



**TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS
AND THE MIDDLE EAST:
PARTNERSHIP OR RIVALRY?**

BY GREG CAPLAN

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Publication date: May 2004

Transatlantic Relations and the Middle East:

Partnership or Rivalry?

Two thousand and four is a critical year for the transatlantic partnership. In the United States, Americans will go to the polls for the first time since the crisis in transatlantic relations that accompanied the Iraq war. For its part, the European Union will hold parliamentary elections, absorb ten new members, decide the fate of a proposed constitution, and begin to develop an independent defense planning unit attached to NATO headquarters in Belgium. Voters and politicians on both sides of the Atlantic will thus have much to say in the next year about the future of the most successful military alliance and coalition of democracies that the modern world has known.

U.S. foreign policy will remain focused on the Middle East in 2004. In this year, Iraq may move toward self-government and peace, descend into chaos, or, more likely, see progress and violence coexist uncomfortably on the road to restored sovereignty. Iran may verifiably abandon its nuclear weapons program in the face of concerted transatlantic diplomacy or continue surreptitiously toward its goal of altering the regional balance of power. Israel and the Palestinians may find their way back to the negotiating table or continue their drift toward continued violence and unilateral separation. The broader Arab and Muslim worlds will observe each of these dramas as they unfold, attempting to extrapolate lessons from each for the future of their region and its relations with the West. In light of the challenges and threats to the United States and Europe emanating from the greater Middle East from terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to mass migration—it would seem reasonable for the

U.S. and Europe to adopt a common agenda for helping the weak states and developing the economies of North Africa, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and Central Asia. indeed, at the G8 Summit in June, President George W. Bush will cast his vision of this region's future as the new mission of the Western democracies.

Four Obstacles to Transatlantic Cooperation

After the ugly diplomatic brawl over the war in Iraq, however, there are at least four significant obstacles to transatlantic cooperation in the greater Middle East. First, the debate over America's role as the lone superpower in the post-September 11 world remains unresolved. Second, policymakers in Washington have come more and more to share Israel's strategic view of the region since September 11, while European diplomats do not. Third, Europeans continue to distinguish more sharply than Americans between the terrorism of global reach, attributed to Al-Qaeda, and Palestinian terrorism, which they view as an illegitimate means to the legitimate end of ending occupation and achieving statehood. Finally, owing in part to the growing influence of a burgeoning Muslim minority in Europe, the EU places much higher priority on renewed efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict than does the United States, where the Jewish community is larger and more politically influential than American Muslims. All of these factors reflect a larger reality that threatens to plague transatlantic relations for some time to come: Americans view Israel as an ally on the front lines of a common war against terror, while Europeans see Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and settlement activity therein as the primary source of Palestinian terrorism and Arab anger toward the West.

Redefining the American Role in the World

Before September 11, 2001, European complaints about the death penalty, genetically modified foods, and the Bush administration's plans to build a missile defense system had the feel of a family quarrel. For decades, issues as seemingly trivial as banana imports and as grave as armed conflict have provoked bickering across the Atlantic, but these disputes never called into question the fundamental strategic posture of the United States and its NATO allies. In the summer of 2001, European frustration with American unilateralism seemed no exception to this rule.¹

Since the end of the Cold War, secular Europeans committed to social democracy have come to feel they have less and less in common with Americans, citizens of an increasingly religious nation, secure in its superpower status and willing to tolerate a weaker economic safety net than any state in Western Europe. This cultural drift coincided with the post-Cold War transformation of the international system. Just weeks before September 11, Dominique Moisi, a leading French observer of international affairs, cautioned that the transatlantic community had failed to adjust to Europe's no longer occupying the center of American strategic thinking.²

While Bill Clinton's political skills and multilateral instincts charmed Europeans in the transitional decade of the 1990s, George W. Bush pushed the unipolar reflex into overdrive. Determined to right the perceived wrongs of the Clinton era, Bush's foreign policy team has consistently asserted American primacy through an unapologetic exercise of American power. President Bush has withdrawn from a number of international treaties, devalued NATO, and alienated a range of allies from Europe to Latin America through aggressive diplomacy, protectionist trade policy, and a general refusal to address the priorities of other nations and the international community as a whole. Europeans regularly cite the familiar list of grievances—Kyoto, the International Criminal Court, the ABM treaty, etc.—that showed that he and his advisers had no interest in enmeshing the United States in the web of international institutions that Europeans hoped would realize the vision of a “new world order” evoked by the first President George Bush. When it comes to issues of importance to Europeans, such as the environment and global governance, U.S. unilateralism has repeatedly provoked Europeans to de-emphasize the transatlantic partnership and to assume a position of leadership for the “rest of the world.” At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in the fall of 2002, for instance, European delegations joined participating countries from around the world in decrying official American indifference to discussions conducted with a sense of urgency by the international community. As a result of this unfortunate dynamic, disputes over the direction of American foreign policy overshadowed any efforts to achieve a common strategic conception of the war on terror.

The military superiority put on display during the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan shocked both Americans and Europeans into thinking more concretely about whether the United States needed its European allies at all. On September 12, NATO invoked Article 5 of its charter for the first time in history, signaling its readiness to come to the collective defense of the United States. Several European nations deployed troops to the region. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder even put his government on the line to maintain his policy of “unlimited solidarity” with the United States, tying a parliamentary vote on German troop deployments in Afghanistan to a vote of confidence in his leadership. Nevertheless, the Bush administration declined to grant NATO a significant role in the planning and execution of the military campaign in Afghanistan.

The overwhelming demonstration of American military might that achieved the liberation of Afghanistan from the Taliban shifted international attention from American vulnerability and international terrorism to the consequences of American dominance. In declaring his “unlimited solidarity,” Schröder also warned the United States that he would not sanction any military “adventures” that had no clear link to September 11, expressing a general European sense that the pursuit of the perpetrators constituted the sole legitimate military response to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

It was in this environment that President Bush delivered his “axis of evil” address in January 2002, intensifying the debate over the scope of the war against terrorism and the proper role of the United States in the post-September 11 world. The speech revealed a strategic leap in the war against terrorism that did not go over well in European capitals. Bush declared the frustration of Iraqi, Iranian, and North Korean ambitions to develop weapons of mass destruction to be a third U.S. war aim, alongside the elimination of state-sponsored terrorism and the destruction of terrorist organizations of global reach. The French foreign minister at the time, Hubert Védrine, responded to Bush’s speech by labeling the United States a “hyperpower” and deriding Bush’s vision of the world as simplistic. His German colleague, Joschka Fischer, warned the United States against treating its European allies as satellites.

German and French skepticism toward the Bush administration thus developed long before the allies renewed their decade-old discussions over how best to achieve Iraqi compliance with UN demands that Saddam Hussein disarm. The debate over Iraq intensified the linkage of unilateralism and the U.S.-led war against terrorism. In late August 2002, in a speech delivered in Nashville, Tennessee, before the annual meeting of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vice President Richard Cheney added his voice to a chorus of advocates of unilateral regime change in Iraq. Cheney’s matter-of-fact rejection of UN inspections as a viable means of achieving the Iraqi dictator’s disarmament infuriated European officials. Schröder, struggling to revive his flagging poll numbers in a tight reelection campaign, seized the opportunity to mobilize voters with an anti-war message. His declared intent to withhold support for any war against Iraq—even a war sanctioned by the UN—salvaged his otherwise moribund campaign, but also set in motion the diplomatic chain of events that mushroomed into the biggest crisis in German-American relations since creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949. The diplomatic skill with which Secretary of State Colin Powell turned President Bush’s decision to take the Iraq issue to the UN into a unanimous vote for Security Council Resolution 1441 did little to change this dynamic. Germany took its

temporary seat on the Security Council in January fully prepared to aid France in blocking a UN resolution sanctioning Bush's call to war.

According to his critics, President Bush had come under the sway of an ideological faction that advocated the projection of American power, as well as the abandonment of the postwar tradition of transatlantic partnership and the promotion of international law and institutions that act to constrain that power. Proponents of this "neoconservative" view in Bush's inner circle had already begun agitating for regime change in Iraq during the Clinton era. Together with a number of leading academic and political figures, the neocons drew intellectual inspiration from the writings of Leo Strauss, a German-Jewish émigré who taught political philosophy at the University of Chicago until his death in 1973. Students and admirers of Strauss have pressed the turn to a more aggressive foreign policy in the name of spreading democracy and defending Western civilization in a Hobbesian world where tyrants would otherwise dominate, as happened in the Europe of Strauss's youth.³

No essay in the past two years has had a more profound impact on the manner in which Europeans and Americans understand and communicate with one another than neoconservative commentator Robert Kagan's "Power and Weakness."⁴ In a forcefully argued polemic, Kagan urged foreign policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic to rethink the oft-avowed assumption that America and Europe share a common worldview. Whereas the United States appreciates the importance of military strength and the readiness to use it, he posited, Europeans have chosen to project the successes of postwar integration and reconciliation onto the world stage, championing negotiation and adherence to shared norms as the only acceptable means of resolving conflict. With international security under the jurisdiction of the American superpower, Europe has had the luxury of enjoying peace and repudiating everything associated with great-power politics, such as significant defense spending, the projection of military power, and decisions to engage in the use of force. The article affirmed critics of the Bush administration in their suspicion of the neoconservative agenda. Because even the most convinced Atlanticists could not deny the kernel of truth in Kagan's argument, the article also sharpened the dispute over how to adapt the transatlantic relationship to the realities of the post-September 11 world. It was no accident that, when the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute's monthly journal devoted its December 2002 edition to Europe in the midst of the Iraq debate, the issue carried the title "Continental Drift," and included such pieces as "Europe Loses its Mind" and "The European Disease."⁵

German commentators concluded early on that President Bush had opted for an imperialistic unilateralism. "The transformation of the international system according to imperial standards is in full swing," wrote one observer in *Die Welt*, an America-friendly German daily. "American combat units, secret services, terrorism specialists, customs and administrative personnel are operating openly and covertly throughout the Islamic-Arabic region and its surroundings."⁶ Taking Kagan's words and Bush's policies to heart, former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt essentially declared the end of the transatlantic partnership. "European governments would be wise to view the current American determination to go it alone as a fact and to accommodate themselves to the idea that unilateralism will continue to enjoy the upper hand in Washington for the long term, perhaps for decades," Schmidt wrote in the summer of 2002. "Already today one hears Americans comparing their land to the Roman Empire. In doing so, they delegate to all of Europe the

provincial role of Athens, where the Roman patricians sent their sons to study rhetoric and philosophy.” He went on to urge his fellow Europeans not to become the instruments of an “American world police force.”⁷ In the transatlantic debate over Iraq, this question divided Europe into what U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (in)famously dubbed “old” and “new” Europe.

Reviving the Atlantic Alliance?

German Chancellor Schröder heeded Schmidt’s counsel and joined forces with Jacques Chirac to promote an independent European security identity as a counter weight to American power. In his response to the outbreak of hostilities in Iraq, Schröder argued that the failure of diplomacy “made more than clear how important it is to be able to speak with one voice in Europe, particularly in crisis situations.”⁸ Military capabilities are central to the achievement of a strong and independent European voice on the international stage, as is a prosperous economy. As the four European leaders committed to this project gathered in Brussels, however, Schröder struggled on the home front to win support within his party for proposed reforms to the German labor market and welfare state. Meanwhile, Finance Minister Hans Eichel acknowledged that the Red-Green government (a coalition of the Social Democrat Party and the Green Party) would not be able to meet the deficit targets of the EU’s Stability and Growth Pact in 2003. In these circumstances, the Red-Green coalition would have to bring about a Reaganite revolution in Germany to achieve the foreign policy goals of the current Franco-German alliance, not only taking on the unions, but ratcheting up defense spending as well.

The preferred alternative would be rapprochement with Washington and the redefinition of the transatlantic security agenda within the context of the war against terrorism. Toward that end, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana drafted a statement on the principles and objectives of European foreign policy that echoed many of the same principles articulated in President Bush’s National Security Strategy. Many commentators and not a few policymakers believe the Atlantic alliance to be already dead.⁹ The failure of the UN Security Council in the Iraq crisis reflected a resurgence of great power politics, in which not just the United States, but each of the UN member states on the Security Council, sought to further narrowly defined national interests. A NATO mission in Iraq would cement the alliance’s new mission in the war against terror, but to European critics of American power, such a reorientation of the transatlantic security architecture would turn NATO into little more than a foreign legion of the United States. Again, these misgivings have as much to do with mistrust of President Bush’s motives and judgment as with an assessment of the military dimension of the war against terror.

In the meantime, it is important to distinguish between the current government’s policies and the ongoing debate in Washington over what kind of superpower America should be. September 11 and the war against terrorism have helped to resuscitate a bipartisan foreign policy consensus on the salutary use of American power. Democratic foreign policy experts champion the multilateral instinct and criticize the unilateralism of President Bush and his advisers, but they are nonetheless urging their party leaders to articulate a progressive

international agenda based on the conviction that “American power represents an opportunity to do much good for America and the world.”¹⁰ How to exercise this power in the most effective and responsible manner remains the subject of sharp debate in Washington.

Attempting to put “American Primacy in Perspective” in an article of that title in *Foreign Affairs*, Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth determined that in the summer of 2002 the “sources of American strength are so varied and so durable that the country now enjoys more freedom in its foreign policy choices than has any other power in modern history.” They urged policymakers not to get carried away with this geopolitical preeminence, calling instead for a benevolent unipolarity in which the United States should “look beyond its immediate needs to its own, and the world’s, long-term interests.”¹¹ As did many of the reflections on American hegemony written in the wake of the war in Afghanistan, this plea for national humility failed to mention the other side of the post-September 11 national identity crisis: American primacy on the international stage has not precluded a sense of acute vulnerability for Americans on the domestic front. From revelations of failures within the U.S. intelligence community to a series of corporate scandals that crushed investor confidence in Wall Street, Americans have been served doses of extreme insecurity to go along with their pride in American primacy. The intensification of violence in Iraq and anxieties about unemployment continue to fuel this combination of patriotism and unease in the American public.

Taking into account both the preponderance of American might and the vulnerability of the United States to terrorism, drugs, disease, environmental degradation, and other transnational security threats, former Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye has argued that the United States cannot afford to stay on the unilateral trail blazed by the Bush administration. Instead, Nye promotes the use of what he calls “soft power,” which, in contrast to the hard power of military and economic strength, “co-opts people rather than coerces them.”¹² In light of globalization and the information revolution, he argues, the United States must lead by example, inspiring other nations and peoples to adhere to its leadership on issues of global concern. Nye’s contribution to the debate is an admonition not to abandon international treaties and norms, but rather to exercise global leadership within and through these structures. In other words, America has a choice: to build alliances based upon mutual respect, common priorities, and shared values, viewing American interests in relation to the concerns of allies and the international community, or to project power and influence other nations primarily through military means. To choose soft power and multilateralism as the preferred model for conducting diplomacy is, by definition, to signal willingness to compromise on the substance of foreign policy issues. For example, should the Bush administration suddenly choose to lead international efforts to reduce pollution and address global warming, Europeans would no doubt approach other potential points of conflict in a more constructive manner. However, only determined political leadership could bring about the transformation of American political culture necessary to see through such a development.

Disagreements over the degree to which the United States needs its allies, how Europe should respond to American unilateralism, and how most effectively to wield power on the world stage are pivotal to the future of transatlantic relations, but they do not address the key challenge of the war against terrorism: how to bring about change in the part of the

world that produced Al-Qaeda and the cult of Islamic martyrdom. A preference for multilateralism and soft power raises difficult strategic questions with regard to U.S. policy in the Middle East. One Middle East expert, Shibley Telhami, urges policymakers to exercise American hegemony with self-restraint and compassion in the post-September 11 world.¹³ Agreeing with Nye, Telhami maintains that the United States should treat terrorism as the criminal practice of nonstate groups, so that the anti-terror coalition may coalesce into a new branch of international law.

Both Nye and Telhami contend that counterterrorism is an international public good, like free trade, which America can achieve through the exercise of soft power and global leadership. The British Empire cleansed the oceans of piracy in the nineteenth century, Nye reminds us, and the international community benefited. Only by winning the adherence of as many states as possible to international norms can the United States succeed in providing a similar service in the contemporary world order. Nye writes, “If our current campaign against terrorism is seen as unilateral or biased, it is likely to fail, but if we continue to maintain broad coalitions to suppress terrorism, we have a good prospect of success.”¹⁴ Telhami agrees with this proposition.

Policymakers in Washington lend less and less credence to the claims of Arab rulers and European diplomats that the rage of the “Arab street” could threaten the stability of Arab regimes in the event of a prolonged U.S. occupation of Iraq or failure to achieve a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Telhami counters that Arab regimes must respond to public opinion if they are to fight terrorism effectively and maintain their legitimacy. According to this logic, absent American action to create a Palestinian state and withdraw from Iraq, Arab states would have to resort to the type of repression that undermines the liberalization of the region, which Washington now purports to advocate. Yet the implications of this argument go far beyond questions of diplomatic style. Arab and Muslim peoples resent the policies, not the values, of the United States, Telhami emphasizes. To win the war against terrorism, he posits, the United States must win the respect of the Arab world instead of provoking fear. To do so, the United States must secure Palestinian statehood.

The Pro-Palestinian Advocacy of the EU

Telhami’s perspective on the war against terrorism mirrors what, without exaggeration, can be called a broad political consensus in Europe. September 11 did little to change the European conviction that the plight of the Palestinians constitutes the most urgent problem in the Arab world. European states opposed to war in Iraq were united on this point, and even those states that supported the United States in Iraq shared the view that Palestinian statehood should be the top priority of the West. More so than the Europeans, the United States and Israel believe that ensuring that the Palestinian Authority has truly entered the post-Arafat era and is committed to fighting terrorism constitutes a precondition to progress toward Palestinian statehood. This dispute has deep historical roots.

In the 1970s, the European left hailed Yasir Arafat as a freedom fighter, a Palestinian David against the military Goliath of Israel, which had conquered the West Bank and Gaza from Jordan and Egypt, respectively. The European Community first made support for the establishment of a Palestinian state and the legitimacy of the PLO as a negotiating partner a central doctrine of its foreign policy in its Venice Declaration of 1980. Ever since, the EU has fashioned itself as an advocate of the Palestinian cause. Economic interests and Europe's geographic proximity to the region drove this policy, which Israelis believed showed that Europeans were willing to compromise Israeli security to improve their relations with the Arab world. Partly for this reason, the Europeans did not play a critical role in peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians before the collapse of the Oslo process in 2000. At the same time, at the request of the Israelis and the Americans, the EU served throughout the 1990s as the most important financial donor to the Palestinian Authority.

President Clinton's efforts to forge a Middle East peace before the end of his term ended in abject failure. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak found himself having to defend Israel against a wave of terrorist attacks in the midst of an election campaign, with nothing to offer the electorate in the way of hopes for a negotiated peace, while the American Jewish community was left numb by the refusal of Arafat to rise to the occasion and negotiate a mutually acceptable peace. In this environment, President Bush shifted U.S. policy toward conflict management from a distance, seeking ceasefires and reciprocal Israeli concessions without expending political capital on the effort. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon took office, and Palestinian terrorism intensified. The Mitchell Report and the Tenet Plan of spring and summer 2001 had no impact on this dynamic. Atlantic Relations and the Middle East

European politicians sought to fill the void left by the American lack of engagement, by undertaking a number of diplomatic initiatives to try to manage the conflict, but in the European public sphere, Prime Minister Sharon was perceived to be more dangerous and less interested in peace than Arafat. The media portrayed Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount in September 2000 as the cause of the so-called "Al-Aqsa Intifada," avoiding discussion of Arafat's decision to ride the tiger of violence and terrorism and to cooperate with rather than confront extremist groups dedicated to the destruction of Israel. Sharon's strategy of isolating Arafat won the Palestinian leader sympathy in Europe, while the Belgian courts pressed ahead in their campaign to try the Israeli prime minister as a war criminal.

Soon after September 11, President Bush recognized that if he hoped to convince Arab rulers to join a coalition against terror, there was no alternative to American mediation between the Israelis and Palestinians. In the months that followed, Israeli concessions and Palestinian acts of terrorism immediately preceded each mission of Bush's special envoy, retired General Anthony Zinni. Finally, in December, Arafat issued a call to his people in Arabic on Palestinian television to cease violent attacks on Israeli civilians. The ceasefire lasted for a month, until the Israeli army killed a Palestinian terrorist in a preemptive strike, reigniting the violence on the ground. During the period of apparent quiet, however, the Palestinian Authority awaited the arrival of the Karine A, a boat loaded with arms purchased from Iran. When confronted about this arms deal, Arafat lied to President Bush, denying any involvement in the affair. This act of deceit discredited Arafat with the administration. The president's rhetoric gradually hardened over the first half of 2001, culminating in his Rose Garden address on the Middle East in June, in which

he called on the Palestinians to choose a new leadership untainted by terrorism.

In Europe, by contrast, the public outcry sparked by the Israeli bombing of an EU-financed airstrip in December 2001 drowned out coverage of Arafat's decision to purchase a boatload of weapons from Iran. European indignation toward Israel and transatlantic discord peaked in the spring of 2002 in response to Israeli military action in the West Bank, the first siege of Arafat's compound in Ramallah, and false reports of an alleged massacre in Jenin, a UN-administered refugee camp that had become the operational center for Islamic Jihad. Following President Bush's Rose Garden address in June 2002, European foreign ministers reiterated their recognition of Arafat as the legitimate leader of the Palestinians. As the international community crept deeper into a diplomatic quagmire over Iraq in winter 2003, the EU and Israel exchanged heated words. On February 17, 2003, European leaders came together in Brussels to try to put the Humpty Dumpty of their common foreign and security policy back together again. Unable to reconcile the pro-American stance of the majority with the anti-war stance of a minority led by France and Germany, they resorted to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to find a common voice. In a statement released at the summit, the EU repeated "its firm belief in the need to invigorate the peace process in the Middle East and to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."¹⁵ Days later, British Foreign Minister Jack Straw and his Norwegian colleague Jan Petersen published an article in the London-based Arabic daily Al-Hayat entitled, "Two Simultaneous Crises in the Middle East."

Israelis took exception to this diplomatic tactic, which in their view sacrificed Israeli interests to the desire of Europeans to show a united front and win the approval of Arab states and their own Muslim minorities. In one of his last acts as Israeli foreign minister, Binyamin Netanyahu responded to his European counterparts with an angry letter, rejecting this linkage of the crisis in Iraq to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the same vein, Israeli Ambassador to Germany Shimon Stein published an editorial in a German daily, asking several pointed questions of the Europeans:

Do EU politicians actually believe that there is a connection between the crisis in Iraq, on the one hand, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the refusal of Arab states to recognize the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state, on the other? Can anyone imagine a connection between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the decisions of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s to wage war on Iran, to use chemical weapons on his own people, and to invade Kuwait? Does anyone seriously think that the resolution of the conflict between [Israelis] and Palestinians would have altered Saddam Hussein's plans to develop capabilities for unconventional weapons and delivery systems in order to establish hegemony in the Gulf region and beyond? Does anyone seriously believe that this linkage might motivate Saddam Hussein to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1441?¹⁶

The adoption of such self-serving tactics by the EU in the Middle East, Stein continued, intensified the distrust of Israelis toward Europeans, which had reached new heights over the course of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Indeed, the relationship between Israel and the EU eroded steadily in light of the readiness of European officials to issue such condemnations and their concomitant reluctance to recognize the right of Israel to self-defense in the face of terror attacks on Israeli pizzerias, discos, cafés, university cafeterias, and holiday celebrations. Maintaining this pattern, in the days preceding the February 17, 2003, summit, Brussels had sent an official letter of rebuke to Israel, protesting its recent military actions, the failure to

dismantle illegal settlements, and other Israeli actions that do damage to the Palestinian cause and EU investments in that cause. Meanwhile, the European Parliament petitioned the EU anti-fraud office to conduct an investigation into the question of whether the Palestinian Authority used EU funds to finance terrorism.

Israeli disappointment in European policy toward Israel and the Palestinians over the past three years is far more significant than a simple difference of opinion. Israel and the United States insist on denying Arafat a substantive role in the peace process because he cannot again be trusted to protect Israeli lives. After more than two years of impassioned debate over why negotiations failed and violence erupted, a major Arab official has finally admitted on the record that Bill Clinton, Ehud Barak, and Dennis Ross have been telling the truth all along: Arafat chose war over peace. Saudi Ambassador to the United States Prince Bandar confirmed this account in the March 24, 2003, edition of the *New Yorker*. In Elsa Walsh's profile, which is astonishing in its belated candor, Bandar confirms that President Clinton had gotten Israeli Prime Minister Barak's consent to offer

... a package that gave Arafat ... almost everything he wanted, including the return of about 97 percent of the land of the occupied territories; all of Jerusalem except the Jewish and Armenian quarters, with Jews preserving the right to worship at the Temple Mount; and a thirty-billion-dollar compensation fund. ... On January 2, 2001, Bandar picked up Arafat at Andrews Air Force Base and reviewed the plan with him. Did he think he could get a better deal? Bandar asked. Did he prefer Sharon to Barak? he continued, referring to the upcoming election in Israel. Of course not, Arafat replied. Barak's negotiators were doves, Bandar went on. "Since 1948, every time we've had something on the table we say no. Then we say yes. When we say yes, it's not on the table anymore. Then we have to deal with something less. Isn't it about time we say yes?" Bandar added, "We've always said to the Americans, 'Our red line is Jerusalem. You get us a deal that's O.K. on Jerusalem and we're going, too.'" Arafat said that he understood, but still Bandar issued something of an ultimatum: "Let me tell you one more time. You have only two choices. Either you take this deal or we go to war. If you take this deal, we will throw all our weight behind you. If you don't take this deal, do you think anybody will go to war for you?"¹⁷

As Bandar had warned, neither Syria nor Egypt nor Saudi Arabia was willing to go to war for Arafat. Nevertheless, the rejectionists, who have ideological and financial ties to the global terrorist organizations and the states that support them, have grown so powerful that a Palestinian leadership committed to a monopoly of force must risk civil war to achieve negotiated peace. The return of Gaza to Palestinian self-rule will force these factions to negotiate a durable power-sharing arrangement or risk slipping into warlordism and violence.

Israel and the War against Terrorism

The relationship between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the U.S.-led war against terrorism has been an awkward subplot to the larger war against terrorism, ever since the attacks on New York and Washington, which occurred as Israelis and Palestinians entered the second year of the so-called Second Intifada. While Al-Qaeda called for the destruction of Israel, Osama bin Laden and his followers declared war on the United States in the name of a far more ambitious cause. In a widely disseminated statement following the first air raids on Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, Bin Laden referred to eighty years of Islamic

humiliation at the hands of the West, alluding to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the colonization of Muslim lands after the First World War. The presence of U.S. troops on the Arabian Peninsula, Islam's holiest ground, and the sanctions regime against Iraq took priority on the list of Al-Qaeda's grievances against the United States.

According to the 2001 U.S. State Department report on global terrorism, the Al-Qaeda network extended to Albania, the Philippines, Chechnya, Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, and Yemen and had ties with Sunni Islamic extremist groups in Egypt, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan, but did not have extensive links to militant Islamic movements in Gaza or the West Bank. Before September 11, the Palestinian cause had simply not been a high priority for Bin Laden, whose formative years as a jihad warrior were spent fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, President Bush's proclamation of war against terrorism immediately begged the question of how ideologically inspired violence against Israeli civilians would figure into this war. Bush's support of Israel and of Prime Minister Sharon's proclamation of war against terrorism rankled Europeans skeptical of the sweeping American response to September 11 and committed to evenhandedness in the Middle East. On September 20, 2001, President Bush told Congress, the American public, and the world that states known to harbor or support terrorists in any way would be treated as terrorists themselves. "You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists," he declared.¹⁸ The following day, Dennis Ross, former President Bill Clinton's special envoy to the Middle East, interpreted this statement in terms of the far-reaching changes that would be necessary to create an environment in the Middle East in which rulers and the media no longer sanctioned terrorism as a legitimate means to advance a political cause.¹⁹ Within a week, the Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei mocked the president's statement, insisting that Iran supported neither terrorism nor the antiterror effort led by America, which purportedly had "its hands deep in blood for all the crimes committed by the Zionist regime."²⁰ On October 10, 2001, the fifty-six-member Organization of the Islamic Conference issued a statement opposing attacks on any Muslim state, including Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, and demanded that the United States force Israel to make peace at any price.²¹ Since then, most of the world has fallen somewhere between these poles, acknowledging the need for the international community to fight terrorism, yet remaining unwilling to lump Palestinian terrorists together with Al-Qaeda operatives, and uncomfortable with the place of Sharon's Israel in Washington's new Middle East agenda.

Policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic expressed the conviction that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would ease the path toward global peace. In October 2001, President Bush became the first U.S. president to pronounce his support for the creation of a Palestinian state. Concerned that Israel might bear the brunt of America's burden in cobbling together a global anti-terror coalition, Prime Minister Sharon warned Washington that Israel would not accept the fate of Czechoslovakia in 1938. The angry rebuke his remarks provoked in Washington provided for one of the last unpleasant moments marring an otherwise ever closer strategic partnership. In April 2003, on the same day that Quartet officials delivered the Road Map to the conflict parties, as if to underscore the connection between the U.S. and Israeli wars against terrorism, two middle-class British citizens of Pakistani descent went from Gaza to Tel Aviv to blow themselves up at a nightclub not far from the American embassy.

With the invasion of Iraq, the Bush Administration opened a new front in the war against terrorism.²² In a speech declaring an end to the “combat phase” of the conflict in Iraq, delivered on May 1, 2003, aboard the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln, President Bush reaffirmed his broad view of the war against terrorism. “The battle of Iraq is one victory in a war against terror that began on September 11, 2001, and still goes on,” he declared. He then recounted the various successes of the antiterror coalition, including the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the pursuit of Al-Qaeda operatives across the globe, and a continued determination to “confront” any regime with ties to terrorism and programs to develop weapons of mass destruction. Again placing the war against terrorism in a line with previous American victories over fascism and communism, Bush left no doubt about the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in this historic mission: “Our commitment to liberty is America’s tradition, declared at our founding, affirmed in Franklin Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms, asserted in the Truman Doctrine and in Ronald Reagan’s challenge to an evil empire. We are committed to freedom in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and in a peaceful Palestine.”²³

Whereas American-led military action dislodged from power the criminal regimes of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Quartet achieved a peaceful, but limited, regime change in the Palestinian territories. In creating an alternative seat of power from Arafat’s presidency of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and chairmanship of the PLO, the Quartet placed the onus of dismantling the Palestinian terror organizations on the incumbent of the newly established post of prime minister of the Palestinian Authority. Unfortunately, Mahmoud Abbas was not able to translate his words about his nation’s need to turn away from the path of terror into concrete action. The optimistic tone struck at the Aqaba summit in June dissipated within weeks, as President Bush’s promise to “ride herd” on the conflict parties collapsed under the weight of mounting U.S. casualties in Iraq and a stalemate with the Palestinian leadership. Abbas’s successor, Ahmed Qureia, seems no more likely than Abbas to prevail in any potential power struggle with Arafat. Against this backdrop, neither Palestinians nor Europeans were likely to welcome President Bush’s embrace of Ariel Sharon’s isengagement plan. But, as happened after Bush’s speech of June 24, 2002, calling for new Palestinian leadership, European leaders may in time come around. It remains to be seen whether this shift in American policy will gain acceptance in Europe as Israel actually withdraws from Gaza.

Mahathir Mohamad and Other Conspiracy Theorists

To critics of President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Sharon, the American failure to build momentum in Middle East peace talks reflects undue Israeli influence on American foreign policy. There are, of course, no more popular foils for conspiracy theorists than Israel and the Jews. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad received a standing ovation when he told the Organization of the Islamic Conference that “Jews rule the world by proxy” and that they had created socialism, communism, human rights and democracy “so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong.” Two years earlier, anti-Semitic myths claiming that Israel and the Jews were responsible for September 11 were disseminated over

the Internet and at the fringes of the mainstream. Virtually everyone has heard by now that Jews who worked in the World Trade Center received a warning not to go to work on September 11, a lie that gained little traction in the United States, but got some in Europe and much more in the Arab world.

Nor was the American political establishment devoid of those willing to break taboos. Right-wing populist Patrick Buchanan, whose critique of the “Amen corner” ruffled feathers during a previous Gulf crisis, turned to his familiar goats to explain his opposition to the ouster of Saddam Hussein. In early 2003, in the midst of a national debate over Iraq, Buchanan claimed that only Osama bin Laden, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and Richard Perle supported the war in Iraq. In March of the same year, Congressman Jim Moran (D-VA) provoked calls for his resignation and then forfeited his leadership post in the Congressional Democratic caucus after publicly expressing his conviction that the American Jewish community was behind the rush to war. American Jewish leaders, he stated, could use their influence to change the course of American foreign policy—and he encouraged them to do so. Even before this scandal, mainstream pundits felt compelled to debunk the myth that the United States might go to war in Iraq solely out of concern for, or at the behest of, Israel and American Jewry.²⁴

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell put an end to this latest round of conspiracy theories—at least in the American mainstream—in testimony on March 13, 2003, before the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. American policy in the Middle East, he said, is “not driven by any small cabal that is buried away somewhere that is telling President Bush or me or Vice President Cheney or Condi Rice or other members of our administration what our policies should be.”²⁵ However, this assertion has done little to stem the tide of conspiracy theorists in Europe and throughout the Arab world.²⁶ Commentators who cite neoconservatives, fundamentalist Christians, and American Jews as the determining factors of Bush’s Middle East policy often overlook the political, diplomatic, military, and ideological dimensions to the war against terrorism and their impact on the U.S.-Israel relationship. Terrorism has shifted the American and the Israeli center to the right, as feelings of vulnerability and insecurity in both societies have fostered a preoccupation with national security in a time of crisis. The state of war has caused havoc among Democrats in the United States and the Israeli parties of the left. The dovish profile of Labor’s previous chairman, Amram Mitzna, led the party of Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin to electoral defeat in January 2003 elections. Similarly, no Democrat will win an American Presidential election in the foreseeable future without demonstrating a willingness to wield American power to contain the terrorist threat.

Diplomatically, Israel is not in the “coalition of the willing,” and Israeli officials have rightly emphasized that the war in Iraq was not Israel’s war. Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom has nonetheless made clear that he would not have stood in the way of the United States and its allies at the UN had Israel held a seat on the Security Council. After all, the elimination of Saddam’s regime removed the threat of an attack from the east and enabled the Israeli military to reassess its security posture. The co-opting of the idea of unilateral separation by Ariel Sharon would otherwise have remained unthinkable.

Operationally, American and Israeli armed forces and intelligence services are cooperating more intensely than ever. Israel is one of the Pentagon’s most critical allies in the war against

terrorism, in spite of the obvious need to downplay this cooperation in public. For more than a decade, the Pentagon and its Israeli counterparts have collaborated on projects designed to combat terrorism through the application of new technologies. “September 11 changed everything,” declared a Pentagon official involved in this collaboration. “I and many Americans now understand what Israelis have endured for a long time. We admire the perseverance, courage, and indomitable spirit that define the Israeli people.”²⁷ By contrast, Palestinian Islamic Jihad claims to have sent thousands of suicide bombers from Lebanon and Syria to fight American forces in Iraq.

Americans and Israelis also face similar challenges in their respective propaganda wars. During the Al-Aqsa Intifada, comparisons of Israeli military action in the West Bank to the methods of the Nazis were common in the European and Arab press. Likewise, during the first week of the current war in Iraq, an opposition newspaper in Egypt titled its war coverage, “The Holocaust in Iraq.” The text of the article read: “Oh History, recount that the massacre of the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi troops during the Second World War paled in comparison to the Holocaust in Iraq.”²⁸ Arab media outlets speak of American occupation forces and Iraqi martyrs, borrowing the adversarial vocabulary of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A similar dynamic is at play in Europe, where a recent European Commission poll found that 59 percent of Europeans consider Israel the greatest threat to world peace, just ahead of the United States of America, which tied Iran and North Korea for second place with 53 percent.²⁹ As Israel and the United States continue to wage wars against terrorism, the political reactions against these wars have stirred long-dormant residues of anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism in the European body politic.³⁰ The European Jewish Congress just released a report on anti-Semitic attacks in Europe over the past three years, which concluded that right-wing extremists and Muslim youth had perpetrated most of the attacks. The European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, a European Union body, which had originally commissioned the report, edited out findings related to Muslim youth, provoking charges from Jewish leaders and the report’s authors that the EU had bowed to fears of offending Europe’s Muslim minority.

Toward a New Middle East

Since September 11, Americans—Democrats and Republicans alike—recognize that oil supplies and support of Israel can no longer be the sole policy concerns of the United States in the Middle East. Fundamentalist Islam, whether of the Sunni variety championed by Al-Qaeda or in its Shi’i Iranian form, and the Ba’athist pan Arabism of Syria and Saddam’s Iraq are ideologies inherently hostile to Israel, the United States, and the West as a whole. As Paul Berman lays out brilliantly in his book, *Terror and Liberalism*, these ideological movements draw directly from the intellectual wellspring of fascist and communist movements of post-World War I Europe.³¹ President Bush acknowledged as much in describing the enemies of the United States and of liberal democracy in his speech to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001: “They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions; by abandoning every value

except the will to power; they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism.”³²

Proponents of these ideologies must be prevented from obtaining weapons of mass destruction. The West must also encourage positive change within the Arab world as an alternative to these deadly belief systems. In the U.S., a consensus on the primacy of these goals, if not on the methods of pursuing them, is crystallizing among Republicans and Democrats. This consensus must be expanded to incorporate the entire transatlantic community, which was united in its recognition of the challenge in the immediate aftermath of September 11.³³ Having then declared Germany’s “unconditional solidarity” with the United States, Chancellor Schröder demonstrated a firm grasp of the threat facing the West, explaining the war against terrorism as a conflict between a globalizing world and the reactionary forces of religious fundamentalism: “America is just the most extreme ... symbol for modernity and for that which we call civilization. It is equally a symbol of the opposite of the medieval structures championed by the Taliban and their spiritual kin. And they are cruel structures, beyond this world.”³⁴

Schröder’s government deployed German troops to Afghanistan and passed two separate laws to facilitate the apprehension of international terrorist groups within Germany. Germany has deployed thousands of soldiers around the world in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Interior Minister Otto Schily continues to enjoy excellent relations with U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft in their cooperative counterterrorism efforts. To pursue the nonmilitary aspects of the war against terrorism, Joschka Fischer has created a task force for dialogue with Islam within the German Foreign Ministry. This task force has few illusions about its potential to promote change in societies that are not open to cross-cultural dialogue in the first place. At the same time, European critics have been quick to dismiss the argument that the end of Saddam Hussein’s regime might be the beginning of a broader transition in the Arab world, away from autocracy and toward freedom.

In the United States, by contrast, neoconservatives are not the only advocates of a concerted U.S. effort to help moderate Arabs take ownership of their political culture and institutions. Democratic leaders have criticized President Bush for neglecting the battle of ideas in the war against terrorism, insisting that, besides coercing rogue states to renounce terrorism, America must allocate more political and economic resources to assisting the Arab-Muslim world to modernize and liberalize. Former Clinton administration officials Ronald Asmus and Ken Pollack are seeking to convince America’s European allies that they, too, have a stake in this endeavor. They argue that the transformation of the Middle East constitutes the “new transatlantic project.” Senator Richard Lugar, the moderate Republican who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has proposed a “Cooperation for Peace” in the Greater Middle East, under the auspices of NATO, on the model of the “Partnership for Peace” that eased the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe.

Democrats supported the government’s efforts to pressure Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to turn over Iraqi Ba’athists and whatever weapons of mass destruction Saddam may have smuggled into Syria to the American forces in the region. “Perhaps Bashar Assad will heed American warnings,” commented Marc Ginsberg, who chairs the Alliance for American Leadership, a Democratic foreign policy organization. “If not, we may soon have a chance to

see a shooting star falling over the skies of Damascus.”³⁵ Assad must make a critical choice about the Syrian role in the new Middle East, for the United States is determined not to let him play the spoiler in post-Saddam Iraq or the Palestinian territories. The United States has cut the flow of Iraqi oil to Syria, depriving Damascus of \$1.1 billion annually in illicit oil sales. Washington has also demanded that Syria shut down the terrorist groups operating out of Damascus and Lebanon. Surrounded by America-friendly regimes in Jordan, Israel, Iraq, and Turkey, Assad is politically, diplomatically, economically, and strategically isolated. Like Saddam before him, he will surely look to Europe and the international community for relief. French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin’s statement in the spring of 2003 that Syria must end its occupation of Lebanon was an unmistakable signal that the French, too, have recognized what Secretary of State Powell has called a “new strategic situation” in the Middle East. Although there are as yet few signs that Assad has committed himself one way or the other, Syria has recently indicated a readiness to resume peace talks with Israel for the first time since the death of Assad’s father in 2000.

This realignment of forces has also created new realities in the Palestinian territories. The Palestinian Authority funded its terrorist campaign with the help of friends in the region who are ideologically opposed to any peace with Israel. Saddam Hussein generously rewarded the families of Palestinian suicide bombers. Iran sold the Palestinian Authority weapons and funded Palestinian terrorist organizations. Saudi Arabian donors filled the coffers of Hamas, while Syria likewise supported a number of Palestinian terrorist organizations. More than their European counterparts, American policymakers have thus far factored these regional dynamics into their understanding of the U.S.-led war against terrorism.

Less dramatically but no less consequentially, the past two years have seen a transformation in the American relationship with Saudi Arabia. Europeans have often expressed their distaste for President Bush’s “axis of evil” criterion for policy by pointing to this decades-old marriage of convenience. In the opinion of many Europeans, the American campaign for regime change in Iraq and calls for freedom from theocracy in Iran rang rather hollow in light of America’s strategic dependence on the autocratic Saudi regime for oil. After all, the House of Saud permitted its local religious establishment to cultivate and export a hybrid mix of Wahhabi Muslim asceticism and violent Islamic fundamentalism propagated by Bin Laden and his followers, and fifteen of the nineteen September 11 hijackers held Saudi citizenship.

The recent series of terrorist attacks in Riyadh shocked the Saudi royal family out of the denial mode that had characterized its responses to terrorist acts perpetrated by Saudi nationals beyond its borders. Before the first attacks on Saudi soil in May 2003, only the Saudis themselves disputed that terrorists continued to receive financial support from within the desert kingdom. In July 2002, an analyst from the RAND Corporation had advised the Pentagon’s Defense Policy Board to treat Saudi Arabia as an enemy in the war against terror. News reports of this internal Pentagon discussion and of unsatisfactory Saudi cooperation in U.S. counterterrorism efforts compounded the most severe crisis in U.S.-Saudi relations in decades.

In the midst of this controversy, Rachel Bronson, director of Middle East studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, counseled caution, arguing that Washington should prefer

continued partnership with a stable Saudi regime to the risks of instability and radicalization that a path of confrontation would generate. “Asking the Saudis to take on terrorist financing would be enormously costly to them,” she warned. “The crown prince would have to directly challenge the religious establishment, as well as key members of his own family.”³⁶ As the crisis in Iraq displaced the role of Saudi Arabia in the war against terror from the headlines, Crown Prince Abdullah did initiate a dialogue on internal reforms. However, Abdullah’s powerful half-brother, Interior Minister Prince Nayef, has used his considerable influence—as well as his control of the secret police—to check Abdullah’s cautious moves toward liberalization.³⁷ Nevertheless, as American and Saudi investigators collaborate more closely on the latest terrorist acts on Saudi soil, the price to be paid for denial, inaction, and the religious justification of suicide bombing is ever clearer to both the royal family and its subjects.

For their part, Arab intellectuals have noticed the self-serving contradiction that Washington calls for democracy in Tehran, Baghdad, and the Palestinian territories, but remains silent with respect to the “moderate” Arab states. “How can America support these undemocratic Arab systems, but desire to eliminate others because they are not democratic?” Salim al-Hass asked in a Lebanese daily in the summer of 2002. Al-Hass went on to express the hope that, despite the uneven application of the policy, American determination to push the Arab world toward democracy would reach every state in the region over the long haul. “It is therefore not going too far to say that the Arab world stands at the threshold of a new era,” Al-Hass continued. “Introducing democracy and practicing it correctly and effectively will be the greatest challenge [of this new era].” He called on Arab rulers to engage in dialogue with Arab intellectuals as to how best to introduce freedom and democracy in a manner consistent with local conditions, “so that the change arises from an internal will and not forced from the outside.”³⁸ If Arab rulers do not rise to this challenge, he concluded, their states will remain internationally isolated; they will be threatened with occupation, as in the case of the Palestinians or Iraq; or they will be toppled by an internal revolution.

In light of these alternatives, the West must place a greater priority on programs to help states that have shown themselves open to reform, such as Qatar, Bahrain, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan, to build the prerequisites of civil society, [Al-Hass] called on Arab rulers to engage in dialogue including political parties and a free press. According to the 2002 Arab Human Development Report, which the UN published in 2002, the social, economic, and demographic crises of the Arab world are threatening or will soon threaten the stability of autocratic regimes in the region. The Arab authors of the UN report cite the lack of freedom, the exclusion of women from political and economic life, and a dearth of scientific and scholarly innovation as the most critical deficits facing the Arab world. It is out of this context that the various fundamentalist Muslim movements engaged in terrorism have developed.

The liberalization of the Arab world would pay dividends for all parties involved. The European Union’s Mediterranean Dialogue is designed to work toward this goal. The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative, which Secretary of State Powell announced in December 2002, has the same objective. “The spread of democracy and free markets, fueled by the wonders of the technological revolution, has created a dynamo that can generate prosperity and human well-being on an unprecedented scale,” Powell said in announcing the initiative. “But this revolution has left much of the Middle East behind.”³⁹ President Bush has also

announced plans to create a free trade area in the Middle East within the next decade. Nevertheless, with just \$29 million allocated in the first year to programs in the realms of education, civil society, private sector development, and economic reform, the financial commitment to this critical dimension of the war against terror pales in comparison to the billions spent on war with Iraq and increases in defense spending.

Transatlantic cooperation in this effort would bring sharper focus, greater international legitimacy, and more ambitious timelines to the endeavor. Whether through a reinvigorated NATO or entirely new institutions, transatlantic unity of purpose and action is a necessary, if insufficient, factor in achieving democracy and the rule of law in the greater Middle East.

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