.

When these reasons seemed insufficient to launch an attack and as world public opinion grew louder in criticism, the Bush administration focused its rhetoric on beefing up the threat of terrorism posed by Saddam's regime and promoting democracy in Iraq and the Middle East.

These reasons also did not seem to be enough for France and other states to back a war, which Paris saw would surely inflame an already volatile region. With the Middle East virtually in France's backyard, Paris saw the war on Iraq as tantamount to the flame that would ignite an internal "clash of civilizations," given the large number of Muslim citizens, and increase the threat of Islamic fundamentalism.

The French position is also predicated on other factors, which the US did not see as important, including seeing the invasion of Iraq as a step backward in the "war against terrorism." Given that no link was ever substantiated between Saddam Hussein and Al-

¹¹ Eric Marquardt, comp., "The Europe-U.S. Divide," *The Power and Interest News Report*, April 28, 2003.

Qaeda, Paris saw that terrorism would be fueled by a war pitting the West against a Muslim country.¹²

Moreover, European historical pessimism and wariness of war meant that Paris did not share the Americans' optimism about the ability to change the world through military power. Europeans also see little in their long and sorrowful experience in the region--especially the French and the British, the Mandatory Powers for Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon and World War I-- to support the notion that force and occupation can bring democracy to the Arab world.¹³

Many, however, have explained France's stand within the tight framework of 'weakness and cowardice,' which the European continent, it is argued, is suffering from. While the US is stronger in military terms, saying that the French anti-war stand on Iraq shows mere weakness would dismiss many of the historical and structural reasons behind its position, some of which were previously mentioned.

To reflect on the political causes of terrorism and how they can be removed, before rushing to war, is not weakness or appeasement, as the American right insists. It is the kind of common sense that the US itself showed when it encouraged political negotiations with representatives of the Kosovo Liberation Army and the Irish

¹² Justin Vaisse, "Regime Change in the Transatlantic Relationship: Part I: Making Sense of French Foreign Policy," *In the National Interest* 2, no. 26 (July 2003),

<http://www.inthenationalinterest.com/Articles/Vol2Issue26/Vol2Issue26Vaissepfv.html>.

¹³ Ibid.

Republican Army, all of which used the methods of terrorism to achieve their political goals.¹⁴

Another common alleged factor often cited as the reason behind France's position is anti-Americanism. The flaw of this argument lies in the fact that Chirac has been dubbed the least anti-American of all recent French Presidents and in the fact that most indicators show the French people were strongly against the war not the US. A June 2003 Pew Center poll confirms this view: 74% of the French public polled thought that the problem ("with the US") is with the Bush Administration. This is the highest rate among the 20 countries surveyed.¹⁵

¹⁴ Arthur Schlesinger and Timothy Garton Ash, "9/11 Letters: Arthur Schlesinger tries to Allay European Anxieties About the Bellicose New America. Timothy Garton Ash Replies," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2004. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1301970,00.html>.

¹⁵ Vaisse, "Regime Change."

Introduction

Focus of Study

“*Nous sommes tous Américains.*” That was how France and much of the European continent felt on September 11, 2001 when three hijacked planes plunged into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington- symbols of America's economic and military hegemony, might and prestige. That day, people from across the globe watched in shock and awe what had befallen on the American giant.

The French were taken aback by the intensity of the attack and demonstrations of solidarity and support were myriad, ranging from the highly symbolic gesture of flying the French flag at half-mast at the Elysée palace, to joining others in invoking Article 5 of the NATO treaty in favor of Washington to taking part in the US attack of Afghanistan.¹⁶ France's President Jacques Chirac was the first world leader to visit the US to pay his respects for the victims of the September 11 attacks after he had declared, immediately after the assault, that the French “are entirely with the American people.”¹⁷

Many were quick to heed US President George W. Bush's call for “a broad and sustained campaign” against “terrorist organizations and those who harbor and support them.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Balis and Serfaty, “Visions of America and Europe,” 117.

¹⁷ Marc Roche, “Chirac Has the Moral High Ground,” *The Guardian*, March 14, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,913869,00.html>.

¹⁸ Project for the New American Century to George W. Bush, 2001, in *The Iraq War Reader*, 222.

But it was not long after the 9/11 attacks that the US lost whatever sympathy it had garnered; something some attributed to “a unique failure of American diplomacy.”¹⁹

Governments and communities across the world soon began bracing for changes they knew would be forthcoming. Indeed, almost immediately after the twin towers collapsed, the Bush administration was talking of attacking “terrorists” and eradicating “terrorism” wherever it lingered by means of war if deemed necessary. But it was not later than September 18, 2001, when Bush and Jacques Chirac met, that their views began to diverge, when the French president emphasized his country’s “total solidarity” with the US, while pointedly disagreeing with Bush’s formulation: “I don’t know whether we should use the word war,” he said.²⁰

Washington’s unprecedented subsequent foreign policy set off a wave of vexation that grew into an unparalleled rift between the US and some of its European allies, especially France. The French, like many of their fellow Europeans, thought that the US would act in a way that was similar to them under similar circumstances. Despite the staggering loss, the French did not envision that 9/11 would mean a new era for international affairs; an era where the system created after WWII would be broken down by the very same people who helped set it up.

¹⁹ Martin Schwarz, “We’re All Americans: Why the Europeans Are Against This War,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, March 26, 2003, <http://www.fpi.org/outside/commentary/2003/0303americans.html>.

²⁰ Patrick Tyler and Jane Perlez, “World Leaders List Conditions on Cooperation,” *New York Times*, October 5, 2001.

This study will seek to analyze the stand that the French government took during the run-down to the 2003 US-led war on Iraq. It will also seek to highlight France's possible motivations for adopting such a stance (which differed from its stand regarding the 1991 "Operation Desert Storm") and there will be a description of the crisis itself showing how France set a precedent at the UN, eclipsing the other veto-wielding powers at the world body's Security Council meetings, although they too, with the exception of the UK, strongly opposed US policies.

Many have tried to explain the French stand in the context of European weakness or mere anti-Americanism but this research will show that both are dismissive of the highly complex reality and the many historical and structural reasons behind this stand. This is the heart of the research at hand.

The French stand vis-à-vis Iraq must be explained in context of the circumstances that prevailed during 2002 and 2003. Accordingly, we must analyze the new system of rules that resulted from recent historical events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the growing military power of the US in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. These events affected the position Paris took as soon as the US made it clear it would invade states that were not involved in these attacks.

Aspects of Research

The thesis will begin with an elaboration of theoretical frameworks likely to provide us with insights into the French stand. The theories I will discuss in this context are neo-realism, institutionalism and constructivism (with a reference to the concept of universalism). I intend most notably to show that this theoretical diversity is necessary, because the French stand, too complex and multi-faceted, cannot exclusively be explained by relying on the neo-realist theory. This chapter will thus begin to offer an explanation of reasons why France opposed the war as it did.

The three above theories in particular are used to help us understand what motivated French policy during this time. Considering the fact that France is ubiquitous on many different fronts in the Atlantic and the Pacific, and that it has interests that many-a-time contradict US interests, France rejects the rhetoric of hegemony that the US uses.

Thus, France's stand stems from its policy of national independence which falls under its perception of international relations that prioritizes peaceful mechanisms to push states into adhering to international legitimacy and refraining from military solutions, which can only be the last solution after all diplomatic means have been used.

Realism, constructivism and institutionalism all help us understand why France decided to stand up to the world's only hegemon. Neo-realists make it a point not to forget the primacy of national interests in any country's decision-making. The government in France saw that its interests—its political security, its leadership position in Europe, its

relations with the Arab world—were not best served by supporting an American attack on Iraq. Moreover, as a middle power, France saw that US hegemony should be deployed not only on behalf of America but for a better global order.²¹

While France's interests were at heart and so was its desire to keep US power in check, realism on its own cannot do the French stand justice, as it would mean leaving out many driving forces that affected Paris' policy vis-à-vis Iraq in 2002/2003. There is no doubt that France's sense of identity, its sense of a mission, and its quest for lost 'grandeur' all affected its policy.

President Charles de Gaulle played a large role in cementing France's identity, which was based on the restoration of national self-confidence, pride, and *rang*. France's greatness meant that it had a universal message and a responsibility towards the rest of the world. To France, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) did not just symbolize the French Revolution but were a torch for the rest of the world, especially those states seeking justice.

These factors make Paris the natural leader of the anti-war "movement" that sprung as soon as Washington made it clear it would make Iraq its next target after Afghanistan. In his 1978 work (*La lueur de l'espérance- réflexion du soir pour le matin*), Chirac clearly expresses what de Gaulle had worked for:

²¹ Nikolas K. Gvosdev, "What Would Nixon Do? Thoughts on Salvaging the Franco-American Relationship," *In the National Interest* 2, no. 8 (February 2003), <http://www.inthenationalinterest.com/Articles/Vol2Issue8/vol2issue8gvosdev.html>.

“The French should not believe that their country is destined to become a small power without influence on the destiny of the world...we [will] not only defend our independence and our interests, but also the freedom and the peace of the world. Among all states France is one of the best placed to take the lead of a resistance.”²²

So while the basis of the French stand is best understood through constructivism, the essence of the confrontation between Paris and Washington is realist. However, institutionalism is also at the heart of the standoff and shows us how although the US succeeded (by going to war without UN authorization), it did fail in many other instances as is evident today in dealing with Iran. In both these cases, the US has showed that it can no longer afford to dismiss its allies or the UN.

Respect for international law and norms is inherent in contemporary French ideology and accordingly in its attitude. The French position is based on the fact that because the world no longer operates along Westphalian principles, one must seek to bring into being a regime of international law; that is negotiation over force (the language understood by Washington today).

France also has a different philosophical conception of the international system. French policy is not anti-American but strongly anti-imperial. It is rooted in the understanding that a unipolar world is impossible and that the most effective way to maintain more or

²² Quoted in Marcel H. van Herpen, “France: Champion of a Multipolar World,” *In The National Interest* 2, no. 19 (May 2003), <http://www.inthenationalinterest.com/Articles/Vol2Issue19/vol2issue19vanherpenfv.html>.

less normal relations is to proceed by management and resolution of conflicts by judicial-legal rather than military terms.²³

Related to the theoretical framework is the historical review of French policy in the diplomatic sphere. There is a long history of France leading coalitions intended to balance the existing hegemonial state (except when France itself sought hegemony!) going back to the 16th century. It was applied, for example to the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, Spain, later to Germany, Prussia and finally, following World War II to the United States.

My own analysis, however, will be limited essentially to the twentieth century. The Gaullist era in particular will be examined, given that former French President Charles de Gaulle set or renewed the precedent in many of the political moves he made, including the expulsion of NATO headquarters from his country.

This will be followed by a detailed discussion of the crisis itself both in the UN headquarters especially during Security Council meetings and on the ground (troop build-up). And finally, I shall focus on answering the question, to what extent and in what ways is this latest French stand a continuation of past policies. In conclusion, I will speculate as to whether the outcome of the 2002-2003 crisis in Franco-American relations seems to suggest that this might be the last time France takes such a stand.

²³ Philippe Raynaud, Interview by Damjan de Krnjevic-Miskovic, "In the Shadow of the Bush Ultimatum: The View from France," *In the National Interest* 2, no. 11 (March 2003), <http://www.inthenationalinterest.com/Articles/vol2issue11/vol2issue11raynaud.html>.

Significance of Research

It is clear that the French adopted their stand at a time when new circumstances were prevailing in the international arena. It came at a time when France was working on playing a pivotal role in the Middle East, a region, which has become a hub for the struggle between the so-called great powers. And circumstances this time around were very different from those that prevailed in 1991. The European Union then was still a European Community, and the international community was in disarray with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But today, France and Germany are considered the two strongest states in the EU and the Union today is stronger than it was some ten years ago. We can also see that there is a conflict of interest between France as a member state in the EU and the US, the world's hegemon. Moreover, with the Cold War's end, Western Europe managed to slip out of the US's grip. France through the EU has been trying to strengthen security oriented bodies and institutions to create a power independent of the Americans and their influence on NATO. Many would say that the current stand undertaken by France reflects elements of constructivism, neo-realism and institutionalism. These theories will be tested here.

The current chill in relations between France and the US is not new but it was "special" because of the circumstances: in a unipolar world dominated by Americans, who are using "fighting those responsible for 9/11" as their trump card, it is hard to envision any state going against US dictates. But France did and it sent shock waves across the globe,

which boosted anti-war movements and demonstrations and represented a setback for Washington.

In the longer term, however, it may be found to have been an isolated act with no follow-up; on the other hand, it might be found that, despite its reluctance to do so, the US may in future have to adopt a more flexible and multilateralist approach to solving global problems, and become a more 'benevolent' hegemon. The relative likelihood of each of these two outcomes will also be assessed.

Because the 2003 war on Iraq is a relatively recent event, few researchers have written on it in general and even less so on the French stand. Many journalists have discussed the issue, but not many scholars have analyzed it in detail or questioned the motives behind and results of this exceptional French stand.

Main Research Questions

This research will address the following general questions and others:

- Was France seeking "global justice" when it opposed the US-led war on Iraq or did it take this stand for pure "reasons of state"?
- Why was France so adamant in its opposition to the latest war on Iraq? Was it trying to act as a counterweight to growing US hegemony?

- Does France's stand have historical roots? And if so, how do they relate to this particular case?
- What is "Gaullism" and how does it relate to this specific event?
- How and why did France's stand on the 2003 war on Iraq differ from the 1991 French stand (when former President François Mitterrand supported the US)?
- What were France's main objections to the war? Were there any "hidden" motives behind these objections?
- Is France's stand a continuation of its traditional approach or will the results mean the end of this policy; i.e. did the French "bite off more than they could chew" in this instance?

Methodology and Work Plan

The research will be outlined in three principal parts:

I) a theoretical part that outlines the different political theories that could shed light on the subject, II) a historical part that will take us back in time into the Gaullist era, which has been described as a leading force behind France's position on Iraq, and III) a descriptive part that will take us into the hallways of the UN where a "diplomatic

showdown” saw the anti-war clan (France, Germany *et. al*) at loggerheads with the pro-war clan (the US, UK, *et. al*).

These sections will be covered in four main chapters:

- 1) **Theoretical Approaches:** The theories of realism, constructivism and institutionalism will be highlighted and tested to explain the French stand. An analysis of the motivations behind France's stand will also be undertaken in detail through the theoretical approaches.
- 2) **Gaullism and French Foreign Policy Today:** I will point to historical roots of some aspects of the Franco-US discord. After General de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, he set a precedent by withdrawing his country from NATO's command structure, refusing to allow US missiles to be stationed on its soil. He also played a large role in bringing France back its lost *rang* or status.
- 3) **Disunity at the United Nations (The crisis):** In this chapter, there will be a discussion of the differences between France's stand on the US-led war on Iraq in 1991 and its stand in 2003, followed by an account of the prelude to the war and the evolution of France's position in relation to that of the US. This will be followed by a description of the crisis itself, highlighting the actions and reactions of the three main players: the French, British and Americans.

- 4) **Conclusion:** This will provide a “summary” of the thesis’s three chapters and will attempt to answer many of the questions raised, based on theoretical and historical considerations set out in the previous chapters. It will also include some of the updated information, to the extent that it is relevant to the subject of the thesis, on matters like WMDs as well as other facts that were revealed after the war was over.

Resources

Resources that will be used can be classified into two categories: primary and secondary. The latter include press reports, especially for what is still a very recent period, in which in-depth analyses are virtually non-existent, and books and articles on the historical background to French policies and French-US relations. For the crisis I shall rely in the main on primary sources, in the form of UN resolutions and documents, and the speeches of various leaders, as well as descriptive media reports.

Secondary sources in the form of academic studies will be used for chapters one and two. They will cover the following topics: French power politics in the 20th century, including the Gaullist era, the Post-September 11 world, Franco-US relations, and accounts of the different perspectives on the war.

Chapter One: Theoretical Approaches

Introduction

France was thrown into the limelight during the rundown to the US-led war on Iraq, and accordingly became both the object of adulation and vexation as Paris took the reins of a coalition that refused to rubber-stamp an American mission to strike Iraq. But regardless of the feelings it aroused, the French stand is very much worthy of being the subject of study and scrutiny.

In this chapter, I will highlight the theoretical framework of this stand and how many of the contemporary theories can be used to explain why this old American ally stood up to the mighty hegemon at the Security Council, where a “cold diplomatic war” between the war’s opponents and proponents took place.

A plethora of theories is available; yet I found that realism, institutionalism and constructivism, as well as a reference to universalism, best explain the complex reality of France’s behavior and that relying on realism solely to explain the French stand would not do this thesis justice.

The disseminated image of French foreign policy is one characterized by a selfish pursuit of self-interests. That widely-held view was further supported with France’s staunch refusal to support the US-led war on Iraq without UN consensus. But such a realist interpretation of French foreign policy in the post-Cold War period is far too simplistic

especially after it proved its limits in explaining the emergence of the new world order and the condition of unipolarity.

Thus, other theoretical approaches, notably institutionalism and constructivism, are needed to further explain France's foreign policy. By saying so, we do not mean to deny the importance of the realist approach all-together; it just means that other theories are altogether essential to supplement the realist approach and to provide a credible, multi-sided explanation of why France behaved the way it did in the international system in 2003.

This chapter will show how one can explain France's behavior using the realist approach but that other theories, notably internationalism and constructivism, can further clarify its behavior in the international arena. It seems almost too easy to label France as a self-serving country fixated at frustrating US work as many have and that is why this chapter will look into the more complex reality of France's behavior.

Realism

Western thought has long been dominated by the tradition of political realism²⁴ and has focused on the notion of the balance of power and the national interests of states, which are deemed the principal actors in the international system. Even among critics there remains a consensus that this articulated image of international relations, which appeals to policy-makers and academics alike, is central to the political arena.

Realism is best explained as an image of international relations that is based on four assumptions: states are the principal actors, the state is rational and unitary, and national security is the top priority for states.²⁵ But explaining how states interact cannot be achieved without understanding the concept of the international system.

The international system is explained best by Kenneth Waltz, who describes political structures as centralized and hierarchical and the structure of the international system as beset by anarchy; i.e. the absence of a central agency or organizing authority.²⁶ This lack of authority above states throws the international system into a state of self-help, where states, unable to trust one another, strive to achieve security and ensure survival. The current conditions stimulate “states to behave in ways that tend towards the creation of the balances of power.”²⁷

²⁴ Robert Keohane, “Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics,” in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed. Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 8-9.

²⁵ Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism, and Beyond*. 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 55.

²⁶ See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (USA: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 88.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

Given the assumption that the state is a rational and unitary actor that will use its capabilities to accomplish its objectives, states inevitably interact and conflict in the competitive environment of international politics. The outcome of their actions is, as Waltz says, a tendency toward equilibrium or balance of power.²⁸ From Waltz's view, balance of power is a systemic tendency that will occur "whether it is willed or not" ... as a "constraining and dispensing force" on the behavior of units.²⁹

There are many indicators to suggest that France fits the criteria for consideration as a realist state. There is much evidence to support the assumptions that France is a country that is both unitary and rational. At least since the end of the 1991 Gulf War, French policy on Iraq has been relatively consistent despite the different "actors" or Presidents and governments that ruled France throughout that period.

It is also argued that France also fits the criteria for rational actor. To act rationally requires a rank of ordering of preferred goals, consideration of all feasible alternatives to attain those goals in the light of existing capabilities and consideration of the costs and benefits associated with using particular methods to attain particular goals.³⁰

National security, considered a top priority for realists, is clearly linked to the notion of power because states use the power they have to serve their interests and achieve their objectives. This struggle for power is inevitable given the fact that there is no central authority over states.

²⁸ Viotti and Kauppi, *International Relations*, 51. See also Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 121.

²⁹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 69.

³⁰ Viotti and Kauppi, *International Relations*, 492.

According to realists, this is how the French view the world: one characterized by a state of anarchy, making it inevitable for them to be concerned with survival and security—high politics.³¹ In the words of President Jacques Chirac, we are living in a world, “which has lost its bearings and which is in an era of change, of instability, of brutal resurgence of conflicts of another age of ethnic rivalries, while at our doors religious extremism is feeding itself on certain economic and social failures.”³²

In light of this lack of any hierarchy of authority, France's foreign policy has been based on the realist notion of balance of power. As we know, to maintain a balance of power, realists see that in an anarchical world, states will either band or ally together and pool their capabilities when threatened or increase their military capabilities. Accordingly, traditional French policy has relied on the strategy of balancing any other state's attempts to dictate to the rest of the world, by creating alliances to defend itself in this hostile international system.

This strategy can be seen in practice in France's drive to create for the European Union its own common defense and security policy, realists say. Likewise, its traditional policy toward NATO has been firmly founded on the view that this alliance is vital for French defense, but that it must not be completely subordinate to the dictates of the United States.³³

³¹ Viotti and Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, 36.

³² “Discours du Président de la République M. Jacques Chirac à l'occasion de 50^e Anniversaire de l'ONU,” 5 July 1995, *La Politique étrangère de la France- Textes et Documents* (Paris: La Documentation Française, July-August 1995), 5, quoted in Macleod, “French Policy,” 2.

³³ Macleod, “French Policy,” 2.

In this context, power is “defined in terms of the distribution of capabilities” within the international system.³⁴ It is understood in relative rather absolute terms. The predominant source of power for states will be the relative gains in terms of actual or potential capabilities to be made in their interactions with other units.³⁵ France poured a lot of its capabilities into developing its nuclear power to achieve that much-needed balance of power. It has also attempted to increase its economic capabilities and to achieve political stability for exactly that objective.

Realists argue that, like any other states in the international arena, France has its interests at heart and accordingly seeks to increase its power position relative to other states in order to achieve its objective and to survive, because as they predict, power is used a means and not an end and maximizing power becomes secondary to maintaining a relative position in the system.

France has also placed a high emphasis on international norms as codified in international law, which some have interpreted as another realist attempt to maintain a balance of power, in order to avoid the triumph of an overarching power. Those who have made this interpretation claim that France's approach toward international institutions shows its attempts to secure its position in the international system, and contend that the French express preference for institutions which they can control or which best reflect their own views and their insistence on a hierarchical international system.

³⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 192.

³⁵ Joseph M. Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism,” in *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. David Baldwin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 116-142.

Consistent with this belief is Waltz's argument that the international system becomes institutionalized around the balance of power. Levels of institutionalism occurring above and beyond the balance of power will be limited.³⁶ The existence of effective international organizations will ultimately be contingent in shifting distributions of power between states. For this reason international politics is merely "flecked with particles of government."³⁷

Also consistent with realist tradition, French foreign policy has been affected by international events, the most important of which was the end of the Cold War, German unification and the "New World Order" that saw a shift from the clearly-divided bipolar world to a less lucid structure.

Of course, this has had an impact on French foreign policy which had previously relied in its essence - as did every government since 1958- on the fact that: a) Germany was a relatively weak power, which offered no serious threat to France's dominant position within the European Community, and b) the opportunities provided by the Cold War to practice a relatively autonomous foreign policy between the two superpowers.³⁸

The "New World Order," coupled with the September 11, 2001 attacks, affected French foreign policy as they gave Bush the rationale to forge a national security strategy

³⁶ Ewan Harrison, "Reassessing the Logic of Anarchy: Rationality versus Reflexivity" (Paper presented at 41st Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Los Angeles, CA, March 14-18, 2000), 7.

³⁷ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 88/ 114.

³⁸ Alex Macleod, "French Policy Toward Iraq Since the Gulf War: A Realist Dream Case?" (paper presented at 40th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Washington, D.C., February 16-20, 1999), 3.

involving “pre-emptive strikes” and using unlimited, unchecked US military power to take out potential threats to reach the ultimate goal: regime change in Iraq and other states in the Middle East.

Some analysts saw that the consequent dispute between the US and France was not about Iraq but about the unrestrained power that the US unleashed following 9/11. Advocates of the realist approach would say that France's stand on the crisis over Iraq was thus logical: it tried to construct an alternative balance of power to keep the US in check. According to realists, France did what any country facing what it saw as unrestrained power would do.

This view of France as a realist state has been supported by Henry Kissinger who sees France as a state that “continues to stand for the policies of *raison d'état*, and for the precise calculation of interests rather than the pursuit of abstract harmony.”³⁹ Kissinger's assertion that the disharmony between the US and France is intellectual also underscores what he contends is France's selfish pursuit of self interests- He says: “The dispute repeats the conflict between the concepts of Richelieu and the ideas of Wilson- between foreign policy as a balancing of interests and diplomacy as an affirmation of an underlying harmony.”⁴⁰

It is hardly surprising that American thinkers, like Kissinger, are bent on using realism in explaining international relations. For the most part, discussions of foreign policy have been carried on since 1945 in the language of “political realism”- that is, the language of

³⁹ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster: 1994), 823.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 822.

power and interests rather than ideals or norms. In public discourse in the United States today, foreign policy prescriptions are rarely justified by reference to universal moral principles or utopian aspirations.⁴¹

Problems with Realism and Complementary Theories

Generally speaking, it can be argued that the underlying assumptions of realism (such as the notion of anarchy) may be too simplistic and that realists portray the system as having a life of its own and where statesmen are granted too little autonomy, making the decision-making process seemingly devoid of human volition.⁴² It is also argued that the realist model is fundamentally ambiguous about the status of its predictions about international behavior and outcomes.⁴³

Moreover, other concerns, such as socio-economic matters, are downplayed because national security always tops realists' agenda. The fact that realists limit themselves to the domain of the political-military relations, where the balance of power is granted status of a core concept, makes them naïve vis-à-vis economic relations and processes. And because economic processes have definite power-political ramifications and are described by a balance-of-power logic, realism is rendered incapable of grasping political-economic dilemmas, and limits realism's capacity to guide state's practice amidst these dilemmas.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Keohane, "Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics," 9.

⁴² Viotti and Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, 62.

⁴³ Harrison, "Reassessing the Logic of Anarchy," 7.

⁴⁴ Richard K. Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism," in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press: 1986), 255-300.

Other critics argue that realism is so obsessed with the state that it ignores other actors and issues not directly related to the maintenance of state security, and accordingly international organizations are either excluded or trivialized. Even when Waltz does acknowledge the importance of institutions, he does so to some extent and only in relation to power. He reiterates that point by saying that “the existence of effective international organizations will ultimately be contingent on shifting distributions of power between states.”⁴⁵ It follows that, for the neorealist, a world of a multiplicity of actors having relatively equal power is a formula for chaos.⁴⁶

Accordingly, the French stand cannot only be justified or explained in realist terms. Even realists have indirectly acknowledged the importance of other non-state actors or institutions in the post-Cold war era. Indeed, Waltz argues that political scientists should avoid slipping “into thinking that what an author fails to concentrate his attention upon, he takes to be inconsequential.”⁴⁷ Similarly, another realist thinker, Robert Gilpin contends that to say “that the state...is the principal actor in international relations does not deny the existence of other individual and collective actors.”⁴⁸

But the way realists perceive institutions is different from how institutionalists do. Realists see institutions as decidedly less important because they do not enjoy independent standing, since they are made up of sovereign, independent or autonomous states that determine what these organizations will do, and because, for the neorealist,

⁴⁵ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 88.

⁴⁶ Ashley, *Poverty*, 277.

⁴⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Letter to the Editor,” *International Organization* 36, no. 3 (Summer 1982):680.

⁴⁸ Robert G. Gilpin, “The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism,” *International Organization* 38, no.2 (Spring 1984): 302.

there are no rules, norms, mutual expectations, or principles of practice prior to or independent of actors, their essential ends, and their capabilities.⁴⁹

Institutionalists, on the other hand, see institutions as central and as having a substantial effect on world affairs, despite the fact that they interpret realism as a rationalist model of the international system and accordingly agree with the two realist assumptions that states are the main actors of the international system and that they act to advance their self-interests.

So where the two actually diverge is over the question of whether institutions cause states to take a course of action that they would not have taken had these institutions been absent, i.e. whether institutions shape or affect the behavior of actors in world politics as well as their strategic choices.

Institutionalists contend that they accept neorealist assumptions about the anarchic nature of the international system⁵⁰ and to share in common the neorealist assertion that states are rational when it comes to decision-making. However, they assume that complex patterns of interdependence (increased by the presence of institutions) exist between states making them have common interests with one another.⁵¹ So unlike neo-realists, institutionalists see that interdependence as a “good” thing.

⁴⁹ Viotti and Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, 35.

⁵⁰ Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 26. See also: Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), 23-37.

⁵¹ Keohane, *After Hegemony*, 6.

According to the prominent institutionalist Robert Keohane, this puts states wanting to cooperate in a dilemma (Prisoner's Dilemma). Cooperation is usually analyzed in game theory by means of this non-zero-sum game called the Prisoner's Dilemma. The two players in the game can choose between two moves, either "cooperate" or "defect." The idea is that each player gains when both cooperate, but if only one of them cooperates, the other one, who defects, will gain more. If both defect, both lose (or gain very little) but not as much as the "cheated" cooperator whose cooperation is not returned.⁵²

According to Keohane, cooperation between states becomes institutionalized around norms of a specific reciprocity, and accordingly, the predominant source of power in the international system becomes the absolute gains they can make from international cooperation.⁵³

Furthermore, institutionalists see that institutions put necessary constraints on major powers, impact their policies as well as the outcomes of their interaction and competition with one another and facilitate cooperation among states which act as rational egoists.⁵⁴

In particular, they discuss the role that norms, backed by organizations such as the UN, play in affecting states' behavior.

⁵² F. Heylighen, "The Prisoner's Dilemma," Principia Cybernetica Web, <http://pesmc1.vub.ac.be/PRISDIL.html>.

⁵³ Harrison, "Reassessing the Logic of Anarchy," 8.

⁵⁴ David Axelrod and Robert Keohane, "Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions," in *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. David Baldwin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 110.

The United Nations is one particular institution that has become increasingly prominent in the international arena. For institutionalists, the UN is viewed as having had an effect on some of the central issues of world politics, by subjecting policies to global scrutiny.⁵⁵ But for realists, the UN is only important in so far as it serves as an extension of the ordinary traditional diplomatic processes. It is simply another forum in which the struggle for power is fought out, as it has been fought out before the advent of international organizations, in the chancelleries of diplomats and on the battlefields.

But regardless of how one perceives the effect these organizations have on state behavior, institutions have undoubtedly become a major part of the international arena and are taken into consideration when states outline their foreign policy. This has been a predominant characteristic of the post-Cold War era for many reasons, the most important being the fact that international institutions, most notably the UN, have become a source of legitimacy and credibility for states that wish to interact with one another in the international arena.

It is also true that institutions have become sources of important principles, rules and norms, which states must abide by, even if marginally, to avoid becoming pariahs and to exercise their power within an internationally-adopted framework. Moreover, institutions provide states with a framework from which to engage in dialogue and resolve their conflicts.

⁵⁵ Lisa L. Martin and Beth A. Simmons, "Theories and Empirical Studies of International Institutions," in *Exploration and Contestation in the Study of World Politics*, ed. Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane and Stephen Krasner (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 91.

It follows that states choose and design institutions when they face certain problems that can be resolved through institutional mechanisms. They choose institutions because of their intended effects. Once constructed, institutions will constrain and shape behavior, even as they are constantly challenged and reformed by their member states.⁵⁶

It is true that the changes the world witnessed by the end of the 1980s and the replacement of a bipolar international system with a new world order characterized by American hegemony have had a profound effect on the nature of international relations and thus on the mechanisms of these institutions, but it is also true that it is almost impossible to discuss international relations without mentioning institutions.

France is one of those states that see institutions as a predominant part of the international arena. France also views international institutions, such as the UN, not only as a vital component of state strategy and foreign policy but also as a tool with which to shape the international system and affect member states into abiding by a universal set of norms and principles.

However, one should not be naïve to contend that France, like other states, would not engage in diplomatic battles within these institutions to secure self-interests or a favored position on a certain issue with international dimensions. What matters to France is that universally-obliging rules, norms and principles are upheld by maintaining these international institutions, which have become an essential component in the formula determining state strategy and foreign policy.

⁵⁶ Martin and Simmons, "Theories," 103.

Mentioning norms gives way to a discussion of constructivism. This theoretically-informed approach to international relations contends that identities and interests of social actors are socially constructed, and that they play an important role in international life.⁵⁷ Although constructivists have not as yet managed to formulate a fully-fledged theory of their own, their perspective and approach to the study of international relations is too important to be dismissed.

Constructivism, an alternative approach necessary for explaining more fundamental, internal changes in actors' goals, talks about the role that human consciousness plays in international life. It also holds the view that the building blocks of international reality are ideational factors that shape actors' outlooks and behavior, ranging from culture and ideology to aspirations and principled beliefs, onto cause-effect knowledge of specific policy problems.⁵⁸

Constructivists also discuss the importance of the role of norms among states, which include the Geneva Conventions on Warfare as an example. Moreover, they consider how specific identities of states shape their interests or their behavior and thereby patterns of international outcomes. To adopt Alexander Wendt's definition, identity refers to "relatively stable, role specific understandings and expectations about self" from which actors define their portfolio of "interests."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ John G. Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," in *Exploration and Contestation in the Study of World Politics*, ed. Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane and Stephen Krasner, 216.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁵⁹ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992), 397.

This means that the identity of a state can change and lead to an adjusting or even transformation of interests. It also means that interests depend on identity, which is constructed by actors on the basis of intersubjective meanings and purposes acquired from their institutionally-defined roles.⁶⁰

What is more, the identity of the same state can change and pull its interests along. Thus Thomas Berger argue that Germany and Japan today differ significantly from their pre-World War II predecessors. Antimilitarism, he maintains, has become integral to their sense of self as nations and is embedded in domestic norms and institutions.⁶¹

By contrast, neorealism treats the identity and interests of actors as given and exogenous. Some neorealists claim to “derive” state interests from the condition of anarchy but, as Helen Milner has argued persuasively, anarchy is an exceedingly slippery concept, and the propositions one can derive from it are almost entirely indeterminate.⁶²

In fact, it is only once that Waltz mentions the role of norms in the following sentence: “England claimed to bear the white man’s burden; France spoke of her mission civilisatrice. In like spirit, we [the United States] say that we act to make and maintain world order...For countries at the top, this is predictable behavior.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., 398.

⁶¹ Thomas Berger, “Norms, Identity, and National Security in Germany and Japan,” in *The Culture of National Security*, ed. Peter Katzenstein.

⁶² Helen V. Milner, “The Assumption of Anarchy in International Politics: A Critique,” *Review of International Studies*, 17 (1991): 67-85 quoted in Ruggie, “What Makes the World,” 223.

⁶³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 200.

We can see that constructivism focuses on both identity and norms, both of which play a role in the formulation of national interests. There is a clear and close connection between norms and identity: norms either define identities or prescribe already constituted identities.

To understand how constructivism relates to the two other theories it is important to understand that, and because norms are channeled via institutions, constructivism cannot be divorced from the study of how institutions affect state behavior.⁶⁴

Since 1948, emergent norms have increasingly become institutionalized in international law, in the rules of multilateral organizations and in bilateral foreign policies. An international institution such as the UN has distinctive structural features that influence the kinds of norms it promulgates about such matters as decolonization, sovereignty and humanitarian relief.⁶⁵

Constructivism brings with it the interpretation of ways in which institutions act on state behavior in general and help define national interests in particular. Institutions and the rules and norms they uphold become part of the formulation of state interests, which evolve with time and thus cannot be limited to the traditional realist conception of material interests or to the narrow conception of military security endorsed by neo-realists.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Quoted in Macleod, "French Policy, 14.

⁶⁵ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "Norm Dynamics and Political Change," in *Exploration and Contestation*, 260-261.

⁶⁶ Macleod, "French Policy," 4.

We can thus see that realist assumptions about state interests are too narrow and do not take into account identity as a major factor in the formulation of interests. Identity is said to be socially constructed and therefore not intrinsic. This follows that identity can evolve and contribute to changes in foreign policy by helping decision-makers determine their state objectives which translate into national interests.

In this case in particular, France formulates its national interests in accordance with the way it views itself: an important actor in the international community with universal responsibilities. Its identity also consists of generally-shared values as well the way others view it. It is through this identity that France imposed itself on the international community despite its lack of power. This is evident in many of de Gaulle's speeches where he stressed that regardless of power, France is entitled to greatness and a special role in international politics.

French identity is like any other country's identity: because it is not intrinsic, it is socially-constructed and thus can evolve to contribute to changes in foreign policy. This point is evident in the way France tried to reconstruct its post-Cold War identity in the realm of foreign policy. The 1994 White Paper on Defense is a good example of reconstructing identity as it proposes a *rang* that goes beyond the new-realist view of military power to include economic, diplomatic, scientific and cultural takes.⁶⁷

Another good example of this is the way Chirac tried to show, through the Iraq crisis, that despite it being a leader, France was still a team player whose respect for international

⁶⁷ Ibid, 7.

law and institutions was integral to its identity by emphasizing that Paris would accept any decision made by the UN on Iraq. He also expressed France's institutionalist identity by insisting that UNSC resolutions were the only source of legitimacy for action against Iraq.

We can see that by using the basics of institutionalism and constructivism, one goes beyond the simplistic realist view of a selfish state in pursuit of its interests and engaged in a struggle of power in an anarchical world. With these approaches to foreign policy, we can expand our explanatory scope by integrating important factors, namely institutions that help shape how states behave today, how they formulate their foreign policy and strategies and how these in turn affect international system dynamics.

Constructivism, on the other hand, helps us highlight how states determine their national interests, mainly by emphasizing the importance of identity in formulating these interests and in partially explaining changes in foreign policy. Related to constructivism is the concept of universalism which shows how a country sees its set of national norms and principles as universal and should be applied to the world at large. Both the US and France in this case see their national principles as ideal enough to set standards for people around the globe.

Applying theory: French foreign policy in the post-Cold War era

It would be rather simplistic to say that French foreign policy is based on a mere drive for expanding its international power and status. The French reality, like that of other states,

is highly complex as is its dynamics and interaction with other players in the international system. The limited realistic notion of national interests and the way this theory sets no boundaries for power attainment's limits make it difficult to explain France's behavior through this narrow prism.

As noted above, realists are so obsessed with the state that they ignore other key players, such as institutions, which play an important role in the international arena. Realists also rarely address the other factors that states take into consideration when formulating their specific conception of national interests. At least since the French Revolution, France's foreign policy has been built on a conception of a particular international role for the country, expressed usually in terms of "French exceptionalism" or President Charles de Gaulle's famous "certain idea of France."⁶⁸

But France is not the only power that sees itself as an advocate of universal values that should be diffused across the world. The United States also sees itself as an exceptional country singled out by a "divine purpose" to lead and spread "Pax Americana" and American values, namely democracy, human rights, pluralist political systems and open markets.

This moral mission dates back to the 17th century Puritans who colonized Massachusetts and whose "Calvinist cast of mind saw America as the redeemer nation" that would build "a city on a hill" for all the world to follow, according to Harvard historian Arthur

⁶⁸ Macleod, "French Policy," 5.

Schlesinger.⁶⁹ This notion is a constant throughout American history. “I believe that God planted in us the vision of liberty,” declared Woodrow Wilson as Washington entered World War I. “I cannot be deprived of the hope that we are chosen, and prominently chosen, to show the nations of the world how they shall walk in the paths of liberty.”⁷⁰

This line of universalism is echoed by many people marked by neoconservative thinking. Francis Fukuyama, one of the founders of the Project for the New American Century, whose impact on Bush's foreign policy is unequivocal, says that explicitly. In his book, *The End of History*, Fukuyama suggests that societies should be organized under the principles and values of liberal democracy and market capitalism (preferably American-style), which cannot be challenged by any other principles.⁷¹

The Project itself explicitly calls for a Reaganite-like foreign policy. Many neo-conservatives also believe that that the US is a force for doing “good” in the world. That is why this group fervently believes that Washington should not be restrained in its action nor should it be accountable to multilateralist bodies, like the United Nations.

“Moral exceptionalism dictates unilateralism. If the US, after all, is morally superior to other nations, such as France, then tying it down to the decisions of the UN Security

⁶⁹ Jim Lobe, “Perhaps Not so Exceptional After All,” *Antiwar.com*, May 10, 2004, <http://www.antiwar.com/lobe/?articleid=2532>.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ See: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, Simon & Schuster, 1992).

Council, for example, would in itself be immoral,” points out Charles Krauthammer, a neo-conservative columnist for *The Washington Post*.⁷²

Like the United States, France sees that it has a universal mission to spread its principles and values embodied in the slogan of the French Revolution: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity). Embodying and spreading these universal values is an integral part of France's international identity and thus an important part of its conception of its national interests. Not taking this into consideration would mean sidelining an important determinant of French foreign policy and also possibly misinterpreting its actions as condescending.

To clarify this point further, one can say that France sees itself as a state on a global mission to spread its own values, which it sees as also intrinsically universal. This entails securing a special role or position for France in the international system, not only for the sake of reputation and esteem, but also to ensure the players in the international arena recognize it as an influential actor.

During the first years of the post-Cold War era, France's international identity suffered enormously, as Paris strived to fortify its position in the international system and to get others to accept it and to accept what it stood for. France was especially having problems with the emergence of a new united Germany and with the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, which compromised its status as a major player in the African continent.

⁷² Lobe, “Perhaps Not so Exceptional.”

France's identity was also transformed with the increasing number of Muslims immigrating to it. The fact that Islam had become the second largest religion in France has had a profound effect – both political and social – on the country and there are mounting fears of a rise in Islamic fundamentalism, which seemed to jeopardize the “traditional” French identity. This has been embodied of late by the laws preventing Muslim women from wearing headscarves in government institutions and public schools.

Constructivism argues that changes in identity are bound to have an effect on the state and its foreign policy and indeed we see that the redefinition of the French identity has brought about some crucial changes to France's foreign policy. France's identity (with 5-6 million Muslims) and a fear of a consequent internal “clash of civilizations” were important factors taken into consideration when France made the decision to oppose going to war without UN consent.

Whereas Washington claimed the war would aim to spread democracy, France saw that having the most powerful country in the world occupy an Arab state would lead to more terrorism. Stanley Hoffmann, a Harvard University professor, emphasizes the importance of this point and says it was very much at the heart of the French desire to postpone the war as long as it seemed to make any kind of sense.⁷³

This point was emphasized by France's Foreign Minister at the time Dominique de Villepin. He said: “...That's where maybe the difference of vision exists between the US

⁷³ Stanley Hoffmann, “French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq” (Lecture at Columbia University, New York, May 22, 2003), Library manuscript.

and us. The fact today is that power is not only the traditional, classical power that we used to know in the 19th and 20th centuries, which is technology, economy or military power. We believe there is a new factor of power...which is what some people call soft power or immaterial power and the bottom line of this new power is identity, the respect of culture, the factor of religion, the factors that are deeply rooted in societies.”⁷⁴

The end of the Cold War had actually “enabled France to free itself and to assert an ideology based on a universalist model- in competition with the American one- thus giving identity variables more importance.”⁷⁵ This has meant cementing France's position in the international system by restructuring its identity in a way that includes not only the standard neo-realist concept of military power but also economic, cultural, diplomatic and social power.

As we have seen, this identity is shaped by a plethora of factors, the most important of which are a) its history and b) its status in the international system. History plays a major role in France's identity. Part of the French attitude toward a preemptive move against Iraq comes from a sobering and tragic past experience.

The French had essentially supported a preemptive regime change in Algeria, with important consequences: an enormous tragedy for the Algerians and a tremendous security problem for the French. The aftermath of the Algerian coup of 1992 fueled a

⁷⁴ Simon Tisdall and Ewen MacAskill, “Power Politics the Gallic Way,” *The Guardian*, October 18, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/france/story/0,11882,1065732,00.html>.

⁷⁵ Charles Tumerelle and Philippe G. Le Prestre, “France: The Straightjacket of New Freedom,” in *Role Quests in the Post-Cold War Era: Foreign Policies in Transition*, ed. Philippe G. Le Prestre (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 145.

number of security problems in France and also in Britain. Part of the French reluctance to be associated with an attack on Iraq may come from an interest in protecting French citizens from the possible backlash of already unhappy people in France.

To the French, having an identity based on universal values means maintaining certain obligations and responsibilities towards the rest of the world, and carrying out these responsibilities is in effect part of France's interests. These responsibilities stem from the fact that France sees itself as an important economic power, as a pillar of the EU and NATO, a leader of *la francophonie*, and as a decisive participant in the UN's decision-making process by virtue of its permanent seat in the UN Security Council (UNSC). These factors, coupled with its rich history, mean that France sees itself as a state that can and should affect global events and bring stability to the world.

However, France sees that these responsibilities must be carried out through institutions, most notably the UN and the EU, which France has been seeking to influence from its very birth. France also sees that its interests and therefore its foreign policy should- via institutions- influence developments and events in Europe. This also means that France sees institutions, not as secondary to states in the international system, and not as obstacles to the realization of its interests as realists claim, but as bodies that provide it with a platform to exert its influence on and have a say in world events.

Moreover, France's need for a multilateral approach to international relations involves devising the necessary policies to influence actors' behavior and to bind them under

common rules. And to play an important role in this context involves getting the actors to accept these policies and norms. It is here that many say France takes the lead. Being what some pundits say is the natural leader of Europe, France has a mission to change or affect the behavior of other states, especially considering the Franco-German axis that long acted as the locomotive behind European integration.

Among the other reasons behind France's insistence on making the UN the sole authority for decision-making was its desire to secure its position as an important player in the international arena especially by using its status as a permanent UNSC member. Another possible reason, which is equally important, was to avoid opening the door for the US or any other state to use the UN as a tool to invade other states under the pretext that a regime was "bad" and for fear of the chaos that would arise if the US unilaterally imposed regime change in Iraq.

This point was voiced by de Villepin at one occasion, when he emphasized, "If there is a country that imagines it can solve this matter just alone, we are going to see more vengeance, more difficulties, more problems and the world is going to be more unstable...You have to have the support of the international community. You need to have at a certain point the support of the UN."⁷⁶

Some would argue that the US had already bypassed the UN many-a-time even before Bush did. Clinton himself did not seek Security Council approval in at least three cases:

⁷⁶ Tisdall and MacAskill, "Power Politics."

in Bosnia in 1995, in bombing Baghdad for four days in December 1998, and in attacking Yugoslavia over Kosovo in 1999.⁷⁷

But France, along with other 'concerned' states, saw that Bush's actions were different in three ways: Bush made it clear that the US would strike any state before it even posed a danger. This new policy of pre-emption was a dangerous *carte blanche* for US intervention anywhere around the world. Secondly, unlike Clinton who had ordered the use of force for a limited objective, Bush was using war as a means to achieve regime change. He also wanted to use the UN Security Council as his own tool to push through an order authorizing that regime change.⁷⁸

For France, this was unacceptable, because again it gave the US the chance to adopt a new military and diplomatic doctrine that would give it the opportunity to change the world map and unilaterally and preemptively intervene in countries whenever it sees fit. Thirdly, unlike Bush, Clinton did not seek a resolution calling for force. But Bush had asked for the UN to make a stand and then he bypassed it altogether. Bush's actions were thus seen as a direct challenge to the UN. Even the former American ambassador to the UN, Richard Holbrooke, acknowledged that the hawks around Bush fundamentally misunderstood the role being played by the international organizations that the US helped create after WWII.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Jonathan Steele, "Disunited Nations," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,959378,00.html>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Lemann, "The War on What?" 283.

It is worth noting that institutions are very central to today's Europe, something which has shaped and affected France's identity and hence its interests and dynamics in the international arena. Europe's nation-states are in the process of forming a continental commonwealth, a multilateral union rooted in ideas that stretch back into medieval Europe. The emerging Europe is "old Europe," which, like any constitutional system, juxtaposes opposite but complementary principles: unity and diversity, common interests and special ones, community and individuality, common action and a balance of power.

However, this does not mean that this Europe is unconcerned with power, says David Calleo, Director of the European Studies program at Johns Hopkins University. On the contrary; due to its tragic history, today's Europe is very much aware of power. But when faced with conflict, Europe's instinct is toward conciliation, toward finding common ground.⁸⁰

Another related point worth highlighting is the fact that the structure of the EU, similar to that of the UN, is seen as a way to tame excessive power; to somehow let small countries feel more secure and give them some real reason for feeling secure. The Maastricht Treaty, for instance, was devised with the aim of attaining a particular vision of Europe: independent, self-sufficient (economically and militarily), and autonomous.

This, however, should not be interpreted that Europe wants to revoke its alliance with the US, explains Calleo. It only means that Europe wants to be master in its own house. That

⁸⁰ David Calleo, "French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq" (Lecture at Columbia University, New York, May 22, 2003), Library manuscript.

ambition, which is embodied in the Euro, and the common foreign and security policy, implies not only a Europe that has a mind of its own, but also envisions a plural world. It is not possible to talk about such a Europe and still talk about unipolarity, he stresses.⁸¹

As a result there is a natural affinity between this kind of Europe (among the states that are trying to create it, of which France is the first) and interest in a larger kind of Eurasian concert. Thus, we can see that for the first time, Europeans are trying to adapt their institutions to enlargement and the awareness that in the future, Europe will have to play a role in high politics, in defense and in diplomacy. France also sees a leading role for Europe especially after the Cold War had ended and that role, as far as it is concerned, is not confined to cleaning up the Americans' "mess."

Others have put forward different interpretations. *New York Times* European and diplomatic correspondent Steven Erlanger, for example, argues that one of the reasons behind France's Iraq policy was intra-European politics. The French were concerned about reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and they wanted to pull German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder toward a kind of new European center. They were also concerned about European enlargement, and about the Trojan horse of the new members of the EU, creating a pro-American bloc.⁸²

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Steven Erlanger, "French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq" (Lecture at Columbia University, New York, May 22, 2003), Library manuscript.

Calleo similarly argues that internal European politics played a large role in the French decision. The Germans presented France with a kind of *fait accompli*: either they abandoned their German allies in a rather exposed position or they supported them.

Whichever reason one prioritizes, one has to acknowledge that many countries want to play an important role in this world, and not just France. The French cannot turn a blind eye to the objectives of the US government in the world, which were stated clearly in its strategic doctrine that focused mainly on preventing the rise of other superpowers and to increasing its military capacity to the point where the nation could never be challenged.⁸³

According to Hoffmann, reaction to unipolar power might become even more likely in the future, and not just from France, whose president is “probably the most pro-American French president, one who almost succeeded in negotiating the re-integration of France into NATO.”⁸⁴ This is because September 11 served as a portal for the United States to operate as a hegemonic power in a unipolar world.

However, as global order became more multi-national—as it runs on new types of sovereignty, multilateral agreements, NGOS—more states started thinking in the realms of “what business does Washington have telling us this?” Christopher Caldwell seems to think that this is what is happening in Europe and that unipolarity and the war on Iraq led the French to think along the lines of “now is the time that, if we put our foot down, we

⁸³ Shawcross, *Allies*, 53.

⁸⁴ Hoffmann, “French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq.”

might have a chance of making ourselves heard.”⁸⁵ The Bush administration's unilateralism, for more than one year, on all kinds of issues, produced a kind of popular reaction in Western Europe that various leaders responded to.

Putting Iraq into Perspective

The American view on French policy vis-à-vis Iraq can be described as skeptical; Washington sees the French as deliberately blocking its policy whenever possible and perceives France as pursuing self-interests in this strategically important, richly-endowed Arab state while not hesitating to sidestep its principles. Kenneth Pollack, an American expert on Middle Eastern affairs, highlights this point: “The French have not hesitated to compromise their principles if it meant a greater share of Iraqi trade.”⁸⁶

France, on the other hand, sees that Washington is deliberately trying to reduce its influence in the world by setting obstacles to prevent it from realizing its national objectives. To support its claim, France usually recalls the 1956 Suez Crisis, when it, along with Israel and Britain launched a military attack on Egypt after President Jamal Abdul Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. On that occasion, the roles were reversed and it was US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles who wanted the UN to condemn the attack and demanded a ceasefire and a troop withdrawal.

The United States also seems to take sound advice from an ally who disagrees with its policy as if it were perfidy—and it certainly has done so twice in the last forty years.

⁸⁵ Christopher Caldwell, “French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq” (Lecture at Columbia University, New York, May 22, 2003), Library manuscript.

⁸⁶ Shawcross, *Allies*, 97.

Because of France's past experience in Vietnam, French President de Gaulle essentially warned the United States what would befall it if it went to war with the Vietnamese. The US took this as another proof of the innate hostility that de Gaulle held for the US, even though everything he predicted came true.⁸⁷ Similarly, when the French tried to suggest that it was wiser to give more time to a rejuvenated inspection process, this was again seen by the US as a sign of malign French intentions, despite the fact that the French were willing to engage in military action if the inspection process proved inadequate.

Others have argued that the Americans got the impression that France was trying to lead Europe from the US to the UN "world order model." Caldwell argues that throughout the Cold War, Europe repressed its nationalistic and national desires for the sake of a common defense against the Soviet Union. With that threat gone, its options became open and now it can remain in the American orbit or it can try and strike out on its own.⁸⁸

France made the judgment that the UN model offered Europe more scope for its "national" ambitions, be they the individual ambitions of the 25 countries that now make up Europe or the new pan-European ambition. The Americans, on the other hand, saw nothing but disadvantages going down the UN route, and saw only the threat of being immobilized by the UN.

But putting Iraq into perspective entails looking at how France devised its foreign policy towards this Middle Eastern state. And to do so, we must take our discussion of interests

⁸⁷ Hofmann, "French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq."

⁸⁸ Caldwell, "French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq."

and identity into consideration. The important thing to take note of is the fact that despite the different governments that have ruled, France's policy toward Iraq in the post-Cold War era has been fairly consistent: after the 1991 Gulf War, it broadly supported getting Saddam Hussein to comply with UN resolutions, though it differed over the means to achieve it.

During that time, France's policy also covered an array of issues, including sanctions, Iraq's compliance with Security Council resolutions, and incorporating Iraq into the international community. Moreover, France adopted its own independent stand toward these issues; a stand which it has tended to act on consistently. But to understand why it did so, we must analyze what the interests at stake were.

France's close economic and political ties with Iraq were forged based on France's perception that Iraq was a modern, wealthy Middle Eastern state, which served as a pivot for regional strategic stability. Its fear of the rise of Islamic militancy and its concern for its personal commercial interests prompted it to support Iraq in its war with Iran.

But despite its vast economic interests, France was forced to back the US-led war on Iraq when it invaded Kuwait in 1991, even though it tried to solve the crisis diplomatically until the last minutes that preceded the military attack. France's reluctant agreement to the UN-imposed embargo was interpreted as its attempt to avoid being left out and sidelined and to affirm its position in the international system.

Others saw it as France's attempt to have a say in the region's post-war resolution. In the aftermath of Operation Desert Storm, French President François Mitterrand declared, in front of President Bush, that his country would try to serve the intentions of the Security Council, but would go no further. France proposed three norms or guiding principles for the actions of the Council toward Iraq, and which in themselves expressed a French national interest: respect for Iraq's national sovereignty, strict application and interpretation of international law as established by the resolutions of the UNSC, and the right to "humanitarian interference."⁸⁹

The norms that Mitterrand had proposed were an embodiment of French norms, which it wants to universalize. Its insistence on referring to the UN Security Council meant that it wanted each state to respect the UNSC's resolutions—something which Paris viewed as a source of legitimacy for dealing with Iraq. It also perceived itself as an important participant in creating an internationally-recognized law that should be adhered to. But it was with the concept of humanitarian assistance—its own version of humanitarian intervention—that France stood out back then.

The idea of humanitarian intervention is not new but France took it up and sponsored two resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1988 and 1990, which paved the way for humanitarian assistance to be carried out and for aid to be sent to those plagued by emergency crisis or natural catastrophes, such as the operations carried out in Rwanda and Somalia.⁹⁰ Despite the fact that this idea was criticized for being futile, motivated by

⁸⁹ Macleod, "French Policy," 10.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

selfish interests and other more scathing skepticism, one cannot disregard the fact that France had put forward the right to humanitarian interference as an international norm and it has used it when tackling the issue of Iraq.

However, some saw that France took this stand to secure economic gains and capitalize on the petroleum potential of Iraq—the country with the world's largest reserves behind Saudi Arabia. It was argued that France had significant commercial and political interests in Iraq and the region, which could be damaged if France were to stand aloof from the rebuilding of the country. US hawks have accused France of opposing the war in order to protect its oil interests, given the fact that France's TotalElf (now Total SA) and multiple contracts worth billions of dollars to develop and exploit some of Iraq's largest oil fields.⁹¹

The argument went further pointing out that until 1991, when French President François Mitterand broke contacts with Iraq's Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait, France had sold an estimated \$20 billion worth of weapons, including Mirage fighters⁹² to Iraq and emerged as Iraq's biggest trading partner, in a wide range of civilian goods and services, after Russia. In exchange, Iraq focused on France as its largest oil market in Europe.

But Hoffmann explains that Iraq represented around 0.2 percent of French foreign trade, including oil imports. And it couldn't possibly have been the Iraqi debt to the French, he

⁹¹ Antony Barnett and Martin Bright, "France's Saddam Deals Revealed," *The Observer*, October 10, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/france/story/0,11882,1323967,00.html>.

⁹² Murray Waas, "What Washington Gave Saddam For Christmas," in *The Iraq War Reader*, 32.

argues, because France never expected to get that back.⁹³ Echoing Hoffmann's statement, Vaisse says that trade with Iraq was somewhere between 0.2 and 0.3% of French trade, and if this had truly been a factor behind France's position, then the appropriate strategy would have been to join the coalition, and insist on getting a fair share of oil and other contracts afterwards.⁹⁴

Even when the UN slapped sanctions on Iraq, France went out of its way to prevent it from becoming a total blockade. Many have claimed that France's position over sanctions was dictated by its commercial interests but if that had been the driving force behind its demand for easing of sanctions at the UNSC, then one might assume such a policy to be more prominent under a right-wing government. In fact, this policy had been put forward by four different governments, two of the right and two of the left.⁹⁵

France had never disguised its true intentions about Iraq: it sought to bring this Middle Eastern country back into the international community because, being in Europe's backyard, it provided regional stability. But France insisted that for Iraq to win back its status in the international arena, it had to abide by UN resolutions and if the US or any other states sought to disempower it via the UN, then France would not back it up.

It can be concluded from France's consistent policy toward Iraq following the end of the 1991 Gulf War that its attitude is not merely a tactic but rather a belief associated with humanitarian preoccupations integral to France's identity. This has been reflected

⁹³ Hofmann, "French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq."

⁹⁴ Vaisse, "Regime Change."

⁹⁵ Macleod, "French Policy," 12.

through its adoption of the “right to humanitarian interference”, its own version of humanitarian intervention, which has contributed to formulating its interests and hence its foreign policy.

By insisting on referring to the UN as the provider of legitimacy for actions against Iraq, France also showed that part of its identity is working through multilateral channels and international institutions. By doing so, France is not only seeking to strengthen its position in the international community but also to show the world that it is a powerful state with a universal mission and that it even has ambitions for the world order itself. Moreover, it seeks to treat the UN as a somewhat higher authority that everyone in the international system should abide by and refer to.

Chapter Two: Historical Setting

Gaullism and French Foreign Policy Today

Preface

At the heart of contemporary international relations lies a history of statesmen, ambassadors and other figures that have shaped foreign policy. Undoubtedly, the ever-changing dynamics of the international system as well as internal ingredients have affected the way these people conduct foreign policy.

Throughout its foreign policy, France has tried to maintain internal harmony while trying to balance out the actions of its adversaries and its relationship with other powers and the Third World. Despite being hard-hit by the defeat in Indo-China and Algeria, France, in the past thirty years, has risen to the challenge posed by a "New World Order" dominated by one overarching power: the US.

Charles de Gaulle's era is probably the most prominent epoch wherein France tried to reassert itself as a great power in the international arena. Clearly, de Gaulle's attempts to take many ambitious steps towards 'grandeur' were thwarted by the US. And this is where we can start to begin understanding the chill in this old trans-Atlantic relationship, which was present during de Gaulle's time, and snowballed into a rift during the countdown to the US-led war on Iraq in 2003.

Thus, it is essential to this research that we ask the following questions: what was de Gaulle's contribution to the framing of contemporary French foreign policy and how does this relate to the manner in which France reacted during the march to the war on Iraq? Did Gaullism play an influential role in French foreign policy during this period? Furthermore, a closer look at de Gaulle and the basic principles of his doctrine is essential. What are these principles and how did they affect de Gaulle's foreign and defense policy-making?

An analysis of French President Jacques Chirac's decisions and policies throughout the countdown to the war and how these fit into the Gaullist tradition must be made especially since Jacques Chirac considers himself to be the contemporary heir of the Gaullist legacy.⁹⁶ Accordingly, the chapter will be divided into two main sections: I) Gaullism and II) the Iraqi war in historical perspective.

I will start out by a thorough study of how de Gaulle mastered the waves of international politics to revitalize France's role in the international arena. I will also sketch out the original Gaullism of de Gaulle, which is based on four axioms; a strong economy, an independent foreign policy, an autonomous nuclear weapons program and the vision of an independent European defense system. In addition to these areas, I will also highlight specific aspects of how Chirac followed de Gaulle's footsteps and where the divergence between the policies of both statesmen is most apparent.

⁹⁶ Marcel H. Van Herpen, "Chirac's Gaullism: Why France Has Become the Driving Force Behind an Autonomous European Defense Policy," *The Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 4, no. 1 (May 2004): 1. http://www.ier.ro/Revista_RJEA/RJEA_Vol4No1_Mai2004.pdf.

Introduction

The Iraqi crisis opened a wide rift between the United States and France that will resonate throughout their mutual history. But in order to grasp the significance of this discord fully, we need to see the war on Iraq in the context of past disagreements that have marred relations between the two trans-Atlantic allies since the late 1950s.

The tension that had emerged between the old allies France and the US during the Iraqi crisis is nothing new. Some fifty years ago, Charles de Gaulle withdrew from NATO's command structure, refused to allow American missiles to be stationed on its soil and inaugurated ties with communist China, all to the Americans' dismay.

De Gaulle, leader of the Free French movement during WWII and the chief architect of the Fifth Republic, remains one of the major political figures of his age who clearly continue to exert a posthumous influence on French political life today. His vision of and subsequent policies had a major impact on the country's post-war history, while his perception of France's "rightful" place in the world continues to exert an influence on France's foreign policy today.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that the footsteps of "The Man Who Said No" (*celui qui a dit non*)⁹⁷-- as de Gaulle is sometimes referred to for refusing to accept France's defeat by Nazi Germany in 1940-- are unmistakable in the stand taken by France during the countdown to the war on Iraq in 2002 and 2003.

⁹⁷Tony McNeill, *De Gaulle and Gaullism*, University of Sunderland, <http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/~os0tmc/contem/gaulle.htm>.

Many see that the events preceding the Iraqi war were due to a long history of French determination to create a foreign policy independent of the US. De Gaulle certainly began to build this policy long before today's France attempted to break free from its dependence on the Atlantic alliance.

He also had a vision for France: he saw it as a prestigious and strong international player lying at the heart of a strengthened Europe that extended "from the Atlantic to the Urals."⁹⁸ His ambitious plan to give France a leading role in global affairs was coupled with a scheme to fight off expanding US power and find the means with which to meet *le défi Américain*—the American challenge,⁹⁹ especially since he perceived a danger in the Americans' embrace of the Europeans as partners in an Atlantic alliance.

Refusing to concede a permanent presence in Western Europe to the United States, de Gaulle accordingly withdrew France from the military facet of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the US-led defense alliance that France had previously joined to serve as a bulwark against communist Russia.

His struggle for independence from the superpowers included leading a group of European nations from the grips of the Soviet and American superpowers as well as developing a nuclear weapons program- a *force de frappe*. It meant extending a friendly hand to the former colonies, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, and calling

⁹⁸ Fondation et Institut Charles de Gaulle, "Quotations: The General's Words," http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=85.

⁹⁹ Shawcross, *Allies*, 77-78.

for the autonomy of the French Canadian province of Québec, a move that drew US (and Canadian) ire.

It also included preventing the UK from joining the Common Market for fear that it would serve as a “Trojan horse”¹⁰⁰ for American interests in Europe. Furthermore, his actions were emboldened by forging a close relationship with France’s traditional enemy, Germany, all of which boosted France’s confidence in the international arena, especially after its extensive empire had fallen to pieces.

2.1 Gaullism

This leads us to an analysis of Gaullism and how it reflected on the course of action that France took prior to the occupation of Iraq.

Gaullism has many aspects, but there is one basic aspect without which it loses its sense. This is a deep belief in a specific historical role of France.¹⁰¹ France has a special role in the world not just because of its tangible characteristics but because it stands for certain ideals and principles, which it must spread to the world. This idea of France being on a mission lies at the heart of Gaullism.

France sees itself as the custodian of the universalist principles of the French revolution encapsulated in the revolutionary triptych *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and radiated by the French language. France’s position in the world in the twentieth century was as

¹⁰⁰ John F.V Keiger, *France and the World Since 1870*, ed. John Gooch (London: Arnold, 2001), 181.

¹⁰¹ Van Herpen, “Chirac’s Gaullism,” 2.

dependent upon how decision-makers and the average French person perceived and understood that role.¹⁰²

De Gaulle saw no limits to the “good” France can do; it would act not only to realize its self-interest but it would work for the sake of other states and indeed for humanity as a whole. Linked to this idea of spreading French/universal values is de Gaulle’s grand plan to bring France back to her “rightful place” as a major world power in the international system- to return to France its true spirit and glory, its *rang*.¹⁰³

In a message to the National Assembly on December 11, 1962, de Gaulle stated: “In order to restore the world’s greatest problem- the accession of all peoples to modern civilization- France can and must play a mighty role. She must know how to develop her economic, technical and cultural resources so as to lend widespread assistance to others.”¹⁰⁴

His preoccupation with restoring France’s prestige and grandeur bordered on the obsessive. “France is not really herself unless she is in the first rank...In short...France cannot be France without grandeur.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Keiger, *France and the World*, 1.

¹⁰³ McNeill, *De Gaulle and Gaullism*.

¹⁰⁴ Alfred Grosser, *French Foreign Policy under De Gaulle*, trans. Lois Ames Pattison (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), 60.

¹⁰⁵ Edward A. Kolodziej, *French International Policy Under De Gaulle and Pompidou: The Politics of Grandeur* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 25.

There may be many tangible factors that determine France's relationship with the rest of the world (such as economics and demographics) but the more abstract concepts of national identity, self-perception and history play a more vital role in understanding this nation's interaction with the world.

How France views itself (a state on a mission to do 'good') certainly conditions how other states react to it. While all superpowers tend to think of themselves as superior, France, unlike all powers, except maybe the US, sees that it is on a universal mission to spread its Revolution-borne values across the globe.¹⁰⁶

2.1.1 National Identity

It goes without saying that international relations are dictated by state actions and those, in turn, are determined by several ingredients, including the way the state perceives itself, its interests, national identity and its mission. These ingredients are especially relevant when it comes to understanding why France behaves in a certain way, why it makes the decision that it does and its aims when conducting foreign policy.

The way France perceives itself (a power on a humanitarian mission) is tightly intertwined with how others around the globe perceive it. This has shaped France's national identity and has given legitimacy to the international role it gave itself. Its international identity has also been molded by the way France cast itself since the

¹⁰⁶ Keiger, *France and the World*, 2.

Revolution: the bearer of universalist values to be diffused across the globe through French culture and language

For much of the 19th and 20th century, France's international relations focused on the creation of a national identity characterized by greatness. The idea of French greatness was nothing new of course, having been built on French cultural and political hegemony during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the eighteenth century, Montesquieu had summarized it as "this general passion the French nation has for glory."¹⁰⁷

In the 20th century, de Gaulle understood the potency of national identity and pride as a unifier. At the beginning of his War Memoirs, referring to 1940 when the French state, let alone the economy and armed forces, was divided and devastated, he proclaimed, "The positive side of my mind convinces me that France is not really itself except in the front rank, that only vast undertakings are capable of offsetting the disintegrating elements of its people. In short, France cannot be France without greatness."¹⁰⁸

He also said on January 31, 1964, "France, because she is France, must pursue a worldwide policy." This means that others are not in the same position and that independent of the situation of power and strength, France has rights and duties that are entirely different from those of other countries. It also specifically means that regardless

¹⁰⁷ Jean-Batiste Duroselle, "Changes in French Foreign Policy Since 1945," in *In Search of France*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann *et. al.* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 316.

¹⁰⁸ Keiger, *France and the World*, 18.

of its power, France is entitled to greatness and to an important role in international politics, both of which have affected the way it conducts its foreign policy.¹⁰⁹

This conviction was born with the Enlightenment but was emphasized by the French Revolution. According to Tombs, democrats saw the French nation as the revolutionary nation, the prophet and standard-bearer of political progress and thus in a way the universal civilization.¹¹⁰

France thus conflates its self-interest with the interests of others, giving its “mission” a universal touch. This means that France not only speaks for itself but for Europe and much of the Third World. Its message to these states is that if France did not keep the superpowers in check, their interests would not be met.

For de Gaulle, France's self-interest and universal mission were obviously one. Assisting its quest for grandeur was in the interest of other states, too.¹¹¹ Dozens of speeches by de Gaulle echoed this conviction; on 31 December 1967, the President's New York radio message to the French stated, “Our action aims to attain linked objectives, and which, because they are French, respond to the interests of mankind.”¹¹²

This civilizing mission has not only pervaded French society but it has also affected the way France itself relative to other countries. On 15 April 1961, President De Gaulle

¹⁰⁹ Grosser, *French Foreign Policy*, 126.

¹¹⁰ Robert Tombs, *France 1814-1914* (London: Longman, 1996), 313, quoted in Keiger, *France and the World*, 1.

¹¹¹ Kolodziej, *French International Policy*, 46.

¹¹² Keiger, *France and the World*, 19.

stated, "France must fulfill its mission as a world power. We are everywhere in the world. There is no corner of this earth, where at a given time, men do not look at us and ask what France has to say. It is a great responsibility to be France, the humanizing power *par excellence*."¹¹³

Of course, grandeur carried with it important implications for French foreign policy. Not only did it give it a big-power role but it also meant that, along with a smaller number of other chosen states, France had the responsibility to define the hierarchical structure of international relations and the role to be played by lesser units. Moreover, it had to determine and assure basic security arrangements, and to regulate the economic and diplomatic processes by which relations are to be conducted.¹¹⁴ Thus, as a great power, France would have to take the kind of steps that others can follow and had to set an example. By taking this international role, France would be reasserting its grandeur.

In order to achieve its *rang*, de Gaulle also saw the need for a powerful presidency in order to put an end to unstable parliamentary rule. He thought the Fourth Republic was too weak to lead France and help it regain its status in the international arena. Accordingly, he introduced a new constitution in June 1958 which provided for a presidential system. He also stressed France's sovereignty through an independent foreign policy vis-à-vis the US and the USSR, and immediately began to create new

¹¹³ Duroselle, "Changes in French Foreign Policy," 353.

¹¹⁴ Kolodziej, *French International Policy*, 25.

vehicles of power, which he saw as necessary in the post-colonial era, after France had lost Algeria.¹¹⁵

2.1.2. Challenging US Hegemony

The French-American relationship has long been saturated with tension coming out of an ancient rivalry alongside the ancient alliance, with both countries having conflicts of interest at times and constant problems over the stereotypes each holds about the other and both thinking they have a world mission to achieve.

No doubt that a certain resentment of the United States, in the context of a complex love-hate relationship, has always affected a section of the French ruling establishment. Gaullism sought to give expression to that resentment in a number of ways, including withdrawal from NATO's military command in 1966.¹¹⁶

The General's vision for France-- her independence, security and greatness¹¹⁷-- and his consequent policies to achieve this dream caused a rift with the US, whose perception of the world pivoted on the Soviet threat. The Americans also saw that the bulwark against communism would be a bolstered NATO and a regional defense system with US nuclear weapons based in Europe and elsewhere.

¹¹⁵ Van Herpen, "Chirac's Gaullism," 2.

¹¹⁶ Amir Taheri, "It's Time for France to Dump its PAF policy," *Gulf News*, March 19, 2003, <http://www.gulf-news.com/Articles/opinion.asp?ArticleID=81204>.

¹¹⁷ Kolodziej, *French International Policy*, 9.

De Gaulle had plans of his own. To free the country from the US's grip, he set up an independent nuclear deterrent and refused to have American arsenal on French soil unless France had complete control over it, which the US would not accept. He saw that a balance was in place by the two superpowers that owned nuclear weapons and called for the independence of the Middle East which he feared would be turned into a battleground for the superpowers.

But to understand this highly-convoluted issue, we must briefly go back in time to have a quick look at US-French relations. During WWII, the French learnt their lesson, which was that the US had not come to their help; a lesson which would not be lost on French leaders like de Gaulle. The relationship with de Gaulle was especially tense but although he was not recognized by Washington as the leader of the French Committee of National Liberation until 1943, US military aid kept him to heel. However, dependency meant that de Gaulle was weary of the Americans whom he saw as insincere about supporting European interests.¹¹⁸

After the war, de Gaulle sought global recognition of France's status as one of the big powers that could shape Europe in the post-war settlement. Despite being excluded in 1945 from Yalta, the conference which was confined to the US, Britain and the USSR,¹¹⁹ de Gaulle achieved much of what he had sought after, thus securing for France an important role in the UN.

¹¹⁸ Keiger, *France and the World*, 176.

¹¹⁹ Anne Lacroix-Riz, "When the US Wanted to Take Over France," trans. Luke Sandford, *Le Monde Diplomatique*- English edition, May 2003, <http://mondediplo.com/2003/05/05lacroix>.

He also blamed the post-war settlement on Yalta's decisions and on the Americans with their non-European perspective. He made the best out of a bad situation when France got excluded by the 'Big Three' by saying that this would in fact promote France's independence and give it the opportunity to promote Europe's interests in the international arena.¹²⁰

His skeptical view of the Americans was apparent in his foreign policy proposals from 1946 to 1958, his years outside of power, and even more so during his presidency from 1958 to 1969. De Gaulle was intent on freeing France from the Americans' grip and accordingly embarked on an independent defense and foreign policy.

France had been vexed by the US many times; Washington refused to provide the French with atomic weapons during the siege at Dien Bien Phu. The Americans also demanded a withdrawal of French troops during the Israeli-Franco-British attack of the Suez in 1956. This incident was particularly important to France and to the future of French-American relations. It clearly showed that it was not easy for France to pursue independent actions in the global arena without the US having a say in them. Moreover, it showed the need for greater European solidarity.

The Indochina War cost France a lot not only in terms of human and financial costs but also because it dealt a heavy blow to its credibility in the international arena to the extent that it was seen as a confirmation of French decline from great power status. It also underlined the degree to which France was dependent on Washington in terms of foreign

¹²⁰ Ibid., 179.

and defense policy. This in turn bred resentment and a yearning for greater independence from the US, which was financing 80 percent of the war.¹²¹

However, the picture cannot be painted in black or white; it is safer to say that there is a fundamental ambivalence at the heart of France's relations with the Anglo-Saxons that makes them adversaries and allies, sometimes at one and the same time. This can be explained by France's desire to promote its own view of the world order, occasionally at variance with that of London and Washington.

Yet often simultaneously, Britain and the US were perceived as real or potential allies against a hegemonic Germany.¹²² This is apparent in many cases throughout history. For example, while the Americans did not give the French direct military help in Indochina, they did largely finance the Indochina War.

However, that did not stop de Gaulle from fighting tooth and nail against US hegemony. In 1964, he recognized China. He also criticized the US for its war on Vietnam, showed his disapproval at the US dollar's domination of international trade and sided with the Arabs against Washington's ally Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War.

¹²¹ Ibid., 64.

¹²² Keiger, *France and the World*, 4.

2.1.3 Axioms of Power

For de Gaulle's ambitious vision to be realized, four vehicles of power¹²³ or axioms were needed to achieve grandeur: 1) "dirigisme" or a state-led economy, 2) an independent foreign policy unconstrained by alliances, 3) an autonomous nuclear deterrent or *force de frappe* and 4) an independent, strengthened Europe that would act as a buttress against the hegemony of the two superpowers: the US and USSR.

a) Foreign Policy

Principles

De Gaulle's quest for an autonomous foreign policy was as much a tool to serve national interests as it was to promote France in the international arena. This drive for an independent policy rested on de Gaulle's conception of international relations, which mainly focused on the nation-state, and on his conception of the international system; a system where France would play a pivotal role.

His conception of international relations and of France's global policy heavily influenced France's foreign policy during his time in office. For de Gaulle, the nation and those who direct its affairs defined political reality. He appeared to define the state in terms of its purposes, which were threefold: domestic order, external security, and, unique to France, grandeur.¹²⁴

¹²³ Van Herpen, "Chirac's Gaullism," 2.

¹²⁴ Kolodziej, *French International Policy*, 23-24.

De Gaulle clearly had a realist (almost Hobbesian) view of international relations: nation-states (the international actors) competing with one another for power driven by their selfish interests. His views rested on balance-of-power politics with their main objectives of maintaining the state and expanding its influence.

The President also held a skeptical view of international institutions, which he saw as subordinate to the nation-states which made them. To him, institutions were merely additional arenas of state interactions and stakes in the pre-existing struggle between states for their particular objectives. As objects and instruments of state conflict they were, themselves, incompetent to enforce binding rules on the members.¹²⁵

It is not difficult to recognize similarities with the thinking of Henry Kissinger. With him, de Gaulle shared not only a distrust of idealist world visions but also a deep historical understanding of the political realities of his time. The only illogical element in his 'Kissingerian' realist world view is the special role he assigned to France; that of an unselfish and idealist Jeanne d'Arc in a bad, selfish world.¹²⁶

This realist conception of the world and international affairs dictated much of de Gaulle's foreign policy. This is apparent throughout his era, most notably in his view that with the rise of two superpowers and globalization, the nation-state with its objectives and independence would be compromised.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 49.

¹²⁶ Van Herpen, "Chirac's Gaullism," 3.

De Gaulle feared that, unchecked by another powerful state or a group of states, the US and the Soviet Union were being drawn simultaneously in two contradictory directions: toward war or toward mutual accord and subsequent condominium rule of the international system.¹²⁷

He saw that superpower conflict would boil over and affect all other states if unhindered because each competing power would attempt to impose its will on the weaker states. Accordingly, a plural international system free from the grips of the two superpowers meant more stability for the nation-state.

Dissatisfied with the order that emerged after WWII, de Gaulle saw that only a decentralized system, still based on the nation-state as the basic actor, but multipolar in nature could promote Gaullist France's aspirations for glory and grandeur, as well as increased international influence and status. What was needed in de Gaulle's eyes was a system that would make unnecessary the "two hegemonies" and would unify Europe under French leadership.¹²⁸

To that end, an "international system revolution" was needed. He made that clear when he said: "Since the division of the world between two great powers, and therefore into

¹²⁷ Ambassade de France, Service de Presse et d'Information, *Major Addresses, Statements, and Press Conferences of general Charles de Gaulle, 1958-64* (New York, 1964) 58-59, 75-78, quoted in Kolodziej, *French International Policy*, 42.

¹²⁸ Stanley Hoffmann, Foreword to *French Foreign Policy Under De Gaulle*, by Alfred Grosser (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).

two camps, clearly does not benefit the liberty, equality and fraternity of peoples, a different order, a different equilibrium are necessary for peace.”¹²⁹

This meant two things: a) a modified international order was needed with a revived France that can play a pivotal role in the international arena and b) the object of foreign policy had to be adjusted to help change the distribution of power and using its political, economic and diplomatic policies as a tool.

De Gaulle's dream was to transform the international system from bipolar to multipolar and to relax the restraints of bloc politics. He also saw France increasing its influence, posture and status, especially in the Middle East and Africa, as well as its relative independence from the superpowers.

A good example of how he put this into effect is the Algerian War, which almost brought France to the brink of civil war and destroyed the Fourth Republic. By ending the war, de Gaulle managed to give France an opportunity to emerge as an independent force in world politics.

By ending the costly war, the French President also managed to take a different path in the Third World; the path of diplomacy that included championing the principle of self-determination as a means to transform the bipolarity left after World War II into a multipolar international order wherein France would again find its *rang*.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Kolodziej, *French International Policy*, 46.

¹³⁰ Grosser, *French Foreign Policy*, 130.

No longer would France conform to the bloc politics of the superpowers and, specifically, to the hegemonic dictates United States. No longer would France be supposedly weakened by submission to its Atlantic partners; it would contribute through the assertion of its own national interests, to the creation of a Europe strong enough to arbitrate the end of the Cold War.¹³¹

Foreign Policy in Practice

In conducting his foreign policy, de Gaulle had two goals in mind: an independent foreign policy for France (free from the Americans' grip) and a foreign policy that would have a global effect.

That meant that France had to get rid of its costly colonial holdings in Algeria, while weakening the American and Russian empires consecrated at Yalta and rallying Europe, with France as its Western focus, to reassume its traditional leadership in world politics.

De Gaulle specifically saw US hegemony as the main threat to his country and the world; his worst nightmare was American *hyperpower* imposing its will through military might and destroying local cultures and economies through globalization.¹³²

To achieve an autonomous foreign policy de Gaulle saw it necessary to have a greater say in NATO decision-making. French relations with the US declined after 1958, when de

¹³¹ Kolodziej, *French International Policy*, 9-10.

¹³² Henri Astier, "French Wrestle with De Gaulle's Legacy: the Wartime Role is Undisputed- but What About Now?" *BBC News Online*, April 15, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1930682.stm>.

Gaule called on the US and UK to establish a tripartite directorate in NATO to address international security issues; a call rejected by London and Washington.¹³³

In the few months after that, France withdrew its Mediterranean fleet from NATO command after Washington failed to supply Paris with submarines. In 1960, France refused having US tactical nuclear warheads on its soil, which obliged Washington to turn to Britain and Germany. This strategy aimed at ensuring less dependence on the US for security and securing an independent foreign and defense policy eventually led to France's withdrawal from NATO's military command in 1966. De Gaulle did not stop at that; he also ordered the withdrawal of NATO troops from French territory.¹³⁴

France's withdrawal from NATO's military command showed how different the change in its foreign policy would be, especially vis-à-vis Third World countries. New industrial relationships were forged with Algeria and Iraq, while French support grew for many countries who sought independence from the US, such as Cambodia.

The move that irked the US the most was de Gaulle's recognition of its bugbear Communist China in 1964. Vietnam was also an area of dispute between France and the US, which was convinced it was an important part of the East-West divide. De Gaulle condemned the war, maintaining that a solution could only be achieved through political

¹³³ Keiger, *France and the World*, 70-71.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

dialogue with the “real political forces,” which he referred to as the “national resistance movement.”¹³⁵

The global reach of French foreign policy was clearly expressed by de Gaulle when he called for the autonomy of Québec when he visited Canada in 1967, provoking the Anglo-Saxon world even more and through his visits to Asia and Latin America, making a diplomatic *percée* in the continent which the US considered its exclusive backyard.¹³⁶

De Gaulle also saw it fit to extend France's global reach further by forging new ties with the USSR. His official visit to Moscow in 1966 resulted in hotline installed between Paris and Moscow; an honor that was once exclusive to Washington. It is also worth mentioning that de Gaulle was also openly critical of the international monetary system, which made the dollar a reserve currency and gave the US considerable power.¹³⁷

The President's determination to free its foreign policy from exterior controls and to increase its global influence and prestige also meant establishing different ties with the Middle East and new post-colonial links with former colonies in the Maghreb, making Algeria the center-piece of this new relationship.

De Gaulle's relationship with the Arab world bloomed at the expense of its ties with Israel. Before the 1967 war, France was Israel's closest ally, supplying it with weapons

¹³⁵ Speech in Phnom Penh in 1965 quoted in Paul-Marie de la Gorce, “A Short History of Franco-US Discord”, trans. Harry Foster, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 2003, http://mondediplo.com/2003/03/07franeusa?var_recherche=France.

¹³⁶ Van Herpen, “Chirac's Gaullism,” 4.

¹³⁷ De la Gorce, “A Short History,” 3.

and facilities for developing its nuclear weapons program. The breaking point for the affair came when Israel launched a war against Egypt, Jordan and Syria against de Gaulle's advice. He was highly critical of the Israeli move and was once quoted as saying that Israel "in the territories it has seized, is organizing an occupation that cannot continue without oppression, repression and expulsion. Furthermore resistance to it is appearing, which it refers to as terrorism."¹³⁸

His condemnation of the 1967 Six-Day War (which Israel waged against Paris' strong advice) caused another disagreement with the US. On June 5, the French President slapped an arms embargo on the Middle East and ended his support for Israel's nuclear program; both of which had little effect because Israel was now receiving its main support from the US.

De Gaulle's vision for a greater France also meant being pragmatic at times to ensure French interests are carried out, as was the case with Algeria. His actions regarding Algeria were based on his belief that France could never win and that ending French rule over Algeria was the right thing to do. He also saw the war as a serious setback for the French economy.

De Gaulle ended 132 years of colonization in Algeria to guarantee France a better status in the international community and to fulfill a greater ambition,¹³⁹ which included

¹³⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹³⁹ McNeill, *De Gaulle and Gaullism*.

establishing a privileged relation with the Algerian government and widening French influence in the developing world.

That goal was apparent after the Six-Day War in the way France responded quickly to fill the vacuum left by the Anglo-American powers among the Arab states and multiplied its efforts to improve its relations with the Arab peoples.¹⁴⁰ With its independent stance, France offered the Arab states an alternative to the superpowers and could provide a Western connection for the Arabs at a time when the United States, with its favoritism towards Israel, could not.¹⁴¹

b) The Force de Frappe

When de Gaulle came to power, he already had a clear vision of France's status in the international community and how it would achieve this globally-high rank. The forces at play at the time made him come to several conclusions, which included his conviction that the Soviet Union no longer wanted, and perhaps was no longer able, to extend its empire into western Europe. He wrote: "If you no longer make war, sooner or later you must make peace."¹⁴²

The fact that both superpowers threatened one another with their nuclear weapons ruled out the possibility of a use of those weapons. But this also meant that France could not

¹⁴⁰ Kolodziej, *French International Policy*, 51.

¹⁴¹ John C. Campbell and Helen Caruso, *The West and the Middle East* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1972), 32.

¹⁴² De la Gorce, "A Short History," 1.

rely on the US nuclear weaponry to protect Europe. De Gaulle came to the conclusion that it was not enough for France to withdraw from NATO's military command.

It was only logical for de Gaulle whose antagonism to US hegemony, quest for national sovereignty and desire to return France to its former state of greatness were a priority to develop France's own nuclear weapons program or what became known as a *force de frappe*.¹⁴³ His Hobbesian view of human nature and international relations meant that developing this nuclear deterrent was the next logical step.

For de Gaulle, France was an important force to balance out the two overarching powers. For the sake of a stable international system, France had to play a role as a global power—a balancer and a broker of international relations, and if it did not do so, he saw no chance for a lasting peace. That is why constructing its own nuclear force was a vital step for France to take.

He formulated the French argument in this way: The world situation in which two superpowers would alone have the weapons capable of annihilating every other country...over the long run, could only paralyze and sterilize the rest of the world by placing it either under the blow of crushing competition, or under the yoke of a double hegemony that would be agreed upon between the two rivals.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Van Herpen, "Chirac's Gaullism," 4.

¹⁴⁴ Kolodziej, *French International Policy*, 45.

France had also been vexed at Washington's refusal to share its nuclear know-how while it made sure the British had access to that information. France was also concerned that should the US suddenly stop supplying fissile material, its quest for national independence would be jeopardized.

But regardless of the reasoning behind it, from 1958 onwards, de Gaulle made nuclear strategy an integral part of France's foreign policy. At no point in France's recent history would strategy, foreign and defense policy be so in tune. But to achieve that unity of purpose using a radically different foreign and defense policy meant overhauling relations with the US.¹⁴⁵

De Gaulle's strategy was spelled out in 1959 to the Paris-based Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale (IHEDN): "The defense of France must be in French hands. This is a necessity with which we have not always been familiar in the course of the past years. Naturally, French defense will be coordinated with that of other countries if need be. But it is indispensable that it be a French defense and that France defends itself, by itself, for itself and in its own manner."¹⁴⁶

De Gaulle's founding principles of the French nuclear force, which remain effective today, are *suffisance* and *dissuasion du faible au fort*; which means that the *force de frappe* is purely a national deterrent and that a broader role for it is not feasible. It also

¹⁴⁵ Keiger, *France and the World*, 70.

¹⁴⁶ Guy de Carmoy, *Les Politiques Étrangères de la France 1944-1966* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1967), 335-6, quoted in Keiger, *France and the World*, 71.

means that the force de frappe cannot match the huge arsenals of the superpowers but that does not however jeopardize its function, i.e. deterrence.¹⁴⁷

c) Europe: a rival to the superpowers

Restoring its proper rank as a major global power also meant being a major European power. With that goal in mind, de Gaulle envisioned a future for France at the heart of a Europe that would act as the bulwark against both US and USSR hegemony; *une troisieme superpuissance*.¹⁴⁸

France would eventually act as the guiding force behind this new Europe in the form of the “European Economic Community,¹⁴⁹” which had been created shortly before de Gaulle’s return to power, through the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

But his attitude towards Europe was not always clear nor was it consistent. He was suspicious of supranational bodies (he once dismissed the UN as a *machin*¹⁵⁰ or a thing) and believed that Europe should be a union of sovereign nation-states. But in de Gaulle’s mind, one nation had to stand out and lead- France.

To achieve this dream, the President took several steps: he had to make France the leading force behind Europe and for that he built a strong relationship with Germany

¹⁴⁷ Van Herpen, “Chirac’s Gaullism,” 5.

¹⁴⁸ McNeill, *De Gaulle and Gaullism*.

¹⁴⁹ Later the EEC was renamed the European Union (EU).

¹⁵⁰ Astier, “French Wrestle.”

while exerting every effort possible to exclude the British and the Americans from the European project. His fear of a supranational Europe meant seeking an intergovernmental foreign and defense policy to be implemented under a French umbrella.

De Gaulle's vision to secure a pivotal role for a Europe that could rival the great superpowers meant turning to its old foe and neighbor Germany and forging close ties with its Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. In 1963, de Gaulle inked a Franco-German treaty of friendship. That, he said, was "the condition and the very foundation of the building of Europe." Although it did not entirely work, Germany and France did get closer.¹⁵¹

History had long played a major role in this relationship. For a long time, France has had a link with its German neighbor; first and for a longer time as its enemy (From 1870 to 1945, France was occupied with several wars wherein Germany was its principal potential enemy) and at times as a tame friend.

Thus, for a long time, France's foreign policy was dictated by how to deal with the "German threat:" by fighting it, containing it, weakening and even befriending to ensure it is tamed. The relationship evolved over the years going from tension to détente to war to conciliation.

Just like the end of the Cold War changed the face of international relations, it also made it more difficult for France to keep other world actors focused on the so-called German

¹⁵¹ Shawcross, *Allies*, 77.

threat. De Gaulle thought of a better way to keep this long-time foe in check: reconciliation.

This was inspired, in de Gaulle's words in July 1946, by the wish to see the balance restored by the "old world between the two new ones,"¹⁵² meaning the US and USSR. At the time, he was thinking of Britain but soon after he saw the benefits of using Germany as the counterbalance to American might, given London's refusal to join the supranational ECSC.¹⁵³

When de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, he made sure the Franco-German entente was an integral part of his foreign policy. Some analysts say that he used this new friendly relationship with Germany to rule the newly-founded EEC. This reconciliation with Germany was boosted by the close relationship he had with Adenauer, who shared with de Gaulle a vision that Bonn would help Paris in its European and world power ambitions, while Paris could support Germany in its dealings with the Soviets over the status of Berlin and reunification.¹⁵⁴

De Gaulle did not, however, stop at that. In 1963, the General vetoed British membership in the European Community arguing that "England, in effect is insular. She is maritime. She is linked through her exchanges, her markets, her supply lines to the most distant

¹⁵² Keiger, *France and the World*, 147.

¹⁵³ Alfred Grosser, *La Ve République et sa Politique Extérieure* (Paris : Armand Colin, 1961), 231-8, quoted in Keiger, *France and the World*, 147.

¹⁵⁴ Alfred Grosser, *La Politique Extérieure de la Ve République* (Paris : Seuil, 1965), 84-6 quoted in Keiger, *France and the World*, 148.

countries. She has, in all her doings, very marked and very original habits and traditions. In short, England's very situation differs profoundly from those of the continentals."¹⁵⁵

The French President feared that the UK's insufficient Europeanism would harm the Community and that it would be used as the US' "Trojan Horse" in Europe.¹⁵⁶ His fears were understandable given past declarations by high-level British politicians; for example, Winston Churchill had told de Gaulle in 1944 that if he ever had to choose between the open sea and Europe, he would choose the former; and if he had to choose between Europe and America, he would choose the latter.¹⁵⁷

While de Gaulle remained suspicious of a supranational European body, his support for European integration never ceased for several reasons. First, he recognized that after its empire had fallen apart, France was too small to embark on its mission to achieve a major role in international affairs. For its status and influence to grow globally, France had to be a part of something bigger; a Europe with a common foreign policy, which it can be the driving force behind.

Second, an institution like the EU could help it have better access to the international market where it can sell its goods more widely. Finally, the EU could help restrain Germany whose economic power meant that dominating the European market was

¹⁵⁵ English Democratic Party, "Why De Gaulle Vetoed our EEC Membership in 1963," *Major Issues Bulletin*, <http://www.englishdemocraticparty.org.uk/bulletin14.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Keiger, *France and the World*, 181.

¹⁵⁷ "Eurosceptic," *Wikipedia the free encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurosceptic>

imminent. Thus, common industrial and trade policies gave France a better chance to have greater economic influence in Europe.¹⁵⁸

De Gaulle's European policy had its successes and failures. On the one hand, it brought together two history-long foes into partnership with Germany being the economic force behind the Franco-German axis and France being the political force. On the other hand, de Gaulle failed in uniting the Europeans under a common foreign policy, and European defense was discussed in the framework of NATO.

2.2 The Iraqi War in Perspective

The Chirac- De Gaulle Parallel/ Corrélation

2.2.1 Background: The Post-Cold War era

The end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany had a major impact on the way France interacted with the world. Many saw that the end of this period made it stand out in the international scene and despite being a medium-sized power, France rose to the status of a decision-maker in the global arena.

Even when relations with the US warmed up by the end of the Cold War, suspicion of American hegemony never disappeared. Gaullist tradition continued to appear throughout the post-war governments. On the eve of the 1991 Gulf War, France's socialist Defense Minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, remarked in the best Gaullist tradition that neither France's interests nor its geography coincided with America's and he resigned his post.

¹⁵⁸ "France," Encarta encyclopedia, http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761568934_27/France.html.

In his book *Le Pari Sur L'intelligence*, published in 1958, Chevènement stated that, although American colonization was less disagreeable than a Soviet invasion, the latter was improbable whereas the former was happening every day.¹⁵⁹

It was his opposition that made France's participation in Operation Desert Storm in 1991 a last-minute thing. Paris had preferred an embargo or other peaceful means to launching war on Iraq during that period. Even when it did eventually join the allies, it committed a much smaller number of forces than the Americans or the British did. Its participation however increased France's sensitivity to American power and made it aware of how dependent it was on the US for intelligence on every aspect of the war.

There is no doubt that a new geopolitical order had emerged since the end of the Cold War. During de Gaulle's days, the world was bipolar with Western Europeans free-riding not only on American forces but also on the Soviet forces that balanced the Americans. The Soviet threat made Europe a great prize and the US was in no position to alienate European governments or publics seriously.¹⁶⁰

Now with the Soviet Union gone, according to Calleo during a lecture at Columbia University, we live in a unipolar world wherein the Americans intend to use their present power to keep that power indefinitely and to oppose any rising powers that might some day be in a position to challenge it. That group could include not only China or a

¹⁵⁹ Keiger, *France and the World*, 221.

¹⁶⁰ Calleo, "French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq."

rejuvenated Russia, but indeed Europe itself, a Europe built around the old French-German axis.¹⁶¹

We can see that in the post-Cold War period, France no longer had the opportunity to playoff the two superpowers against one another. Influential international relations commentators such as Professor Alain Joxe, brother of the former socialist Defense Minister, Pierre Joxe, charged that the US was dragging the West into a new bipolar conflict along an axis that is no longer East-West but North-South. France is described as perched on the fault line between the prosperous North and the impoverished South running along the Mediterranean rim, with the US always able to withdraw into its safe North American haven.¹⁶²

Frustration with the US also has been apparent throughout Chirac's rule. In 1997, he said "The United States has the pretension to want to direct everything; it wants to rule the whole world."¹⁶³ That year, in Gaullist vein, Chirac went on a tour of Latin America, accompanied by businessmen in a show of defiance to American commercial and political interests.

More than any other great power, France has had to rethink its post-Cold War strategic agenda. Many of de Gaulle's conceptions of defense policy were altered to become in

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Alain Joxe, 'Autonomie stratégique de l'école française', in *Un Nouveau débat stratégique: Actes du colloque* (Paris: La Documentation française et le Ministère des affaires étrangères, 1993), 117, quoted in Keiger, *France and the World*, 221.

¹⁶³ James Petras and Morris Morley, "Contesting Hegemons: US-French Relations in the 'New World Order,'" *Review of International Studies*, 26 (2000): 66.

tune with the new era: France was forced to 'denationalize' many aspects of defense in favor of European and international roles. France has also reasserted its position towards institutions, which it regards as highly pivotal to the international system today.

No longer are institutions today *machins* or things; on the contrary, France's attitude towards the 2003 Iraq crisis had evolved around the idea of institutions and international norms and it had become a prime mover behind initiatives like the International Criminal Court. But many of de Gaulle's old geo-strategic reflexes were used, such as befriending Germany and using Europe as the bulwark against US hegemony.¹⁶⁴ The traditional Gaullist belief that Europe cannot rely on the US for ultimate, reliable support has also meant Paris being committed to a European defense that does not rely in its essence on the US-dominated NATO.

Professor Joxe hopes that Europe will develop according to what he calls the 'French school,' which wants the international order around France to be compatible with the survival of republican principles based on the nation state. The French school "spread across the world...like a call addressed as much and more to Voltaire, to Rousseau, to Victor Hugo and, now, to de Gaulle, as well as to living Frenchmen." It is, he explains, the national Republican tradition on which the unity and success of the Third Republic was built and which today is common to left and right."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Keiger, *France and the World*, 231.

¹⁶⁵ Joxe, "Autonomie Stratégique," 109-21.

2.2.2 Explaining the Transatlantic rift

Many have tried to describe the Franco-American discord in the wider context of the Transatlantic Alliance or in terms of the European-American relationship.

The American and British determination to go to war threw the European continent in disarray; anger and disillusionment at the decision not only threatened to boil over in France but across much of Europe. The continent's most important institutions, namely the European Union and NATO were deeply divided and the once-solid transatlantic alliance was starting to look shaky. The societies of those states that were bent on war, namely Spain, Italy and Britain, also demonstrated in massive anger against their leaders' decisions.

The divisions reflected a fear of *déjà vu* – a repetition of the dark world wars that plagued this continent—and a deep hostility to the military option and war as a solution to the Iraqi crisis as well as a belief that multilateral institutions should be turned to at these times.

Of course, some explained France's (as well as others') hesitancy to jump into war as boiling down to Europe's "Venus-like" weakness as opposed to the "Martian" strength that the Americans enjoy. Robert Kagan, the co-founder of the neo-conservative think tank Project for a New American Century, argues this, saying that when it comes to foreign policy-making, Europeans are from Venus and Americans are from Mars.

Kagan's thesis was outlined in his article *Power and Weakness* and his subsequent book *Of Paradise and Power*, causing a huge stir in 2003 as the debate over policy toward Iraq hardened while giving a framework to the anger being expressed on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁶⁶

These two, Kagan argues, are differing on major international conflicts today because Europeans are "moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation", while the Americans are using their power in what he calls the "anarchic Hobbesian world" where international laws are undependable and where military might is the vehicle for promoting the American-style "liberal order".¹⁶⁷

According to Kagan, Europe and the US have two opposing views of the world and consequently they have diverging goals. Europe wants to adhere to international institutions and accordingly build its global security while the US, antagonistic to international norms, sees that military power is the key to security and removing threats. Kagan points to examples throughout the Cold War; when the US stepped up against the USSR, while the Europeans used what Kagan says are softer methods such as France's independent Gaullism and former West Germany's Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Shawcross, *Allies*, 55.

¹⁶⁷ Kagan, Robert, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 3.

¹⁶⁸ PM Nilsson, "The United States and Europe: Continental Rift," *World Press Review* 49, no. 10 (October 2002). http://www.worldpress.org/article_model.cfm?article_id=804&dont=yes.

Kagan goes on to say that the 1990s showed that Europe was declining into relative weakness with its role being limited to economic rebuilding and peacekeeping missions after the US was done with its military work. The end of the Cold War, which once gave Europe a central role amidst the struggle between communism and capitalism, exacerbated the disagreement between the two by widening the power gap. Because of Europe's relative weakness, it is less likely to resort to force than the US, and because the US is more powerful, he says it is more likely to be unilateral at work and more likely to face up to threats than Europe.¹⁶⁹

Kagan also claims that the Americans' view of the world (in Manichean absolutes- good vs. evil) is different from the more complex way Europeans perceive it. This is because, he contends, not only is there a growing asymmetry in power across the Atlantic between the two but also an ideological one. It follows that Europe does not rest on the balance of power but on a rejection of force and reliance on rules of conduct; a world wherein *raison d'état* is replaced with a sense of moral consciousness.¹⁷⁰

What Europe is in fact doing today, he says, is rejecting its past that was peppered with the "evils of *Machtpolitik*". As German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer put it in a speech outlining his vision of Europe after 1945 at Humboldt University in Berlin on May 12, 2000, "The core of the concept of Europe after 1945 was and still is a rejection

¹⁶⁹ Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review*, no. 113 (June/July 2002): 6.
http://www.policyreview.org/jun02/kagan_print.html.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

of the European balance of power principle and the hegemonic ambitions of individual states that had emerged following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.”¹⁷¹

While Kagan and others explained the dispute over Iraq (and France's stand) in terms of it being a purely realist power problem, others have put it down to the fear of the unfettered power the US has been displaying and the subsequent “New World Order.”

Peter Howard says that what the French, Germans, and others fear most is the concentration of international power in and around a Bush-led United States. It's not the power capability that has produced the transatlantic rift, he says, but rather the fear that America's power is now unchecked and unmitigated by international institutions and norms.¹⁷²

While the US was more powerful after WWII, it did not frighten its European allies. During that time, the US was ensuring its power was being channeled through a set of international institutions. The UN and the Bretton Woods system made sure the American's power was moderate and mediated through channels that addressed the concerns of other states. Howard says, “It is the legitimacy that turned American hegemony into an engine for post-war reconstruction.”¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Kagan, “Power and Weakness,” 10.

¹⁷² Peter Howard, “Endgames: Washington, UN, and Europe,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, February 28, 2003, <http://www.presentdanger.org/commentary/2003/0302endgame.html>.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Some would argue this does not make much sense because the US was relatively more powerful in 1945 than it is now. But by 1945, post-war presidents such Truman channeled US power through a number of international institutions. This gave it legitimacy in Europe. Today, the Bush administration has shown its total disregard for the international system. It has evaded membership in the International Criminal Court and abandoned the Kyoto Protocol, among other multilateral agreements.

That is why, some thinkers say, France rejected the war. To them, France rejected the war not for Iraq's sake but for fear that the Bush administration had torn apart an international order that has existed since World War II.¹⁷⁴ According to realists, France did what any country facing what it saw as unrestrained power would do. Advocates of the realist approach would say that France's move was logical: it tried to construct an alternative balance of power to keep the US in check.

However, it is vital to highlight that it is not just unchecked US power that France opposed when it stepped in against attacking Iraq without resorting to the UN and without ample evidence that Iraq possessed WMDs. There are also structural and historical reasons why France took this stand, resulting in Franco-American dissonance.

2.2.3 The War on Iraq in Context

If there is one thing we have learned from the de Gaulle era it is France's unwillingness to pay a heavy price for maintaining an American presence in Europe. This is because

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

history, most notably the 20th century, taught France to be wary of absolute reliance on alliances. History also taught Paris that the US cannot be relied upon to fulfill its vows—from the Senate's rejection of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles to Congress's refusal to ratify the 1999 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).¹⁷⁵

Moreover, history taught France that acquiescence would not necessarily mean the US would listen more to its allies. This attitude has most notably prevailed throughout de Gaulle's foreign policy and even during the post-September 11 era. Many thought the attacks on the US would bridge whatever gap there existed between the two allies but the post-9/11 US foreign policy, carried out unilaterally and with a military fist, prompted France to be cautious of US endeavors abroad.

This traditional French unwillingness to be entangled in the US's foreign operations was apparent in the countdown to the 2003 war on Iraq. France's insistence that the US adhere to UN decisions showed, in effect, that France could not contain US hegemony alone and that its permanent seat in the Security Council could help it make Washington abide by specific standards of behavior.

This, as well as a strong legalistic tradition, explains French support for multilateral institutions and multilateral processes, which President Jacques Chirac and his government expressed so vehemently and effectively during the Iraq crisis of 2002-2003.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Balis and Serfaty, "Visions," 119.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

As we mentioned earlier, structural and historical aspects fall into the reasons why France took the road that it did in the months leading to the war. Historically, France has always resisted hegemony or overwhelming power in the international arena. The traditional role of the French state has long been to act as a bulwark against the domination and aggression of other empires. It even built its identity upon opposition to overwhelming power of the Holy Roman Empire on the one hand and the papacy on the other. In short, France is fundamentally suspicious of unchecked international power.¹⁷⁷

De Gaulle's skepticism of American and Soviet overwhelming power and his subsequent building of an independent French foreign policy also portray this long-held skepticism of hegemony. Many see that the way things turned out at the United Nations and before the war was launched were due to a long history of French determination to create that kind of foreign policy that can be independent of the US.

De Gaulle began to build this independent foreign policy long before today's France attempted to decrease its dependence on the Atlantic alliance. He succeeded in making the enmity between his country and Germany bloom into a strategic friendship. At the same time, successive French presidents began to dream that European institutions could be the means of meeting *le défi Américain*—the American challenge.¹⁷⁸

This situation resonated during the months leading to the war on Iraq in 2003. Suspicion between Paris and Washington was already brewing during the summer of 2002 as

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 121.

¹⁷⁸ Shawcross, *Allies*, 77.

preparations for the war were ongoing. France was suspicious of the US determination to attack Iraq, without consulting with its allies first. The US on the other hand was wary of how 'autonomous' the EU's defense could become and whether the EU could eventually have a defense policy independent of NATO.

The Iraq war brought back the old Gaullist world: the UK taking the Americans' side, while France opposed the US-led intervention. The dissonance between the British and the French meant an end to Chirac's attempt to build a strong bilateral relationship with Tony Blair in December 1998 in the French port of Saint Malo, which had previously been considered a real breakthrough and a triumph for both leaders.¹⁷⁹

The UK's siding with the US on the Iraqi issue meant an end to Chirac's multilateralism.¹⁸⁰ The consequences for the EU were disastrous: it was divided between 'Old' and 'New'- Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg took France's side while Italy, Portugal, Spain and Denmark joined the side of the UK and the US.

These were backed by Poland and Hungary followed by the so-called 'Vilnius 10'¹⁸¹- five more east European countries about to enter the EU, plus a collection of Balkan states keen to reap the rewards of loyalty to Washington. In the words of External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten, the EU was, to put it bluntly, "in a bloody mess."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Van Herpen, "Chirac's Gaullism," 9.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Quentin Peel *et. al.*, "The Plot that Split Old and New Europe," *Financial Times*, May 27, 2003, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/attack/2003/0527plot.htm>.

¹⁸² Stephen Sackur, "The Disunited States of Europe," in *The Battle for Iraq: BBC Correspondents on the War against Saddam and a New World Agenda*, ed. Sara Beck and Malcolm Downing (London: BBC Worldwide Limited, 2003), 99.

Just as soon as the military operations in Iraq ended on 29 April, 2003, France, Luxembourg and Germany came up with plans for a unified European Security and Defense structure with its own headquarters just outside Brussels by the end of 2004. This force, said Chirac, was necessary to create “balance.” He added, “We need a stronger European Union and a strong United States.”¹⁸³ This obviously meant a return to the old Gaullist Franco-German relationship; an axis that de Gaulle had foreseen acting as a European bastion of power that would challenge the overwhelming power of the US and USSR.

After the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1441, which called for enhanced inspections in Iraq, Chirac began to forge close ties with Germany's Chancellor Schröder with the hope that this Franco-German relationship, reminiscent of the de Gaulle-Adenauer ties, would define the position of the European Union.

Of course, neither man had been reticent about disliking one another but their unity meant not only an increase in internal popularity but it also revived Franco-German ties, which became the locomotive behind EU unity. The relationship moved beyond a joint position on Iraq; both countries also united in a joint initiative to create a common constitution for the EU.¹⁸⁴

Let's not also forget that the French-German axis has been the locomotive behind European integration. With the UK indecisive about European integration and outside the

¹⁸³ Eric Marquardt, comp., “Will Europe and Russia Seek to Check US Power?” *The Power and Interest News Report*, May 12, 2003.

¹⁸⁴ Sackur, “Disunited States of Europe,” 98.

euro-zone, these two ex-foes form the real core of the EU and the war on Iraq has shown that Berlin and Paris are more determined to shape Europe's future and to work together towards a joint effort. The French and German EU commissioners, Jacques Lamy and Guenter Verheugen, have even called for a "French-German confederation."¹⁸⁵

Both are different from other states like Britain not only by their commitment to a common European foreign policy but also by their vision of Europe as a "social entity". Moreover, neither –under socialist or centre-right governments- has ever quite embraced the deregulated, free-market model championed by Britain.¹⁸⁶

The Franco-German axis, formed out of common interests, also sent a clear message to the Americans that Europe would not be taken for granted. Indeed, the war on Iraq touched a traditional French raw nerve. Like de Gaulle, Chirac felt that the Americans were interfering in European affairs, especially when Washington was not too subtle about showing a lack of support for EU efforts to create their own independent military power.

The US had also pressed for Turkish and some Eastern European membership in the EU; another sign of meddling. Many of the steps taken by the US were seen as evidence of a US-led conspiracy to divide Europe and shift the balance of power in the continent in a more pro-American direction.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Angus Roxburgh, "From Ex-foes to EU's Driving Force," *BBC News Online*, May 31, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3743255.stm>.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Sackur, "Disunited States of Europe," 97.

This was coupled with the fact that the French and Germans had been kept in the dark about American intentions.¹⁸⁸ The road to Iraq was surrounded by secrecy and President Bush kept reassuring his allies until very late in the game that he had not yet made up his mind. France, which had participated in previous American wars, including Afghanistan and “Operation Desert Storm,” was not told anything about any of the US preparations.

In January, when there was a sharp stiffening of the French position, it became clear that the French delegation at the UN were finally told by their American counterparts that the Iraq war was decided upon. According to Stanley Hoffmann, the subsequent Security Council fiasco was merely a smoke screen behind which the US went on inexorably preparing the invasion,¹⁸⁹ which it turns out had already decided upon by early 2002.

Given this context, it is hardly surprising that Bush's determination to occupy Iraq produced one of the most chaotic, damaging diplomatic crises in the history of both continents, especially when so many questions were at stake for the Europeans: were they really united? Who spoke in their name? And how much of an ally or foe was the US?

Jacques Chirac had answers for all those questions. In no small measure he felt he *was* the answer. Like de Gaulle, Chirac wanted France to secure its “rightful” place in the international arena. For President Chirac, the Iraq crisis represented an unmissable

¹⁸⁸ Peel *et. al.*, “The Plot.”

¹⁸⁹ Hoffman, “French Fries: The French-American Rift Over Iraq.”

opportunity to stamp his mark on global affairs. He saw Iraq as an opportunity to secure “what he saw as France’s rightful destiny.”¹⁹⁰

Like de Gaulle, Chirac stands for a strong, independent and united Europe—with France playing a leading role. Another of Chirac’s priorities is the Middle East and North Africa, which he sees as vital to France for both geo-strategic and economic reasons. The Arab world which is geographically located in France’s backyard, poses three important issues for Chirac. Of course, there is the issue of Iraq and the issue of the Middle East Peace Process and continued support (economic and other) for the Palestine cause and the Palestinian National Authority.¹⁹¹

It is well-known that France speaks to the Arab world in the language of Gaullism. The French have long had a strong relationship with the Arab world. In fact, de Gaulle was the first head of a French government since 1954 to speak of the causes of rebellion as other than a plot of a few irresponsible leaders or the influence of Moscow, to speak of the humiliations suffered by the Muslims for over a hundred years and to speak of the lack of dignity and the desire to erase inequalities.¹⁹²

It was thus hardly surprising that de Gaulle’s protégé Chirac gave Palestinian President Arafat, who was sidelined by Israel and shunned by the US, a hero’s funeral after he

¹⁹⁰ Sackur, “Disunited States of Europe,” 96-97.

¹⁹¹ Aicha Lemsine, “Can Jacques Chirac Fill Charles De Gaulle’s Shoes?” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, Issue 0795 (July/Aug. 1995), <http://www.washington-report.org/backissues/0795/950721.htm>.

¹⁹² Grosser, *French Foreign Policy*, 33.

passed away in a Paris hospital. Likewise when Syria's leader Hafez Al-Assad died in 2000, Chirac attended his funeral when many international leaders chose to stay away.

Arriving at the Elysée with similar ambitions of grandeur as de Gaulle, Chirac was bent on relieving France from futile, unwinnable conflicts (like the General did in the cases of Vietnam and Algeria) to turn to more important concerns such as establishing France as a leader in Europe. The Iraq crisis represented such an opportunity for France to play its rightful, dynamic role in the international scene.

Chirac also reasserted time and time again that despite being a leader, France was part of the international community, a team player, whose respect and adherence to international law and institutions were integral to its identity and therefore would be a red line for all those who tried to cross it. This was apparent throughout the countdown to the war when France reasserted that it would accept any decision the UN would take- even if it meant going to war.

Like his predecessor, Chirac had to confront American *hyperpuissance*.¹⁹³ Bush's national security strategy, which involved "pre-emptive strikes" and using unchecked military power to take out potential threats and make strategic changes in the Middle East was not an acceptable strategy for France. For Chirac, Iraq was merely an embodiment of America's new strategies as dictated by the Bush administration neo-conservatives.

¹⁹³ Sackur, "Disunited States of Europe," 101.

France's stand during the months leading to the war on Iraq was attributed many times to mere anti-Americanism. This is quite surprising given the fact that Chirac has been dubbed the 'most American' French President of his time,¹⁹⁴ especially after he ensured Paris' return to NATO's military command; a move that deviated from the orthodox Gaullist tradition. Furthermore, France has been applying to the international community the very same rules the US devised when it was still a lesser power. After all, it was the United States that promoted multilateralism to contain European powers.

The US attempt to change the international system's status quo thus led to an unsurprising reversal in their respective positions on the management of the international system. This means that now, as before, France remains reluctant to accept or follow US directions blindly. Rather France will go along with the US when its positions seem to coincide with France's or those of the wider international community.¹⁹⁵

Moreover, being anti-American suggests a disregard for all things American, including society and way of life, a charge that is not in tune with the French people's admiration for America's culture and way of life. Let us not forget that France was warmly pro-American during and after the September 11 attacks, with Chirac being one of the first leaders to visit Bush to pay his respects after the tragedy struck. Thus, those who put down France's stand to mere anti-Americanism will be missing the point. For Chirac, the

¹⁹⁴ See Roche, "Chirac Has Moral High Ground," and Sackur, "Disunited States of Europe," 97.

¹⁹⁵ Balis and Serfaty, "Visions," 121.

US-led war on Iraq was a “provocation, an attempt to set the seal on a unipolar world in which Europe’s role was that of loyal lackey.”¹⁹⁶

Chirac was not the only Frenchmen that stood up to American hubris during the crisis. His protégé, Dominique de Villepin, who served as foreign minister and swiftly became a central character in the diplomatic showdown to the war, saw the Iraqi crisis as a US attempt to seal its fate as the invincible superpower that cannot be stopped.

Both these men with a grandiose (and none too Venus-like) vision of their country’s place in the world defined French strategy during the months preceding the war. Like Chirac, he had a vision of a resurgent France bestriding the world stage, fulfilling her historic role as leader of Europe and counterweight to the United States. In a pamphlet entitled ‘The Cry of the Gargoyle,’ de Villepin spoke of how France “still burns with a desire for history... France should be an ardent defender of her rank.” In short, de Villepin was, and is, an avid disciple of Charles de Gaulle.¹⁹⁷

In an interview with *The Guardian* in October 2003, de Villepin spoke passionately of justice, equality and respect. Resonating de Gaulle’s insistence on achieving national sovereignty, de Villepin said bluntly, “Regime change cannot be a policy on its own in today’s world. You have to be respectful of sovereignty.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Sackur, “Disunited States of Europe,” 97.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*,” 96-97.

¹⁹⁸ Tisdall and MacAskill, “Power Politics.”

While Chirac and his foreign minister proved to be ardent Gaullists, they were still nonetheless forced, at times, to stray from Gaullism's "true path," especially after the Cold War ended. While de Gaulle insisted on maintaining the sanctity of national sovereignty and dismissed multilateral institutions, Chirac stuck to the multilateral path and worked through international institutions, which he saw as vital for France to secure its *rang*. France also had to change 'some of its ways' by agreeing to rejoin NATO's military command; nonetheless, it never gave up on the idea of having a European defense system independent from NATO and the Americans.

Chapter Three: Disunity at the United Nations

Preface

The US global dynamic and engagement was fairly consistent throughout the half century of the Cold War when a bipolar international system existed and US power was kept in check by its adversary, the USSR. However, this changed after 1990 with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of America as the leading power in a unique unipolar world or what George Bush Sr. dubbed the “New World Order,” wherein Washington felt free to exercise its unconstrained power as it pleased.

The George Bush Sr. administration first exercised that power during the second Gulf War after Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait, although care was exercised to obtain UN backing. A decade later, George W. Bush and the neoconservatives running his administration took advantage of the 9/11 attacks to transform their hawkish ideology into a policy that would soon be carried out under the guise of an all-out “war on terrorism.”

The “war on terrorism,” however, was the sandstorm used to cover up what some maintain were the real reasons behind the war: to create a pro-American, free market-oriented government in Iraq to serve as a paragon for other Arab states and to convert Iraq into a base for an expansionist American Empire, where it can keep Iran and Syria in check.

Fearing an unleashing of this unrestricted power that would be exercised beyond the consent of multilateral institutions such as the UN, France played a pivotal role in bringing the “anti-war” forces together when it emerged that Washington was bent on launching a war on Iraq and changing the geopolitical structure of the Middle East in its favor and that incidentally of Israel.¹⁹⁹

Although its initial rejection of the war on Iraq was made to salvage Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's political career, Germany's stand on the crisis led to the formation of a Franco-German axis that later became the locomotive behind the anti-war coalition. Germany's position may have been trivial had the US not responded the way it did and had Germany not secured the backing of France. But what France had done in essence was to use the “only coherent and relevant modern model of constructive resistance to US power: the Gaullist model.” In doing so, it catalyzed international opposition to American unilateralism.²⁰⁰

During this time, the UN became the stage of a bitter showdown between the proponents of immediate war and the proponents of prolonged weapons inspections in Iraq; the “Bush clan” against the “Chirac clan”.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ See Mark Weber, “Bush Invaded Iraq to ‘Secure Israel’, Says Senator Hollings,” *Aljazeera.info*, August 20, 2004, <http://www.aljazeera.info/opinion%20editorials/2004%20opinions/August/20o/Bush%20Invaded%20Iraq%20to%20Secure%20Israel.%20Says%20Sen.%20Hollings%20By%20Mark%20Weber.htm>. See also: Samuel Francis, “Who Got Us into Iraq?” *Chronicles*, April 7, 2004, <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/www/News/Francis/NewsSF040704.html>.

²⁰⁰ William Pfaff, “Don't Blame the French,” *The Guardian*, March 20, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,917908.html>.

²⁰¹ Jean De Belot, “Chirac's Logical Plan: Support the Blix Mission,” *The Guardian*, February 11, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,892929,00.html>.

Six weeks of wrangling between diplomats of the Security Council's 15 member states produced resolution 1441 and a new mandate for UN weapons inspectors to resume work in Baghdad. Yet, in the end, the UN was bypassed and humiliated. Multilateralism was replaced with the unilateral American decision to go to war.

In this chapter, we will examine the events that led to the war on Iraq, with a special emphasis on the showdown between the Anglo-American-led "coalition of the willing" and the French-led opposition at the United Nations. We will also highlight a few of the reasons behind the disparity between France's stand during the 2003 Anglo-American-led war on Iraq and the allied war on Iraq in 1991.

Old Allies at Loggerheads: an Overview

A day after the 9-11 attacks, Europe became immersed in feelings of sympathy and solidarity. France, Germany and Russia, along with other European states, broadly supported the American war on Afghanistan to remove the Taliban regime and to destroy the infrastructure of Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda, which claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks.

Yet in some 18 months, US President George W. Bush managed to lose the mammoth support and sympathy America had garnered, and set off an unprecedented rift between the US and Europe, mainly France, which assumed the leading role in the anti-war coalition that came together.

France led many of the EU member states in an effort to stop the US from launching an attack on Iraq despite the risk of being isolated by Washington and its companies stripped of the opportunity to participate in re-building Iraq. Indeed, during the countdown to the war, Paris was assaulted by the American press to the point where some journalists jokingly voiced fears it would be added to Bush's infamous "axis of evil."

But how did these old allies end up entangled in such a bitter web of dispute?

The wide trans-Atlantic rift between the US and France, which was not willing to resort to war without UN consensus began soon after 9/11, when Bush split the world into two: those who would go along with US dictates and those who would not. "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists,"²⁰² Bush told the world, asking states to take sides.

He promised to bring those who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks to justice but, with an agenda in mind that included taking out even those not linked to the attacks, he went further to say that even "terrorist organizations and those who harbor and support them" would be struck.²⁰³

The Bush administration's immediate rhetoric focused on creating a link between Saddam Hussein's regime and the attacks that took place that September. Indeed, only

²⁰² Lemann, "The War on What? 283.

²⁰³ Project for the New American Century to President Bush, 222.

three days after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz talked of “ending states that sponsor terrorism.”²⁰⁴

In essence, he was referring to an alleged link between Al-Qaeda and Iraq. When none was found, Bush widened the sphere of his war on terror to include states that “develop weapons of mass destruction that will be used to terrorize nations.”²⁰⁵ Iraq, the US claimed, was such a nation.

On the other side of the “war spectrum” however stood France, which did not see eye to eye with its old ally. Paris believed that the Iraq regime did not pose any real threat to global security and that UN inspectors should be given ample time to inspect the alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) that Washington claimed Saddam possessed in breach of its 1991 Gulf war ceasefire. France’s position was supported by the fact that in 1998 UN weapons inspectors left Iraq after they said they oversaw the destruction of chemical weapons and the building blocks for biological agents.

Furthermore, former UN inspector Scott Ritter repeatedly reaffirmed his belief back in the 1990s that Iraq did not have the capability to “weaponise” the chemical and biological materials it possesses. He also said the 5 percent of the pre-1990 chemical and biological arsenal not destroyed by the inspectors would have become useless over the years without necessary maintenance.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴Simon Jeffery, “War With Iraq,” *The Guardian*, October 4, 2002, <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/foreignaffairs/story/0,11538,769921,00.html>.

²⁰⁵Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

Washington's rhetoric that Iraq possessed WMDs was outlined in a document entitled *A Decade of Defiance and Deception* by US President Bush at the UN Security Council in September 2002. The document charged that Iraq was in possession of or seeking WMDs (chemical, biological and possibly nuclear bombs); it had violated 16 UN resolutions, and it was guilty of human rights violations.²⁰⁷

The US and some of its allies, mainly the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and Australia insisted that the charges outlined in the document justified launching a war on Iraq. Even prior to gaining consent from the UN or NATO, the United States and Britain began dispatching forces and ammunition to the Gulf region.

On the other hand, France along with Germany, China, Russia and Belgium said the charges could be leveled against other countries, especially key US allies, such as Israel and Pakistan, both of whom possess a nuclear arsenal.²⁰⁸ France contended that 12 years of continuous scrutiny and an embargo that has devastated its economic and social pillars made the likelihood of Iraq possessing WMDs very minimal.

France also maintained that inspectors from the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), headed by Egyptian Mohammed ElBaradei, and the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), led by Swedish diplomat Hans Blix, were making steady progress, as they had underscored in their report to the Security Council on March 7, 2003.

²⁰⁷ Ignacio Ramonet, "Global Crisis Over Iraq: Poles Apart," trans. Ed Emery and Luke Sandford, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 1, 2003, <http://mondediplo.com/2003/03/01polesapart>.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

For France and the others in the anti-war coalition, disarming Iraq—if indeed it did own WMDs—was possible through peaceful means and war would be the last measure to resort to. In the words of then Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin, “War is always an acknowledgement of failure.” “Let us not resign ourselves to the irreparable,” he told the Security Council.²⁰⁹

Like his foreign minister, French President Chirac's desire for a peaceful resolution temporarily put him in the world arena's limelight as the moral figure who personified resistance to the growing US Imperium. Many saw his reasons for not endorsing the war on Iraq as partly embedded in the fear of an “internal clash of civilizations;” a domestic upheaval that may ignite Muslim fundamentalism should an attack be launched on a Muslim country such as Iraq.

At his speech before the UN Security Council, de Villepin also voiced that fear: “We believe that the use of force can arouse rancor and hatred, fuel a clash of identities, of cultures—something that our generation has, precisely, a prime responsibility to avoid.”²¹⁰

Moreover, France, along with its foe-turned-ally Germany, made it clear that working through multilateral institutions, especially the UN, was needed to counterweigh growing US hegemony. As de Villepin said, “We believe that a multilateral world is needed, that no one power can ensure order throughout the world.”²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Text of Speech by Dominique de Villepin to the UN Security Council in March 2003, <http://www.truthout.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi?archive=3&num=129&printer=1>.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ *Le Journal du dimanche*, February 16, 2003, quoted in Ramonet, “Global Crisis.”

France was also highly aware of the hidden agenda behind the neo-conservatives' plan to invade Iraq; a step that would bring them ever closer to acquiring global imperial power and enforcing what they call a worldwide "Pax Americana"²¹² or American peace.

Bush's administration, which include Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, who held top positions during the Bush Senior administration, had unfinished business dating back to the 1991 Gulf War, when the US and its allies did not move into Baghdad, topple Saddam Hussein and end the era of containing Iraq.

Some analysts contend that France, along with others, saw that behind the US façade of fighting terrorism was a war on the verge of being waged for exactly those reasons as well as other political and economical reasons embedded in controlling the Gulf and its oil resources,²¹³ especially since Saudi Arabia was becoming an increasingly unreliable ally.

The Mêlée at the United Nations

The showdown at the United Nations showed that the alliance that ties the Western world together, namely the European Union and NATO, had been shaken. The diplomatic damage that had been made en route to war even proved far worse than the conflict itself, as it led to a long and bitter confrontation between old allies, especially at the UN, where

²¹² Bookman, "President's Real Goal," 348.

²¹³ See John Capman, "The Real Reasons Bush Went to War," *The Guardian*, July 28, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1270414,00.html>.

the US realized it can no longer rely on the unquestionable support of states which had been its partners throughout the Cold War and beyond.

The US especially found itself at loggerheads with France, which became the champion of the anti-war movement at the United Nations. By threatening to use its veto-wielding power, and by marshalling support from two other permanent Security Council members, namely China and Russia, France managed to torpedo a UN resolution proposal sanctioning military action against Iraq, which left the US waging war without any international consensus.

France justified its actions by stressing that UN inspectors needed more time to uncover Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction before the US resorted to military action. Moreover, the French, from President Chirac down, warned repeatedly before the war that a unilateral American invasion of Iraq would only encourage further terrorist attacks, cause a rift between the people of the Middle East and the Western world, and cause an array of political, social and economic problems in Iraq and the region, thus risking its destabilization.

The Americans on the other hand were bent on going to war, regardless of whether any evidence of WMDs or a link between Al-Qaeda and the Iraqi regime surfaced. Many analysts saw that the US determination to resort to military action was not based on either of the above given justifications but rather on a large-scale plan to re-arrange the geo-political structure of the region by beginning with a regime change in Iraq.

The consequent clash between the US and France became so intense, at one point Americans boycotted French wine and even changed the name of French Fries to Freedom Fries at the House café on Capitol Hill.²¹⁴

A Poll carried out in September 2003 also showed that support for US global leadership had eroded across the continent, but most dramatically in France, where 70 percent saw US leadership as undesirable as opposed to 50 percent in Germany, according to the Trans-Atlantic Trends 2003, carried out by the German Marshall Fund.²¹⁵

But the crisis in Iraq not only damaged US-French relations but also had adverse repercussions on the entire European continent, which was divided among itself between those willing to support America's war and those who wanted to go down the path of diplomacy before finally launching a military strike.

Meanwhile, the Iraqis remained resolute in their assertion that Baghdad did not possess any chemical, biological or nuclear weapons and missiles for more than ten years. Their claim however did not convince the United States or Britain.

Nonetheless, allegations made by George Bush at the UN General Assembly on September 12, 2002 that "Saddam Hussein's regime is a grave and gathering danger,"²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Sean Loughlin, "House Cafeterias Change Names for 'French' Fries and 'French' Toast," *CNN.com/Inside Politics*, March 12, 2003, <http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/03/11/sprj.irq.fries/>.

²¹⁵ Ian Black, "Settling Differences," *The Guardian*, September 8, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,7792,1037609,00.html>.

²¹⁶ Text of Speech by US President George W. Bush to the UN General Assembly on September 12, 2002.

did not convince the rest of the world either. Iraq's neighbors, the rest of the veto-wielding UN Security Council members and the UN inspectors were also not convinced.

The British government, America's staunch European ally, meanwhile faced a problem because its Prime Minister had promised to fight terrorism alongside the US and to strongly support the American stance on Iraq despite facing stringent opposition from the British people and his cabinet.

Opposition grew stronger when Blair failed to present the necessary independent, credible evidence to back up his allegations that Iraq posed a threat to the world and that there was a link between Al-Qaeda and the Iraqi regime. Also to Blair's disadvantage, the plan to attack Iraq had been drawn up and supported by the US neo-conservatives, whose ideas were revered in the US and Israel but were frowned upon by much of the rest of the world.

Because of inside and outside pressure, Blair wanted to secure a UN resolution before going to war. US Secretary of State Collin Powell, who was seen as the "dove" in the administration also saw eye to eye with Blair.²¹⁷ And unlike the neo-cons who did not want the United States getting entangled in the "UN web," then US Secretary of State saw that the UN should not be bypassed unless it failed to act and so by the end of

²¹⁷ See: Randeep Ramesh, ed., *The War We Could Not Stop: The Real Story of the Battle for Iraq* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd on behalf of Guardian Newspapers Ltd, 2003), 25 and Bridget Kendall, "Showdown at the UN," in *The Battle for Iraq: BBC News Correspondents on the War against Saddam and a New World Agenda*, ed. Sara Beck and Malcolm Downing (London: BBC Worldwide Limited, 2003), 53.

August, Powell was pushing for consensus. The only way to get that, he saw, was to call for a UN resolution.

During the summer, Blair made it clear that he wanted the issue of Iraq to go to the UN but only so long as it was “a way of dealing with the matter rather than avoiding it.” It followed that on the weekend of September 7, 2002, Blair went to see Bush at Camp David to convince him to go to the UN, in order to avoid a rift between Washington and its allies in Europe. There, the two leaders agreed on a speech that was to be made by Bush at the UN and the US President agreed to call for the return of UN weapons inspectors under a strict timetable after having left Iraq four years previously.²¹⁸

By this point, the French had made their position on the matter of the UN resolution unequivocal. On September 9, 2002, French President Jacques Chirac called for two resolutions: one to send weapons inspectors back into Iraq with a tough new mandate and a second to endorse military action if that proved necessary. From the outset the French were adamant that there should be no ‘automaticity’ as they termed it: no automatic trigger that would allow the US to go to war without first coming back to the Security Council for approval.²¹⁹

Three days later, the UN General Assembly convened in New York, with Secretary General Kofi Annan making a speech before the 191-member body. But before that, Annan released the text of his speech to the press, a highly unusual move that some

²¹⁸ Ramesh, ed., *The War*, 25-26.

²¹⁹ Kendall, “Showdown at the UN,” 55.

analysts took as proof he wanted to influence the rising debate over how the dispute on Iraq would be resolved. In his speech, Annan identified himself as a “multilateralist” and urged the world community to take action against “terrorism” by making use of international institutions and via “multilateral action.”²²⁰

“I stand before you as a multilateralist- by precedent, by principle, by charter and by duty. I also believe that every government that is committed by the rule of law at home, must be committed also to the rule of law abroad. All states have a clear interest, as well as clear responsibility, to uphold international law and maintain international order,” he stressed.²²¹

Ignoring Annan's plea, Bush later called for a solution that could possibly be brokered by the UN Security Council only if it followed Washington's lead. “We will work with the UN Security Council for the necessary resolutions. But the purposes of the United States should not be doubted,” he said.²²² His words, however, later became the basis of subsequent six months of diplomatic wrangling.

What had happened was that this important sentence had been dropped off his teleprompter, but Bush managed to ad lib the key commitment he had previously agreed upon with Blair. Only he had referred to “new resolutions” instead of the one new

²²⁰ Text of speech by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the General Assembly on September 12, 2002.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Kendall, “Showdown at the UN,” 54.

resolution that was needed to bring back weapons inspectors to Iraq.²²³ This had big consequences.

One immediate result was it gave the French the ammunition they needed to ensure that the US did not use the one resolution to resort to force as it pleased, and thus on September 13 at a lunch in New York with his counterparts, de Villepin called for two UN resolutions, a request also called for earlier by President Chirac. The French, de Villepin said, would be willing to vote for the second if Iraq had been given a chance to comply, and had failed to do so.

France's immediate concern was to ensure that the first resolution did not give the US a free hand to resort to force whenever it judged Saddam to be in breach of his obligations. The Americans, however, wanted to ensure the passing of both resolutions. "Be sure about one thing," Powell told de Villepin. "Don't vote for the first unless you are prepared to vote for the second."²²⁴

As transatlantic shuttle diplomacy continued, Blair made his case against Iraq and its alleged threat on the world before Parliament on 24 September 2002. He revealed a 50-page document based on British intelligence reports that claimed Iraq could deploy weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes of an order, and could produce a nuclear

²²³ Ramesh, ed., *The War*, 26.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

weapon within one or two years, if it obtained fissile material from abroad. The trouble was, in the coming months, much of the dossier's claims were demolished.²²⁵

To add to British and American woes, the new resolution the French had asked for had to be drafted in a way that was tough enough to make Saddam believe that the UN meant business but not too tough for the Security Council to refuse to vote for it. The wording of the resolution was finally agreed on at the end of September. It called for taking "all necessary measures," but deferred taking action until inspections were clearly over.

And so finally on 8 November, the 15-member UN Security Council unanimously agreed to endorse Resolution 1441, which mandated "an enhanced inspection regime with the aim of bringing to full and verified completion the disarmament process."²²⁶ Even Syria, the only Arab representative on the council voted yes. It was a far better result than the US had hoped for. The resolution threatened Iraq with serious consequences if it failed to comply, but only after there had been further Security Council consultations.²²⁷

But unanimity led to confusion because each side saw the resolution from a different angle and accordingly tried to extract the meaning they desired from it. The French took it as meaning that the US had to come back to the UN after the inspectors had finished their job and that a Security Council vote was needed before going to war.

²²⁵ Ibid., 28.

²²⁶ Text of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 (8 November 2002).

²²⁷ Ramonet, "Global Crisis."

The Americans, on the other hand, saw that there was no need to resort to the UN if Iraq failed to comply with what had been asked of it. In their eyes, the US just needed consultation, not permission. The British were somewhere in the middle: London's view was that a second resolution would be preferable but not necessary.

“To the bitter end the French tried to get a commitment that the Security Council would have to make a further decision after an assessment by the inspectors,” Sir Jeremy Greenstock, Britain's ambassador to the UN in New York said. “That proved a red line for the Americans, who would not be tied to a second resolution or anything that relied on the recommendation of the inspectors.” The final wording merely allowed for the Council to meet if Iraq did not fully comply with the resolution. So as we can see the resolution left a few ambiguities.²²⁸

UN weapons inspectors finally went back to Iraq on November 27. During that time, US troop build-up in the Gulf was being accelerated and the Americans were quietly waiting for Saddam to trip up and for the missing WMDs to show up. During those weeks, their expectations were frustrated.

The Iraqi government was very welcoming in its opening of once out-of-bound palaces and the few “dramatic” discoveries—11 empty chemical warheads—were not very convincing.²²⁹ Throughout inspections, many reports emerged out of Iraq of incorrect tips

²²⁸ Ramesh, ed., *The War*, 29.

²²⁹ Kendall, “Showdown at the UN,” 57.

being given to weapons inspectors. This left France and the others in the anti-war coalition disillusioned and feeling that this was a war of choice, not necessity.

Events reached a climax on December 7, 2002, when the Iraqis handed the suitcases of a 12,000-page dossier, which it claimed revealed all of its nuclear, chemical and biological programmes. Its basic assertion was that Baghdad had not possessed any of these weapons or missiles for more than a decade. Dr. Blix complained that the documents were neither comprehensive nor complete and that more time and much work were needed.

The UN was now split between a majority of its members wanting to keep Saddam under pressure and to hear from Blix and ElBaradei, who were scheduled to report to the Council in January, in accordance with Resolution 1441, and the Americans, who were quick to formally announce that Saddam had breached Resolution 1441. Not too long after that, their allies in Britain were echoing their stand.

When Blix briefed the Council on January 9, 2003 he said that “in the course of these inspections, we have not found any smoking gun.”²³⁰ That marked the beginning of a new more strenuous year for the UN. Moreover, the first two months of the New Year, two war-skeptics were scheduled to chair the Council: France in January and Germany in February. London saw that France's defiant stand was mainly an attempt to curb

²³⁰ Beck and Downing, “Chronology,” in *The Battle*, 13.

America. British sources later said they believed that Chirac had made a strategic decision not to support the war as long ago as end of September 2002.²³¹

When Germany arrived at the Council as a non-permanent member, Gerhard Schröder took a firm position which stood against taking military action against Iraq, partly as some analysts saw it, a move to secure his narrow re-election in German elections of September 2002. Politically, it saved him.²³² At this point, France had an important strategic decision to make: it was either going to win Germany over as a powerful rotating member of the Council or a rival.

The crunch of the matter at the UN came on January 22 when President Chirac and Chancellor Schröder celebrated the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Franco-German Treaty at Versailles—which set the cornerstone of the countries' bilateral post-war alliance. President Chirac stressed at a joint press conference with Schroder that, “Germany and France have the same judgment on the Iraq crisis” and that the two felt “everything must be done to avoid war.”²³³

Furthermore, Chirac said the countries' joint stance could be summed up in two points and would be pursued in the Security Council. “The first is that any decision to the Security Council belongs to it alone, to be expressed after hearing the report of the

²³¹ Ramesh, ed., *The War*, 32.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Marc Burleigh, “France, Germany Make Joint Stand Against US War on Iraq,” *Agence France Presse*, January 22, 2003, <http://www.eubusiness.com/imported/2003/01/101581>.

inspectors” searching for alleged WMDs in Iraq,” he said, adding that the second is that, “for us, war is always evidence of failure. Everything must be done to avoid war.”²³⁴

The celebrations went beyond mere symbolism; in fact they marked the emergence of a united anti-war front that would not heed the US call to use military force in Iraq as easily as it did during the attack on Afghanistan. The event also denoted the emergence of a rift not only at the heart of the UN, but also in the European Union.

The statements by Chirac in Paris followed warnings by de Villepin a day earlier that France may use its veto power to prevent a resolution at the UN Security Council authorizing a US-led war against Iraq. As British and American troops continued to pour into the Gulf, Paris, which saw this as a sign that Washington was bent on war, decided to respond in orderly fashion.

De Villepin used a Security Council meeting on terrorism in New York, which Paris had called for, to suggest that it would launch a diplomatic battle against the automatic use of force on Iraq and using its veto if needs be.

“Today, nothing justifies considering military action,” the foreign minister said. France would never “associate [itself] with military intervention that is not supported by the international community,” he further elucidated. “When asked explicitly if France would

²³⁴ Ibid.

use its veto, he added, "Believe me, that, in a matter of principles, we will go all the way to the end."²³⁵

This "diplomatic ambush" as *The Washington Post* called it, marked an important turning point. "That meeting changed everything for us," one French diplomat said. "We realized that the Americans were going to go to war no matter what. They were not listening to us. And it was our moral duty to try and prevent it."²³⁶

In Powell's eyes, the event was used as an opportunity by de Villepin to vilify Washington. He was also vexed by the fact that he had been called to New York to be confronted by de Villepin and his German counterpart Joschka Fischer about US military intentions, in light of the large military build-up in the Gulf. More importantly, he realized that there was no point arguing for more time for diplomacy if the French had already ruled out the military option.

In turn, according to French officials, de Villepin had believed Powell's assurances that the goal of American policy was not to overthrow President Saddam Hussein, but to disarm Iraq. When Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld contradicted that view, de Villepin also felt betrayed.²³⁷ As for the British, it was the moment when the French revealed their 'perfidy,' as one official put it, by assuming leadership of the anti-war

²³⁵ Glenn Kessler and Colum Lynch, "France Vows to Block Resolution on Iraq War," *The Washington Post*, 21 January 2003.

²³⁶ Kendall, "Showdown at the UN," 59.

²³⁷ Elaine Sciolino, "Diplomacy at High speed, Pour la France!" *New York Times*, March 8, 2003, <http://www.truthout.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi?archive=3&num=130>.

camp. "It turned out they had been stringing us along all the time," he said bitterly.²³⁸ On all sides, trust had been broken.

To make matters worse, Rumsfeld responded to de Villepin's statement by saying the positions adopted by France and Germany came from "Old Europe." "France has a problem," he said, "Germany has been a problem; but I think that's old Europe...and the center of gravity in Europe is shifting to the east."²³⁹

Rumsfeld's dismissal of the two key NATO and EU pillars as "Old Europe" highlighted Europe's growing division between Old and New; between Western Europe and the pro-American, former Soviet states in Eastern Europe, such as Poland and Hungary, whose leaders were eager to show their allegiance to the US.

France's determination to ensure Washington did not automatically go to war was voiced the day following the Security Council meeting on terrorism by de Villepin in Brussels. The French minister and his Belgian counterpart Louis Michel said they hoped to forge an EU consensus on Iraq, particularly in terms of demanding that any plan to start a war be made the subject of a second UN resolution; something Washington had already insisted would not be necessary.²⁴⁰

In February, Downing Street issued a new dossier, which it said contained evidence showing "how the Iraqi regime is constructed to have and to keep WMD and is now

²³⁸ Ibid., 60.

²³⁹ Shawcross, *Allies*, 126. See also: Sackur, "Disunited States of Europe," 98.

²⁴⁰ Burleigh, "France, Germany Make Joint Stand."

engaged in a campaign of obstruction of the United Nations weapons inspectors.”²⁴¹

Britain alleged that the report “*Iraq: Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation*” was based on a number of sources, including intelligence reports.

But as it emerged afterwards the doctored dossier was based mainly on published academic papers—an article in the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* and two articles in *Jane's Intelligence Review*.²⁴² That astounding revelation dealt a heavy blow to Britain's credibility.

Also in February, Powell made a presentation to a special session of the UN Security Council drawing on what he said was classified intelligence. Aiming to secure America's much-vaunted “coalition of the willing,” Powell outlined what he said was evidence showing that Iraq possessed mobile chemical weapons laboratories in contravention of resolution 1441.²⁴³

Powell's “evidence”, which consisted mainly of vague, muffled taped telephone calls and a number of assertions however failed to show hard facts and accordingly did not change the tide of skepticism that was overtaking the Security Council.²⁴⁴ The worst news for Powell and the US administration was Dr. Blix's report, which came through on February 14, when a Security Council meeting was held.

²⁴¹ Text of report from the 10 Downing Street official Website, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/files/pdf/Iraq.pdf>

²⁴² Paul Lashmar and Raymond Whitaker, “M16 and CIA: The New Enemy Within,” February 9, 2003, in *The Iraq War Reader*, 480/1.

²⁴³ Text of Presentation by Secretary of State Collin Powell to the UN Security Council on February 5, 2003. US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/Secretary/former/Powell/remarks/2003/17300.htm>.

²⁴⁴ Ramesh, ed., *The War*, 34.

But by this time, the stage was set for more wrangling because the Russians had joined Germany and France in what became known as the “*non-nyet-nein*” alliance²⁴⁵ (or rather the “anti-war camp”). The three issued a joint declaration only four days before the Security Council meeting calling for inspections to continue in Iraq. Much to the US and Britain’s dismay, it was now two—not one—veto-wielding Security Council powers that were determined not to opt for a military option to the conflict.

In his report, Blix stressed Iraq’s behavior had improved but not perfected, and said there was no proof for the alleged use of these mobile labs for the production of biological weapons. If anything, Blix criticized Powell’s presentation and said some of the evidence the US Secretary of State outlined was dubious and in one case clearly based on forged documents.²⁴⁶

Moreover, Blix said that inspectors had seen “no evidence” of Iraq hiding and moving material used for WMDs either outside or inside Iraq and no “persuasive indications” of links between Iraq and Al-Qaeda. Worse, his colleague, ElBaradei, the chief nuclear inspector exposed as unfounded many of the US claims and declared, “we have to date found no evidence of nuclear activity in Iraq,” adding that given a few months he could wrap up his investigation.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 35.

²⁴⁶ Shawcross, *Allies*, 137.

²⁴⁷ Glen Ragwala, Nathaniel Hurd and Allistair Millar, “A Case for Concern, Not a Case for War,” Middle East Report Online, January 28, 2003, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero012803.html>.

This led Powell to cast aside his rehearsed speech and to give an impromptu performance defending American policy. This too was met with little reaction from the skeptical members of the Council. Powell's claims were also directly refuted by De Villepin, who stressed, "ten days ago, the US secretary of State reported the alleged links between Al-Qaeda and the regime in Baghdad. Given the preset state of our research and intelligence, in liaison with our allies, nothing allows us to establish such links."²⁴⁸

He ended his speech by saying, "In this temple of the UN we are the guardian of an ideal, the guardian of a conscience. This message comes to you today from an old country, France, from a continent like mine, Europe, that has known wars, occupation and barbarity."²⁴⁹

When de Villepin's speech was over, something extra-ordinary happened. His criticism of the war was met with an unusual shower of applause rarely exercised by diplomats at the UN Security Council. The *BBC*'s diplomatic correspondent Bridget Kendall said "it felt like a muted gesture of open revolt."²⁵⁰

This captured the mood that was spreading across the chamber of the Security Council; the US and Britain were isolated in their stand on Iraq. The meeting also showed that opposition to war had exacerbated the already tepid transatlantic ties and that support had in fact grown for the status quo: continued inspections.

²⁴⁸ Ramonet, "Global Crisis."

²⁴⁹ Speech quoted in Shawcross, *Allies*, 138.

²⁵⁰ Bridget Kendall, "The Day the UN Mattered," *BBC News World Edition*, December 23, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/3340313.stm.

As the architect of the French-German-Russian initiative that week to stop the US from passing the war resolution at the UN, de Villepin briefly became a moral champion of the millions who opposed the war. What he said and how others at the Council reacted to it took a level of importance unheard of in trans-Atlantic diplomacy. For its part, the UN Security Council became a global theatre wherein players squabbled for the limelight, each aiming to win over world audience.

The British meanwhile had other problems to worry about. The anti-war sentiment was growing and preparations were underway for a big anti-war demonstration in London to coincide with protests that were to take place around the world. On February 15, at least eight million people in 60 countries took to streets in a mammoth wave of demonstrations unprecedented since the Vietnam War era. The largest of these protests surprisingly sprang in countries allying with the US, namely Britain and Italy.²⁵¹

In Britain, at least half a million people took part in an anti-war demonstration deemed one of the largest in the country's history, jeopardizing the political future of Prime Minister Tony Blair standing in firm support of a military attack on Iraq.

To counter the arguments of protesters, Blair began to make numerous "excuses" to justify a possible war on Iraq. At the Foreign office, an exasperated official admitted the government was no longer sticking to one argument. "We try to respond to the moment,"

²⁵¹ *Palestine Media Center*, "World to Bush: We Don't Want Your War," February 16, 2003, <http://www.palestine-pmc.com/details.asp?cat=1&id=587&search=1&key=protest>.

he explained. "So we make a different case each week: weapons of mass destruction, links to terrorism, the moral argument and so on."²⁵²

Meanwhile, the Bush team was getting impatient with the United Nations, especially as a quarter of a million US troops were either already in the Gulf or en route. So despite the fact that a majority of Americans favored a second UN resolution, Washington believed that the first resolution provided "good enough" legal and political authority for waging a war against Iraq.

The US administration had made it obvious from the start that it thought a second resolution was not a "prerequisite" for waging war, yet it was imperative for Blair, who was facing the rejection of most of the British people as well as members of his own party, 121 of whom voted against his government at the House of Commons on 26 February for lack of evidence making the war justifiable.²⁵³

The problem now was that the US did not have the necessary backing it required to secure a win at the Security Council. To secure a second resolution that gave a green light for war, Washington needed nine of fifteen Security Council votes. Two things were clear: first, three of the five veto-wielding powers (France, China and Russia) wanted UN inspections to continue and second, the US realized it would only be able to rely on three other states' votes, namely, Spain, Bulgaria and the UK, while the anti-war camp could rely on the votes of Germany and Syria.

²⁵² Kendall, "Showdown at the UN," 62.

²⁵³ Beck and Downing, "Chronology," *The Battle*, 13.

The US thus needed to coax the votes out of five of the remaining undecided six members: Chile, Mexico, Pakistan, Guinea, Angola and Cameroon.²⁵⁴ But even if it had, any vote could have been torpedoed by a Russian or French veto. The US was also hard-hit by an unexpected move from its Turkish ally. On March 1, Turkey's parliament unpredictably voted against having Iraq-bound US soldiers pass through Turkey. This made British and American attempts to secure a UN cover for the war on Iraq even more unlikely.²⁵⁵

Even the six undecided nations were starting to look weary of what they saw as American arrogance and an attempt to buy them off in exchange for their vote at the UN. Mexico, for example, was among the most reluctant to come to the USA's rescue and in Chile, the government had not yet forgiven the Americans for their role in overthrowing Salvador Allende and bringing Augusto Pinochet, who was responsible for war crimes, to power in 1973.²⁵⁶ Bush and Blair were hoping that their personal good relations with Vladimir Putin would coax Russia into changing its mind but Putin made it clear he would not succumb to US pressure.

In the meantime, Britain put together a second resolution on Iraq- co-signed by the US and Spain- and submitted it to the Security Council. The draft would have the council decide "that Iraq has failed to take the final opportunity afforded to it in Resolution

²⁵⁴ Sifry and Cerf, Editors' postscript, *The Iraq War Reader*, 502.

²⁵⁵ Justus Leicht and Peter Shwarz, "Turkish Parliament Votes Down US War Plans," *World Socialist Website*, March 4, 2003, <http://www.wsws.org/article/2003/mar2003/turk-m04.shtml>.

²⁵⁶ Kendall, "Showdown at the UN," 63.

1441,²⁵⁷ to disarm, implying adoption of the resolution would immediately authorize use of force.

The February 24 draft resolution proposed by the US and Britain and co-sponsored by Spain was rejected by France, Germany and Russia, which, in turn, submitted a proposal at the UN for a step-by-step disarmament of Iraq. Moreover, France's then Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin said two days later that Paris would not support the US-backed resolution that would pave the way for war.

“In the current circumstances, a second resolution in the UN Security Council has no justification. That is the reason we will not support this initiative,” he said. The Minister further stressed that, “The use of force is not justified in the current circumstances because there is a credible and effective alternative to war: disarming Iraq through inspections.”²⁵⁸

French President Chirac also stressed France's opposition to the draft UN resolution submitted by the US, UK and Spain. “We are opposed to all new resolutions,” he said.²⁵⁹ But the French did not stop at that. On March 5, the anti-war camp published a rival memorandum calling for inspectors to be given more time.

²⁵⁷ Text of US-British draft resolution on Iraq presented to the UN Security Council on February 24, 2003.

²⁵⁸ *Associated Press*, “France Warns Iraq War Would Divide World,” February 26, 2003, <http://www.worldrevolution.org/article/651>.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The statement released by de Villepin, his Russian counterpart Ivan S. Ivanov and Germany's Fischer reiterated that the "full and effective disarmament of Iraq, in compliance with Resolution 1441...can be achieved by the peaceful means of inspections." They also stressed that Paris, Berlin and Moscow "will not let a proposed resolution pass that would authorize the use of force."²⁶⁰

Two days later, Blix and ElBaradei presented their report on the progress of inspection efforts in Iraq to the Security Council. Blix asserted that UNMOVIC had found no evidence "so far" backing the two charges put forward by the US against Iraq: that Iraq was developing biological weapons in mobile laboratories and that it was conducting illegal weapons production underground. ElBaradei also said that Iraq was being more cooperative and reiterated that inspectors had not unveiled evidence that Iraq possessed a functioning nuclear weapons program.²⁶¹

Moreover, while inspectors needed more time to close the books on Iraq's nuclear program, he emphasized that there was "no evidence or plausible indication" that Iraq had resumed nuclear activities in buildings identified by national intelligence agencies as conducting such work, or that Iraq has attempted to import uranium since 1990 or that aluminum tubes Iraq had attempted to import are, as the United States has said, useful for producing weapons-grade uranium."²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Statement by Foreign Ministers Dominique de Villepin of France, Ivan S. Ivanov of Russia and Joschka Fischer of Germany on March 5, 2003.

²⁶¹ *Global Security Newswire*, "Iraq I: Inspectors Brief Security Council; British Resolution Receives Underwhelming Support," March 7, 2003, http://www.nti.org/d_newswire/issues/2003/3/7/2p.html.

²⁶² *Ibid.* Also see: Sifry and Cerf, Editors' postscript, *The Iraq War Reader*, 502.

In response, Powell delivered a blistering statement calling Blix's report "a category of 12 years of abject failure" by Iraq to disarm while his French counterpart stressed that there was significant evidence that progress has been made in inspections and that "we can achieve our objective of effectively disarming that country."²⁶³

Accordingly, de Villepin put forward three working proposals, which included asking inspectors to establish a hierarchy of tasks for disarmament and a work program provided for by resolution 1284, which stipulates a time frame of 120 days that can be shortened if the inspectors deem it feasible.

He also proposed that inspectors report on their progress every three weeks as well as establishing a schedule for assessing the implementation of the work program. Moreover, the French Foreign Minister made his country's stringent opposition to the war unequivocal: "As a permanent member of the Security Council, I will say it again: France will not allow a resolution to pass that authorizes the automatic use of force."²⁶⁴

De Villepin's urge for respecting the United Nations and giving it a leading role in securing peace in the Middle East was quickly rebuffed by the American President. During a press conference, Bush voiced his country's readiness to go to war without the support of the United Nations.

²⁶³ Text of Speech by Dominique de Villepin to the UN Security Council in March 2003.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

"I'm confident the American people understand when it comes to our security, if we need to act, we will act, and we really don't need United Nations approval to do so," Bush said. "When it comes to our security, we really don't need anybody's permission," he added.²⁶⁵

Despite their comments, the Americans knew they needed the UN to legitimize the war on Iraq and to help their friend Tony Blair facing a salvo of opposition at home. But the Anglo-American quest for a second resolution soon ended when President Jacques Chirac announced on French television on March 10: "Whatever the circumstances, France will vote 'no' because she considers this evening there are no grounds for waging war."²⁶⁶

The statement was seen as a get out for the six undecided countries, who did not want to take a stand and anger America when France was going to veto the resolution anyway. Some analysts saw that the key phrase here "this evening" meant that Chirac was saying that in the current circumstances, France would not support the war.

A *Guardian* editorial pointed out that Chirac meant that this would not be the case all the time. Indeed, since he spoke, several official statements had made it plain that France was anxious to preserve UN unity and will explore 'all opportunities' for compromise, the editorial said.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ *Global Security Newswire*, "Iraq I: Inspectors Brief Security Council."

²⁶⁶ Fergal Keane, "The Road to War," in *The Battle*, 39.

²⁶⁷ Ramesh, ed., *The War*, 40.

Russia meanwhile took a similar stand to France by indicating that it too would veto the UK-US-Spain draft resolution. In the next few days, the British were hurling allegations of treachery at Chirac and on March 16, the leaders of Britain, the US and Spain attended what became known as the “council of war”²⁶⁸ in the Azores, wherein March 17 was set as the “deadline” for Security Council resolution deliberations.

The next day in New York, it became clear to the world that the UN diplomatic frenzy was over. After a sore defeat, Sir Jeremy Greenstock announced that the US and Britain were withdrawing their draft resolution. Greenstock summed up the failure of the strategy: “Maybe we were naïve, but we always thought the combination of tough inspections, the military build-up and catching Saddam red-handed with weapons of mass destruction would persuade the people round Saddam that this is not worth the regime’s suicide. As you can see, we were wrong.”²⁶⁹

The US was to look for a “coalition of the willing” elsewhere and indeed it sought peripheral allies in remote places as the Solomon Islands and Micronesia. The UN Secretary General’s call for the evacuation of weapons inspectors meanwhile came at the heels of Bush’s ultimatum to Saddam Hussein and his sons: 48 hours to leave Iraq or face war.

The British were in heated debate as well with Robin Cook resigning as leader of the House of Commons over the government’s decision to go to war without a UN resolution

²⁶⁸ Kendall, “Showdown at the UN,” 64.

²⁶⁹ Ramesh, ed., *The War*, 41.

to back it. Two days later, the air strikes on Baghdad began. With that, France's pleas to find a peaceful resolution were dismissed, the diplomatic fiasco of the past months was over, the UN was bypassed and a regime change was later imposed on Iraq under the guise of "liberation."

Chapter Four: Conclusions

The state of international affairs in 2003 was characterized by tension between major transatlantic allies, who had been partners for decades. The United States, backed by Britain, was seen as the leader of a trend of neo-colonialism bent on imposing regime change in one of the most geopolitically important countries in the Middle East: Iraq.

The US embarked on an unprecedented preemptive attack by overstepping major multilateral world bodies, such as the United Nations. It did little to hide the fact that its foreign policy was rollercoasting from internationalism to *realpolitik*, as it shredded to pieces along the way the very international order it helped put together after World War II.

Washington's disregard for its allies was patent in the ultimatum it gave to all states-enemies and allies alike- either to jump on the bandwagon against "terrorism and evil" or to risk finding themselves on the periphery of international relations.

Some heeded the call while others saw unprecedented danger in the way Washington was imposing its political agenda without so much as asking its allies. Among those was France, who, supported by some European countries namely Germany and Russia, led the anti-war movement that strived to avoid military confrontation and to use the UN as the basis for resolving an international crisis as explosive as this one.

Like many other nations, France supported and participated in the war on Afghanistan, but it took mere months for America to lose the overwhelming sympathy it had gained. Some three years after the heinous 9/11 attacks, America is viewed as the most unpopular country in the world, and the hostility aimed at the Bush administration is almost unprecedented in US history.

Soon after the 9/11 attacks, US President George W. Bush began talking about “decapitating” Taliban, but his second goal he stressed was “to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction.”²⁷⁰ Among those states, he handpicked Iraq, which he said had allegedly “plotted to develop anthrax and nuclear weapons for over a decade.”²⁷¹ It was clear from then on that Iraq would next be on the US agenda for regime change.

But the ramifications of this statement were much larger than anticipated. The US would no longer abide by the old international rules it had helped shape throughout the 20th century. This was most evident in June 2002 when Bush emphasized that “Cold War doctrines of deterrence and containment are no longer sufficient for the US”—which meant that war would be waged on other states preventively.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Text of President George W. Bush's State of the Union address before Congress on January 29, 2002, 250.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Lemann, “The War on What?” 284.

Post-Cold War Reality

The way things turned out between these old allies is hardly surprising given the fact that the end of the Cold War had created new power realities. Major political actors have been trying to find their way to a new formula of stability since the collapse of the USSR, and the disintegration of the bipolar system, which left the world at the mercy of a unipolar order. This new system meant that the US would lead in pacifying and stabilizing a global capitalist economy.²⁷³

The 9/11 attacks represented the second major turning point for the drastic change in US foreign policy and the consequent affinity between the US and Western Europe. US President George W. Bush used the attacks as an occasion to launch a new aggressive foreign policy that would represent a change in direction rather than a specific war on terrorism.²⁷⁴

The “war on terror” meant a rejection of the old means of deterrence and containment, which had served their purpose during the Cold War, and, in turn, it became the means with which to launch preventive war, despite it being a long-rejected and long-abhorred policy in America.

Neoconservative ideologues in Washington saw that the new policy meant that the US could dispense with allies and international institutions. They systematically disparaged

²⁷³ Michael Weinstein, “An Era of Instability in World Politics,” *The Power and Interest News Report*, October 20, 2004.

²⁷⁴ Nicholas Lemann, “The Next World Order,” *The New Yorker*, April 1, 2002, http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/020401fa_FACT1.

and vilified the UN, ironically enough, in the house of its founders Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt.²⁷⁵

Time and time again, the Bush administration made it clear that it would bypass the multilateral organization if needed. This is precisely what happened in Iraq. In fact, what we are seeing today is an American diversion from internationalism towards power politics, which remains the condition of world order that has prevailed since the creation of the modern state system at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.²⁷⁶

The failure to check the US in the UN is the reason why France and much of the rest of the world, barring a few close allies such as Britain and Australia, felt threatened and resisted the US attack on Iraq. The war on Baghdad proved that Washington today prefers power politics to internationalism and that since it has its grip over the entire world with virtually no superpower in sight to challenge it, it will no longer be needing the United Nations.

America's omnipotence has rendered the UN more impotent. By working its power outside the realms of the UN, the US has weakened the power of all other states working from inside the global organization. That is what has left most of Western Europe alarmed and frustrated.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Schlesinger and Ash, "9/11 Letters."

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

It is important to mention that the European Union itself supports its own multilateral model that adheres to international institutions, norms and rules. That is why it is hardly surprising that many international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, and the International court of Justice, are European products: because Europe believes in the power of institutions and because it is trying to achieve a more globalized government with a European dimension.²⁷⁸

French Weakness or Wisdom?

The crisis that emerged between the US and France, which led the anti-war campaign, highlighted the differences between the old allies on thorny issues, such as crisis-management in the Middle East and the role each would assume during such crises.

The 9/11 attacks brought the necessary threat to security that the US needed to advance globalization, which encapsulated the new paradigm of world order that emerged in the 1990s. But even long-time allies, such as France, saw that this did not justify—from a security perspective-- preemptive warfare, given “the West’s deterrent capabilities and the progress of disarmament efforts in Iraq.”²⁷⁹

Also relevant to the French view was the threat posed by the US unilateral decision to go to war and to impose regime change without the consent of its historical allies. “Operation Iraqi Freedom” became a symbol for the US’s crusade to “spread world

²⁷⁸ Ali Hilmi Mohammed, “The Future of the European Union’s Foreign Policy,” *Majalat Aldifa*, (Defense magazine), March 2003, 80-83.

²⁷⁹ Conetta, “Bringing Down the House.”

market democracy and police world capitalism overtly, using its military supremacy to enforce an order that other powers would have to accept because they have no alternative.”²⁸⁰

Some US commentators attributed the French stand to an inherent European weakness. They neglected to mention that Europe has had a long history of wars and bloodshed and has been trying to form a unified, common safe-haven for its people. Despite its setbacks, it can be safe to say that the Europeans have done a good job in forging cooperative ties between their nations.

America's power, unchecked and unmitigated by international norms and institutions posed a threat to France and the allies. The Bush administration has shown nothing but contempt for multilateralism; it rejected all such elements of the international order such from the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases to the International Criminal Court to constraining their own people's freedom through the Patriot Act. France feared that the Bush administration was emaciating the international system that has ensured global peace for 58 years.²⁸¹

During this crisis, France made an effort to stop what it saw as attempts by the hawkish US administration to spread American hegemony and so it presented itself as the champion of the Arab world and the Third World. It was also seen as the driving force in

²⁸⁰ Weinstein, “An Era of Instability.”

²⁸¹ Howard, “Endgames,” 2.

the UN for restraint, respect for international law and bodies, and solving crises by forsaking the use of military force.

It is also important to mention that the choice between the diverging approaches to the war clearly affects and reflects the interests of both sides. Military might is one of America's greatest assets and thus "emphasizing military solutions in dealing with security problems will increase the value of armed force as a currency of power- a currency the US holds in abundance- thus enhancing US influence."²⁸² In French eyes, allowing the US to go to war unopposed was in effect a "carte blanche" to strike anywhere in the Middle East- preemptively or otherwise- and to act unilaterally whenever it pleased.

However, France did not hide the fact that its reasons for rejecting the war were also based on self-interest. Any international actor with a "sense of duty" towards its people and the rest of the world would do the same. Moreover, traditional French foreign policy has always been based on a rejection of absolute power- be it emanating from the US or even the Holy Roman Empire as was discussed in chapter two.

Its rejection of unchecked international power meant that it was only natural for France to seek an independent foreign and security policy for the European Union. Its "traditional unwillingness to be entangled in foreign operations led and devised by another nation"²⁸³ also meant that France was naturally the leader of the anti-war camp.

²⁸² Conetta, "Burning Down the House."

²⁸³ Balis and Serfaty, 120.

It is easy for many to dismiss France's stand as mere anti-Americanism, but that explanation would turn a blind eye to the fact that the French people and their leadership have much admiration for the American way of life. This minimalist explanation would also mean ignoring the fact that the French are still abiding by the same multilateralist rules devised by the US when the international system was bipolar.

This, however, does not imply that France does not have any other concerns. France is still straining to maintain harmony on its own soil with fears of an exacerbation of Islamic fundamentalism. France is equally serious about "terrorism" and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs).

Thus portraying the French as being bent on opposing the US on every issue is profoundly wrong. What should be understood is that the French will never accept a transatlantic relationship based on blind followership similar to the British-American relationship. In French eyes, Europe needs to become an international player because it has legitimate interests that it needs to pursue.²⁸⁴

Any student of *realpolitik* would not be surprised by the French response. He/she would also not be surprised to see smaller states, especially those Eastern Europe states making a democratic transition, eager to jump on the American bandwagon "in hopes of currying favor in other areas, [because] their opposition wins them nothing, while ardent support

²⁸⁴ Balis and Serfaty, 122.

wins them US favor that can be used to counter French and German influence in Europe.”²⁸⁵

While realism can be a good place to start to explain France's stand vis-à-vis the war on Iraq, it must not end there. International organizations, which have proved to be a very dynamic part of the international system, play an important role in this equation.

Institutionalists see that organizations put necessary constraints on major powers, and impact their policies. In particular, they discuss the role that norms, backed by organizations such as the UN, play in affecting states' behavior- something France wanted to see the UN do in the Iraqi case.

The US administration, peppered with classical realists such as Condoleezza Rice, sees the UN as only important in so far as it serves as an extension of the ordinary traditional diplomatic processes. It is simply another forum in which the struggle for power is fought out, as it had been on the battlegrounds before international organizations were created.

Whichever view one holds, it cannot be denied that institutionalism has played its role in this case. Whether it has worked in this case or not is another question. The way I see it, institutionalism can help us explain how although the US succeeded in one way, it failed in another.

²⁸⁵ Howard, “Endgames,” 2.

By bypassing the UN and going to war without its consensus, the US tore up whatever legitimacy the UN and the notion of multilateralism had. In this case, we can say that the institutional function did not work because the US bypassed or went outside this function.

However, we can also argue that institutionalism has worked in another way. Even if it took him some time, Secretary-General Kofi Annan did finally explicitly state that the war on Iraq was illegal. The Americans themselves declared that Saddam Hussein had neither WMDs nor programmes to manufacture them at short notice when the US and its allies invaded in March 2003.²⁸⁶ Former UN chief weapons inspector Scott Ritter went so far as to say the Americans were “bushwacked*.”²⁸⁷

Institutionalism also proves that despite having ignored the UN in this instance, the US can no longer afford to show its contempt for this global organization and for the allies it dismissed when it unilaterally went to war. This is evident in President Bush's latest “marriage of convenience”²⁸⁸ with French President Chirac over the Lebanese-Syrian matter.

The Iraq fiasco has taught Bush a lesson and now it is almost impossible for the US administration to ignore or shelve the UN. That is part of the reason why Bush is “hid behind the French” in his call for Syria to withdraw its troops from Lebanon after his

²⁸⁶ Rupert Cornwell, Ben Russel and Anne Penketh, “No Weapons, No Programmes: Nothing to Justify the Invasion,” *The Independent*, October 7, 2004, <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/americas/story.jsp?story=569584>.

²⁸⁷ John Intardonato, “Americans were ‘Bushwacked,’ Weapons Inspector Ritter Says,” *The Daily Star*, June 26, 2004. http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=5&article_id=5625.

*Ritter said he believes US President Bush not only hid the truth, but used deception to get his people's support for the war.

²⁸⁸ Timothy Heritage, “US, France in Marriage of Convenience on Lebanon,” *Reuters*, March 13, 2005.

administration implicitly blamed the assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafiq Hariri on Syria.

While the US's aim is evident—smashing Hezbollah and imposing a peace treaty with Israel on Lebanon—the US has opted to play it safe, show respect for the UN, and resort to an “entente cordiale” with the French to settle this matter.

The Americans' attempt to “play it safe” is also evident in the US's efforts to rebuild the bridges with Europe after the end of warfare was declared. In June 2004, France and Germany signed a US-sponsored Security resolution on Iraq after the US went to great lengths to satisfy European concerns (except the French demand that the interim government have a veto power over Americans' use of force in Iraq.)

Even though France and Germany accepted the US-engineered UN package, it has become clear they would not bail the Americans out of the quagmire in Iraq, that there would be no sharing of military burden and no sharing of responsibility if the US solution in Iraq falls apart, as has been the case so far.²⁸⁹

Essentially, the resolution gave a bit of vindication to the Europeans in the great Iraq war debate. The Europeans could say that the Bush administration's move toward multilateralism is an indirect way of saying that Europe was right, that going it alone on

²⁸⁹ Richard Bernstein, “‘Old Europe’ Sees Gains in Rebuilding Bridges,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 12-13, 2004.

Iraq would not work. The administration has learned a lesson, this reasoning goes, and has therefore dropped its unilateralist philosophy.²⁹⁰

One can say that these examples prove that while realism is evident in the French stand on the war on Iraq, it is what we can call a “realism tinged with institutionalism”. The near-success of the institutional route in this case proves that the US can no longer directly ignore the UN or the allies it dismissed before going to war in 2003. The French role has also reminded us that institutions have acquired importance of their own, despite their lack of efficiency in many cases.

But while the essence of this French stand can be explained by neo-realism, and its trump card institutionalism, without a powerful sense of identity, it would be difficult to explain why this quasi-powerful European state showed more strength than most other more powerful states and why it did not bandwagon like the rest. Thus, it is safe to conclude that the basis of this French confrontation is constructivism; a strong sense of identity that was once fostered by a powerful man who led France out of despondency into independence.

France's repeated calls to Bush to leave the Iraqi crisis to the UN are a message that is strikingly similar to that delivered by President de Gaulle years ago to the US. While de Gaulle did not resort to the UN to stand up to the US, as France did in 2003, the General did play the US against the USSR, a procedure he mastered with great skill when the international system was still bipolar in nature. He also set up his country's own nuclear

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

capability (*force de frappe*); a strong sign that France would be leading its own independent military and foreign policy.

While the means were somewhat different, the message France is still conveying is somewhat the same: it will not be coerced into something that will not be of interest to its people and to the international community, which it feels it represents. The principles of the French revolution encapsulated in “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” are not something that apply to the French people alone, but are principles of a universal nature that should be diffused across the world.

The French do not take their moral quest to bring “good” to the world light-heartedly. They believe that France's greatness, glory, *rang*, can only be restored once they take a leading role in the international system. They have a strong sense of mission very similar to that of the US.

To achieve this mission, France sees that a multilateral approach is needed and institutions are a vital means from which collective decisions can be made and binding norms and principles can be devised to bring peace and security to the world.

But while the American mission today – to impose regime change for a more suitable world capable of fostering American-style democracy and economics—differs from the past, the French are still holding on to their dream that they will bring justice to the

world, given the long history of injustice and bloodshed that marred the European continent for so long.

Thus, while neo-realism significantly contributes to the plausible explanation for the French stand on the war on Iraq, it does not do it justice completely. Neo-realist assumptions about the nature of state interests are far too narrow, and make little allowance for identity as a major factor in the formulation of interests. Again, France, as has been shown, offers a prime example of how its conception of its national interests is inextricably linked to self-perceptions as an important actor of the international stage.²⁹¹

Neo-realism also does not highly give credit to institutions, the role they play in the international system and how their policies and behavior have affected the neo-realist conception of anarchy. There is no doubt that institutions have affected and continue to affect state behavior, and that, despite their relative weaknesses, they continue to influence the way international players interact with one another.

While many neo-realists, such as Paul Kennedy and Robert Gilpin have made serious attempts to offer an explanation for the transformation of the international system, it still remains that neo-realism does not offer an adequate explanation for change in the international system. With its tendency to portray key concepts, such as balance of power and anarchy as unchangeable attributes of international relations, which always reassert

²⁹¹ Macleod, "French Policy," 13.

themselves in the end, it would seem to condemn the international system to nothing more than the illusion of change.²⁹²

Because of these objections, the French stand must be explained not only by resorting to neo-realist thinking but by incorporating other theoretical approaches to supplement it and to have a better, more comprehensive understanding of the case at hand. With that in mind, we should go back to a time when de Gaulle attributed his warm welcome in the US city of New York during one of his visits to the “extent of the city’s extraordinary love of France,” and not because he is de Gaulle. What is meant by this is: all states thrive on power, but France is loved. This is what justifies her receiving a special status, not entirely independent of her power, but despite her lack of power.²⁹³

This means that the way France sees itself is being reflected on how the world should see it; its own identity is a reflection of the duties and responsibilities it feels it has towards the rest of the world and this is what justifies its position on this crisis. So, while constructivism may not wholly explain the French stand, it does enrich and complement the approach being used to interpret the case at hand.

As for institutionalism, we have already established that while it failed in one instance, it did succeed in others. This is becoming increasingly visible in the way the US is dealing not only with the Lebanon/Syria case but also with Iran. British Prime Minister Tony

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Grosser, *French Foreign Policy*, 22.

Blair has made it clear that the Americans are working closely with the British, the French and the Germans to resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear weapons.

"France, Germany and the UK are working together, backed by America, to get the Iranians to understand their obligations under the Atomic Energy authority rules...Let's just pursue the diplomatic path for the moment," he said in the British monthly *Muslim News* in March.²⁹⁴

What remains to be said is that Jacques Chirac, the French president, gave sharp definition to the nation's role on the international stage when he opposed the Iraq war. Britain's Tony Blair followed the US to Baghdad. France asserted its independence in what Chirac declared a multipolar world.²⁹⁵ By doing so, France offered the only coherent and relevant modern model of constructivist resistance to US power: the Gaullist model. Articulated in the Security Council debate, this found overwhelming support in international opinion as was evident throughout the countdown to the war.²⁹⁶

His actions and those of France's cannot be attributed to blind anti-Americanism or opposition to the remaining superpower just for the sake of opposing it. France's post-Cold war identity, reflected by its quest to spread its home-made norms and principles, its interests which it sees as representative of those of the international community, and the significance of institutions and institutional norms, all must be taken into consideration to

²⁹⁴ *Middle East Online*, "Blair: Nobody Planning to Attack Iran," March 23, 2005, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=13057>.

²⁹⁵ Philip Stephens, "France Questions Europe's Rationale," *The Financial Times*, March 17, 2005, <http://news.ft.com/cms/s/d544fea0-9715-11d9-9f01-00000e2511c8.html>

²⁹⁶ Pfaff, "Don't Blame the French."

begin to understand why France went down the path of opposition during the road to war and to comprehend what France was trying to achieve.

However, it seems unlikely that France will take this position again. Analysts say that neither France nor Germany sees any advantage in perpetuating the animosities and tensions of the recent past. "The French want to avoid a confrontation because the collateral damage of last year's crisis was such that there is no particular taste for repeating it in the absence of high stakes," says François Heisbourg, the director of the Foundation for Strategic Research in Paris.²⁹⁷

Given the way it was shunned by much of the world's citizenry and bruised by a surprisingly unprecedented level of diplomatic defiance, even by those it considers its oldest allies, it is also unlikely that Washington will attempt to undertake any gamble similar to the one it had taken in Iraq, and we can see this through its cautious behavior vis-à-vis Iran and Syria.

What remains to be said is that the circumstances—France's alignment with Germany, its leadership of *la francophonie*, its special position in the UNSC, NATO and the EU, and the global uproar against the war on Iraq—all boosted Paris's chances of taking up the leading anti-war stance. It remains to be seen whether such circumstances will ever prevail again and whether France will see it fit to go down that path, without risking being shunned or dismissed to the periphery of international relations.

²⁹⁷ Bernstein, "Old Europe."

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