



## Discussion Papers

# The Iraq conflict and the future of Europe

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*The war with Iraq coincides with crucial discussions over the future of Europe. Glenys Kinnock MEP looks at the thorny issues involved for the international institutions concerned, and concludes that the move towards a common foreign, security and defence policy is more important now than ever.*

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So the UN route has been abandoned, and the United States and its 'coalition of the willing' has decided to launch an attack on Iraq. In his resignation speech in the House of Commons, Robin Cook expressed his deep concern about a war that did not have the agreement of NATO, the EU nor the UN Security Council. The decision to go to war lacks the legitimacy and authority of the UN, and represents a failure of that multilateralism, which is the cornerstone of international stability and the firm principle upon which the EU is built.

Europe's influence and authority has been damaged, but that does not mean that we should despair about the possibility of building an effective set of policies that recognise the shared influence we can have for good. The big question is 'what now?', both in terms of the consequences of war in Iraq, and also for our multilateral institutions which have been shaken and rattled by events over the last few weeks. Many believe that the Iraq crisis has seriously threatened attempts to build that elusive EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

It is ironic that Europe's divisions have come at a time when the Convention on the Future of Europe is mapping out a constitution intended to convince our citizens that the EU has relevance and importance in their everyday lives. I do not, however, believe that the outbreak of war marks the end of the hope that we can forge that common foreign policy. European unity was, after all, founded upon the conviction that peace and stability on our continent could only be guaranteed if we build common positions.

There have, of course, always been spats and disagreements between Member States, and with the US. There are currently, for instance, disputes on steel subsidies and on GMOs. However, it should not be assumed that when there have been disagreements between countries of the European Union that this irreparably weakens the understanding that we have a shared interest in collaboration and co-operation on everything from consumer rights to environmental protection, global trade rules and civil liberties. Post-war Europe has built an understanding that multilateralism and strong international institutions, backed by international law and clear global rules, create stability on our own continent and in the wider world.

Europe has, after all, led on a Code of Conduct on Arms, on the International Criminal Court, on Kyoto, and in Johannesburg on sustainable development. There is, for the first time, a European police force operating in Bosnia, and now an EU military operation is in place in Macedonia. Member States do share a position on

building peace and security in the Middle East, and have taken a strong position on governance, human rights and the rule of law across the world. Efforts to tackle terrorism have been implemented under the Justice and Home Affairs pillar, and we know that unless we have international co-operation, our efforts will not succeed.

I would also claim that the emergency EU Council Summit on Iraq was not the failure that many had predicted it would be. It showed that Member States were still making a commitment to trying to ensure that CFSP structures work, even in very difficult times. It succeeded in highlighting shared positions on multilateralism, support for the UN, and for a regional solution in the Middle East. However, of course, no agreement could be reached on the necessity or the timing of the use of force. Unusually, the role of the President of the European Parliament was very positive and added legitimacy to the Parliament's position on seeking greater influence on the CFSP. In the general rubbishing of the EU's prospect of being taken seriously at this time, these positive elements should not be forgotten.

France and Germany - whatever you think of how they managed their difference of opinion with the UK and Spain - did show that a European voice can have a powerful influence over events. This leads me to believe that a united European voice can, and should, provide balance in situations when the world's superpower is holding sway. However we must acknowledge that the CFSP has been damaged because so many member states took a 'national' position. It was clearly in ~~none~~ some's interest to support the US going it alone on Iraq, and it was Tony Blair who ensured that Bush took the UN route. Also, his influence over the conduct of the war and over the post-conflict reconstruction will be essential.

As the debate moves on to reconstruction efforts in post-conflict Iraq, our Prime Minister's task is to build trust again with his European allies. There must be an agreement on the kind of UN Mandate which was secured for work in East Timor, Kosovo and Afghanistan. Also, humanitarian assistance must be delivered in a neutral and impartial manner. Clearly, our Prime Minister's dealings with other European colleagues will be affected by the questions which will be raised about the EU and the UN picking up the pieces after military action without that second UN resolution.

We also, of course, need clear and unequivocal reassurance that Bush is genuine about getting a just and speedy settlement between Israel and Palestine.

Clearly, the role of Eastern European countries will continue to complicate the search for a more coherent European Common Foreign and Security Policy. EU differences were very publicly exposed in NATO, and Rumsfeld claimed, "if you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the centre of gravity is shifting to the East". Indeed, many of NATO's newest members from Central Europe, and those waiting to join, are all committed advocates of the transatlantic link. They are anxious to join the side which won the Cold War battle, and tend to see the US, rather than the EU, as being more likely to provide a shield against any future threats.

New members of the EU will, it appears, maintain this commitment to the US and internal NATO differences are likely to grow unless, within NATO, Europeans develop, and support, a more coherent foreign and defence policy. Despite the recent discussions on EU defence co-operation and the Anglo-French procurement deal on two new British aircraft carriers, defence still remains more transatlantic than European. Indeed, Eastern European entry into NATO requires the opening up of markets to foreign investment, and a commitment to spending at least 2% of GDP on defence. Despite economic collapse, Lithuania recently purchased stinger missiles worth \$34 million made by Raytheon Corporation of Tuscon, Arizona. They may have to spend \$240 million on arms every year as the price for NATO membership.

The consolidation of the CFSP **before** EU enlargement is clearly important if bridges are to be built and divisions healed. For the EU to redress the disunity and imbalance within NATO, it will need to begin by strengthening the European Security and Defence policy (ESDP). The EU has proved, in the Balkans and in Afghanistan in particular, that we have a serious role to play - especially when the US is unwilling, or unable, to act. This also applied in the west of the former Soviet Union, on the Turkish-Greek Cypriot issue, as it does on the Mahgreb. This should be not be interpreted as undermining the transatlantic defence alliance, but rather as strengthening it.

If Europe is to assert itself in any international crisis, the 'soft' defence policies for which it is traditionally associated with need to be enhanced, along with a firmer commitment to 'hard' defence policies. I agree with a

comment made by the Belgian Prime Minister, who said, "the more people march in our streets in favour of peace, the more urgent it becomes to develop a true European defence".

I have believed for some time that a vital step towards this would be to hold an EU comprehensive defence and security review - the UK has already indicated that it plans to add a new chapter to its Strategic Defence Review. This is important if we are to address the current security challenges. However if the way we continue to deal with the issues is in a predominantly national way then it will not be surprising if Paris and London come up with different solutions. A common foreign, security and defence policy would be greatly strengthened if it were built on a joint analysis of the threats and challenges the EU faces. Whilst it could reach the same conclusions as the US - that huge increases in defence spending and the creation of an office for Homeland security are the most effective ways of protecting its citizens - it might reach different conclusions, and offer a different vision. This could be one based more strongly on the need for diplomacy and prevention, backed by an improved defence capability. Whatever the outcome of the review the EU would then be better prepared to begin pooling its capabilities and avoid duplication of training and equipment.

The Convention on the Future of Europe has begun to address these concerns. Last December, the Convention's Defence Working Group discussed the idea that European nations alone take responsibility for the territorial defence of Europe for the first time since the Second World War, suggesting that a mutual defence commitment should replace the Article V defence guarantee provided by NATO. But the differences of opinion over Iraq have obviously paralysed efforts to effect such a change of policy. The Convention, which was due to present its final proposals to the European Council in June is now unlikely to do so, particularly in the area of defence. There was a sense that despite acknowledging, as the UK did, that 'foreign policy must remain a matter for national governments co-operating freely', progress was being made towards a stronger CFSP. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer ruled out any extension, however, saying "it is all the more urgent the Convention finishes its work on time", referring explicitly to the divisions over Iraq.

Discussions were also taking place on how the EU could strengthen foreign policy by creating a longer-term Presidency of the Council, and by reinforcing the powers of the EU High Representative, thereby creating a European foreign secretary.

Way back in June 2000, Commissioner Patten said in the European Parliament, "all Member States should acknowledge what those actually doing the work on CFSP have long understood - that mere intergovernmentalism is a recipe for weakness and mediocrity - for a European foreign policy of the lowest common denominator. That is the lesson we still have to learn". The current situation offers the EU a challenge - to prove that it is a real player on the global stage. We must begin work as soon as possible on repairing the very fabric of international relations that have been so damaged.

We are living through very dangerous times. When this war is over, we will need to work together to rebuild the credibility of the United Nations. A stronger, more unified EU will be central to that. We also need to forge closer links and a more sustained dialogue with progressive forces in the US - those who reject the blundering unilateralism of Rumsfeld and Cheney, and who understand that global stability needs to be underpinned by greater international co-operation and agreement.

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