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INSTITUTE NOTE

CFSP CONFRONTING IRAQ

Paris, 3 March 2003

The current Iraqi crisis led the Institute to convene urgently a meeting between experts and representatives to the Political and Security Committee. Bearing in mind that it is still too soon (and arguably too ambitious) to try and propose any solutions, the purpose of the seminar was better to understand the depth and the historic nature of the crisis. Three main issues were considered in three separate sessions.

Why is Iraq a divisive issue?

It emerged from the discussion that there are three dividing lines between Americans and Europeans, although these lines also cut across Europe. First, the United States makes an assessment of the Iraqi threat that is not shared by many Europeans. While the US government believes that the Iraqi regime, and notably its WMD, represents a direct and imminent threat to the US national security and is one linked with terrorism, most Europeans think that Iraqi WMD, however dangerous, can be contained. Second, the Europeans (with some exceptions) declare that a UNSC resolution authorising the use of force against Iraq is necessary. For the United States, conversely, the Security Council's blessing is not indispensable because they contend that they are acting in self-defence. Third, the EU members and the United States diverge on how to deal with the Middle East region as a whole. The Iraqi issue is the most visible dispute today, but the kind of international action and its timing needed to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also brings the two sides of the Atlantic into opposition.

The question of whether those divergences were just a specific misunderstanding, connected to a very sensitive issue, or were rather the first manifestation of a long-term divorce between the transatlantic allies was discussed in the seminar. The current Republican administration has certainly accentuated the differences but – it was pointed out – the Administration's stance represents a more assertive American attitude towards global issues that existed before and has been extrapolated after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. In order to interpret the profound gap regarding strategic issues between both sides of the Atlantic, the idea of two historical 'time scales' was offered, i.e. while the Europeans are living in a 'post-modern', essentially multilateral world, the United States is living in a 'modern' world, in which the

use of armed force is central to their understanding of international relations. However, this idea was criticised on the ground that everyone was living in a 'modern' world.

Confronted with the transatlantic divide, the Europeans have taken two stances. Some have opted for following the US political leadership, by conviction or convenience, or both. In this group, the staunchest US allies have tried to exert influence in order to nuance some parameters of the American designs. On the other hand, others have preferred to oppose the United States. Upholding either their interests or international principles and values, or both, are possible explanations of those countries' attitudes. The fact is that both European approaches to the US leadership present obvious drawbacks. The states that followed the 'bandwagon' approach have not proved very successful in changing American attitudes, particularly as far as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned. In addition, they have followed a way that implies estrangement from other Europeans. For their part, those who oppose the United States are seen as putting at risk the transatlantic relationship and are likely to be the target of rhetorical and political reprisals.

What implications for CFSP/ESDP and the future of Europe?

The discussion started from an evaluation of recent European divisions from a CFSP perspective. Perhaps, it was said, the Franco-German statement on Iraq made on the solemn occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty contributed to triggering a counter-reaction in that it went beyond the traditional scope of Franco-German cooperation (normally limited to intra-EU affairs and, as such, accepted and even demanded). The letter to the *Wall Street Journal* signed by eight European leaders only made things worse. And, perhaps, the way in which the Greek presidency was sidelined and megaphone diplomacy carried out across the Atlantic as well as inside the EU did not help either. The net result, however, has been a very poor collective image of Europe ('old' and 'new') with wider and deeper implications for the immediate future. Although it is not yet foreseeable how far such implications may go, mutual mistrust and second thoughts may well impinge upon CFSP proper (more difficult to adopt common positions on controversial issues), ESDP (especially as regards the implementation of 'Berlin-plus' in Macedonia and possibly Bosnia), but also on the proceedings of the European Convention. While it is true that the 'groupings' among the 'Conventionists' are not the same as those on Iraq, it is none the less a fact that the drafting of the articles related to CFSP/ESDP has been postponed till late spring. As things stand now, it would be almost impossible to achieve consensus on, say, the introduction of QMV or a reform of 'enhanced cooperation' - let alone the creation of a "Eurozone of defence".

Different views were expressed about the tactical/contingent or strategic/stable nature of the renewed Franco-German partnership. For other countries, such as Italy or Spain, it was pointed out that their respective leaders are caught between the mood of public opinion and a sheer calculation of *Realpolitik*, while candidate countries are left with very little choice and even smaller margins for an autonomous stance. It was also noted that, among the many paradoxes of the current situation, many leaders and/or countries find themselves in a situation that does not fully correspond to their profile or interests: Tony Blair is probably the most pro-European British PM since Edward Heath, Jacques Chirac is probably the least anti-American President of the Fifth Republic, Germany is hardly an anti-American country, just as France is hardly a pacifist one. There was convergence, however, on the need to lower the tone of public diplomacy, to "shield" CFSP from US divisive initiatives, and to agree on some "EU-tiquette" among leaders and governments in order to limit the damage.

In this respect, *five possible scenarios* were drawn:

- a) “business as usual”, whereby the clashes over Iraq and the US are dealt with as a temporary parenthesis to be closed and possibly ignored after the crisis;
- b) “re-nationalisation” of the foreign policies of the member states, similarly to what happened, albeit briefly, in the early 1990s vis-à-vis the crisis in former Yugoslavia;
- c) “role specialisation” between the EU and the US, namely along the ‘Venus vs. Mars’ cleavage, as an accepted reality;
- d) “two Europes”, namely a ‘core’/continental/Carolingian vs. an ‘outer’ one, thus replicating the EEC vs. EFTA groupings of the late 1950s - early 1960s; and
- e) “more Europe”, i.e. a robust rebound towards a ‘political’ Union built around a new convergence among the member States.

Scenarios a) and b) were considered unlikely, the former looking hypocritical and the latter unfeasible. Scenarios c) and d) were considered undesirable, although not entirely impossible in the short term if things get worse. Scenario e) was seen as the most desirable one, although not one on the cards yet. Opinions differed, however, as to who could/should make it happen in the first place – the Franco-German duo or a broader and perhaps more balanced combination of interests and visions.

What implications for transatlantic relations?

The discussion underlined the role of some members of the Bush administration who successfully divided Europe, not only between the “old” and “new” Europe, but also inside the EU itself. This “divide and rule” stance marked a clear break from the last 50 years when the US was Europe’s pacifier and the strongest proponent of European unification. Beyond the *intuitu personae* dramatization, it was recalled that US public opinion does not support unilateral action against Iraq. The question remains whether the current disdain for Europe could be sustainable in the long term, especially if the US economy runs into more difficulties and the US dollar falls. Then, the Administration would perhaps rediscover the necessity and the charms of EU markets.

The confusion between the opposition to the war in Iraq and anti-American feelings in Europe contributed to the degradation of the transatlantic relationship, as the recent clash in NATO demonstrated. There was a vicious circle in which European opposition feeds American unilateralism. The key question, largely unresolved, is how to escape the current deadlock and how to repair the damage.

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