The EU and Iraq

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The US intervention in Iraq revealed the enormous difficulty that the EU faces in its attempt to forge a common foreign policy in a context of serious divergences with the United States. The Iraq crisis encouraged many groups to believe that the EU should stay out of Iraq: for some, keeping a distance was necessary because it was deemed impossible to define a common stance on postwar Iraq; others wanted to avoid helping Bush in any way and thereby contribute to his re-election. With President Bush's electoral victory the latter argument is no longer valid, and what is more, the gravity of the crisis in Iraq imposes a duty on the EU to define a policy for solving it. President Bush's visit to Brussels in February 2005 did not do away with existing divergences over Iraq, although there is a clearer consensus that the Union should be involved in the resolution of the crisis using its soft power instruments. This is what the US president sought to gain from his visit to Europe. For some time now, various American analysts have noted the importance that the United States attaches to European soft power, with a view to establishing a division of labour in which the United States continues to hold a monopoly on hard power. Andrew Moravcsik, for example, argues that the European Union should abandon any attempt at transcending the civil power role, which it would be well advised to perform as a supplement to the exercise of US military power: 'Rather than criticising US military power, or hankering after it, Europe would do better to invest its political and budgetary capital in a distinctive complement to it. European civilian power, if wielded shrewdly and more coherently, could be an effective and credible instrument of modern European statecraft, not just to compel compliance by smaller countries but perhaps even to induce greater American understanding. Europe might get its way more often – and without a bigger army.'[1] This seems to reflect the view of the Bush administration today. But there is no evidence to suggest that Europeans are disposed to accept such a division of labour, nor that they have agreed on the future of Iraq. Conse-

1. Andrew Moravcsik, 'How Europe can win without an army', *Financial Times*, 3 April 2003.

quently, the fundamental questions remain unresolved: what kind of involvement – economic, civilian or military or all of the former; what degree of European commitment; should there be a direct alliance with the United States, or should the framework be multilateral? Although the member states of the EU presented a united front during the visit of the US president, they have still to find satisfactory answers to these questions; nor have they overcome the divergences with the United States that emerged after the latter's military intervention. There is awareness not only of the need to normalise relations with the United States, but also of the fact that the resolution of the Iraq crisis is in the interests of the European Union for a number of reasons, notably:

◗ the suffering of many Iraqis in the current situation;
◗ the regional repercussions of disintegration or the triumph of an authoritarian outcome, particularly for Iraq's neighbours, and especially for Turkey, a candidate for EU membership;
◗ the impact of the crisis on public opinion in the Arab countries, which are important EU partners.

A common view of the Iraq crisis?

A democratic domino effect from Iraq is highly unlikely, given the way in which the current process of change was initiated and given the rejection of so-called 'democratic interventionism' by large segments of society in neighbouring countries. The 30 January elections did not solve the crisis, and many issues central to the process of political transition remain unresolved. Further, the security of the civilian population has of course yet to be assured. A significant number of Iraqis from Kurdistan and the mostly Shia south turned out to vote – a fact worth noting in light of the reigning climate of insecurity. However, this does not automatically guarantee peace, as the examples of Angola and Haiti, where violence and war broke out again after the first free elections, show. The Sunni dominated central part of Iraq saw much lower levels of electoral participation, and this is where support for armed resistance against US forces is strongest. The Sunnis are not involved in the political process. The results of the elections in the north showed a resounding victory for the Kurdish coalition, which gained more than 90 per cent of the vote (25 per cent of the total votes). In the south the Unified Iraqi Alliance, backed by Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, also garnered 90

per cent of the votes (48.1 per cent of the total votes).[2] There was no real electoral pluralism in any of these areas of the country, however, despite the large number of competing parties and high voter turnout. The larger national political questions have yet to be addressed, be it the shape of the Iraqi state – a matter on which there is little consensus – or the protection of citizens' rights. The future constitution, which will have to emerge as a result of a consensus among all the relevant political currents in the country, should resolve these foundational issues, but this can only happen if there is a real desire to discuss a democratic Iraq or indeed an Iraqi state.[3]

European policy must be built on an analysis of the situation on the ground, and should avoid any triumphalism: the difficulties faced by the United States should teach us that such attitudes only lead to a repetition of past mistakes. It is equally essential to realise that external actors can be part of the solution to the crisis, even if they are today also part of the problem. A deepening of the crisis and the possibility of civil war would have dramatic effects on the Middle East as a whole, and Iraq could become even more of a focus for the mobilisation of violent Islamic extremists, as well as a centre of recruitment for the launching of campaigns of violence in other countries. The central aim of a European policy on Iraq cannot be to normalise transatlantic relations but rather to contribute to the resolution of the problems that Iraqis are facing. In the absence of a clear political outlook, the role that the Union may have in Iraq will be seen as supportive of US policy or, alternatively, will reinforce the perception of a division of labour between a 'hard power' United States that makes full use of its military might without much thought for the day after, and a 'soft power' EU that comes to the rescue of the Americans, putting out their fires.

Taking this as the starting point, it is possible to highlight eight fundamental guidelines for EU policy in this domain:

I. *Supporting a sovereign democratic Iraq.* The vision of a sovereign Iraq should be based on a commitment to a democratic Iraq, able to reconcile national aspirations and the need for political liberty, which shows that democracy is not simply an external imposition but rather the best way to ensure the independence of the country. But sovereignty means guaranteeing that the people are able to express their will and command their own destiny. In Iraq, as in other countries of the region, real freedom of choice may well mean the coming to power of forces with which

2. The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq.

3. On this, see Marina Ottaway, 'Iraq: Without Consensus, Democracy is not the Answer', *Policy Brief* 36, March 2005.

Europeans do not identify. As in other regions of the world, the Union should get involved in the political process, by:

◗ Supporting political parties in a spirit of pluralism, and backing their consolidation as essential forces in a transition process. A source of inspiration in this instance could be the role played by the German foundations in Southern and Eastern Europe.

◗ Backing the constitutional process with European juridical expertise, taking advantage of the experience developed in the EU member states in that domain. Law faculties, for instance those of France and Portugal, have been particularly active in Africa.

◗ Promoting civil society organisations and making them privileged partners in any EU initiatives. A good example might be the initiatives undertaken by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

II. *Prioritising community instruments.* In light of intra-European divisions, the Council ended up delegating the leadership of European policy to the Commission, as it was unable to define a common stance on Iraq. Given the nature of the Union, Commission policy is characterised by the use of the instruments of a civil power. The Commission has participated from Jordan in the humanitarian aid effort, and has supported the political transition within the framework of the UN, budgeting €320 million from 2003 onwards to invest in services, energy and trade. The role played by the Commission in conducting EU policy in Iraq should not only be maintained but also deepened. The Commission has not just worked on humanitarian assistance, but also contributed, as it should, to the political process, supporting the elections with €31.5 million and sending European election specialists and training around 170 local electoral observers. In fact, this is the significance of the next International Conference on Iraq, which will be held as a result of Bush's European visit. That event should serve to define the priorities of the international community's support for the political process. Maintaining the Community dimension of European policy towards Iraq should not mean avoiding the establishment of a clear political orientation; rather, it should serve to ensure the EU's capacity to act on the ground, where international aid is most necessary and where Europe is most wanted

and efficient. Again, if the EU does not define a clear political orientation the International Conference is likely to fail. Over the medium to long term, European relations with Iraq should lead to a bilateral trade agreement, but it does not make sense to propose that Iraq join the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Iraq is not a country with a Mediterranean – and therefore a European – vocation as are the countries of North Africa; it is, rather, a Gulf state, which should become a part of European relations with the countries of that region.

III. *Defending human rights and curbing violence against civilians*. One of the main concerns of the EU in Iraq should be the protection of civilians who have been the main victims of violence, originating with groups or political movements that target civilians in terrorist actions, or resulting from so-called 'collateral damage' caused by the action of coalition forces. According to the project Iraq Body Count, the number of Iraqi civilian deaths since the start of the war is between 17,316 and 19,696.[4] The Human Rights Organisation in Iraq estimates the death toll as more than 30,000.[5] In this context, it is obvious that the Union must give special attention to the protection of basic rights and should therefore support the activities of the UN and those of Iraqi non-governmental organisations working to protect human rights and promote the rule of law, the creation of an effective judicial system, and even police forces that are able to protect fundamental rights.

IV. *Prioritising multilateralism*. If there is a crisis that justifies the EU preference for multilateral over bilateral action, it is that of Iraq. Multilateralism in this case clearly means the UN. Even NATO lacks sufficient multilateral public legitimacy to garner support for intervention in the country, given the circumstances surrounding the US intervention and the opposition to the unilateral policy of the Bush administration expressed by a large majority of the European public. The polls clearly show the level of that opposition – 68 per cent of European citizens felt that the intervention was not justified and in only one country (Denmark) among the then 15 EU members was there a majority in favour of intervention.[6] This does not reflect systematic European opposition to war or militant pacifism: it will be recalled that 55 per cent of Europeans favoured EU intervention in for-

4. Iraq Body Count (http://www.iraqboycount.net), 4 April 2005.

5. Bassem Mroue, 'AP: Thousands of Iraqis Estimated Killed', Associated Press, 8 September 2004.

6. 'Iraq and peace in the World', *Eurobarometer* 151, October 2003.

mer Yugoslavia during the conflict in the Balkans.[7] On 15 February 2003, millions of Europeans demonstrated in major cities in Europe, particularly in the countries that supported the intervention, including London, Rome, Madrid and Barcelona. These simultaneous demonstrations – considered the largest since the Second World War – led philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas to state that the demonstrations 'may well retrospectively enter the history books as a sign of the birth of a European public arena'.[8] Europeans signalled that they wanted a Union able to shape the international order, but in a way that is faithful to its founding values, one that delegitimates power politics and war as a normal instrument of politics in relations between states, not just among the member states of the Union but elsewhere. As the two philosophers say, the Union is not just the fruit of the conscience of the tragedy of two world wars that started in Europe, but also of the experience of loss of Empire and self-criticism regarding the colonial past. Thus, Europeans consider the use of force to be a last resort and prefer international law and multilateral action. In the case of Iraq, and as the polls demonstrate, only multilateral action will be seen as legitimate: when asked who they trusted to rebuild Iraq, 58 per cent of Europeans said they trusted the UN,[9] and only 18 per cent the United States. In the United Kingdom, the numbers are 72 and 20 per cent respectively.[10] All this leads one to conclude that EU action in Iraq must be clearly situated within a UN framework. This also means that there has to be a serious debate about the effectiveness of the United Nations, and of the conditions that will make it possible to establish an efficacious multilateral system. This is particularly crucial when one considers the whole controversy surrounding previous UN interventions in Iraq, namely the management of the sanctions policy.

V. *Supporting parties and civil society structures, and adopting a clear position on political Islam.* Political movements are central to any political transition, and Iraq is no exception. The Union should play an important role in consolidating political forces and civil society organisations, using Commission programmes or private and public institutions of EU member states to that end. For it to do so effectively, it cannot relate only to movements that are similar to those that exist in Europe. The Union must accept that in Iraq, as in the majority of the countries on the southern

7. *Eurobarometer* 39, June 1993.

8. Derrida Jacques and Habermas Jurgen, 'Europe : plaidoyer pour une politique extérieure commune', *Libération*, 31 May 2003.

9. 'Iraq and peace in the World', *Eurobarometer* 151, October 2003.

10. Ibid.

shore of the Mediterranean or in the Gulf, Islamism – be it in the form of political movements or civil organisations – is an unavoidable force, and that there can be no successful transitions that do not integrate non-violent Islamic forces. Such forces should be Union partners and interlocutors just like other political forces that have popular support.

VI. *Helping the United States to withdraw in an orderly fashion*. As emphasised by various analysts and civic figures in the Middle East, including the few that supported the US intervention, it is essential that the United States announce a date for its departure, which might contribute to resolution of the crisis in Iraq. The timetable to be established, however, must take into consideration the need to guarantee security in Iraq. This is what has been referred to as an exit strategy or, to use the term preferred by Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the noted Egyptian human rights activist, an 'exit without panic'. The future stability of Iraq would not be well served by the maintenance of US bases in the country. These would be a cause of nationalist polarisation and would encourage the mobilisation of radical groups. The decision taken by the United States to leave Saudi Arabia in light of the fact that its military presence would be a strong focus of tension and radicalisation should serve as an example for policy in Iraq. Helping US forces to leave means that Europeans must – if necessary – contribute to the formation of the Iraqi Army, and that they must be ready to participate in a UN peace mission in the country, once all the forces that participated in the war have gone home.

VII. *Involving Turkey in Iraq related CFSP decision-making*. Turkey has a key interest in Iraq's stability and is deeply knowledgeable about the region. Turkey's role in Iraq cannot be seen from the perspective of its past interventions in Kurdistan. Today, Turkey shows much greater respect for the rights of minorities and is more at ease with the Kurdish question, it is a country where democracy is being consolidated and it is also a candidate for EU membership. Further, it should be noted that Turkey opposed the military intervention in Iraq, refusing to allow US ground forces access to Iraq via Turkey, and Turkish public opinion was very similar to that in other European countries. Even before it becomes a member, Turkey should be involved in CFSP where Iraqi and Mediterranean issues are concerned. Portugal and

Spain were involved in European political cooperation with Latin America and participated in the San José Group before their accession to the Community, given their ties with the region, an initiative that contributed decisively to the creation of a peaceful alternative to the conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador in Central America.

VIII. *Establishing appropriate links with the Palestinian and Gulf issues.* Iran and the Palestinian question have an impact on the resolution of the Iraqi crisis, albeit in different ways. According to most analysts in the region, Iran is the regional actor that can have the most weight in the evolution of the situation in Iraq. As regards the Palestinian question, the military intervention in Iraq aggravated the sense among significant sectors of the population in the Middle East that external actors apply double standards, and that the Palestinians have been left to fend for themselves. Arab governments will not find popular backing for participation in resolving the Iraqi crisis if there is no parallel effort to establish a Palestinian state. It was an awareness of this fact that led President George Bush Snr and James Baker to push forward the Middle East peace process in the wake of the 1990-91 Gulf War. The issue is not one of making the fate of the Iraqis depend on that of the Palestinians, or vice versa, but rather of recognising that there is a political link between the two problems, and that if that linkage is not made then any efforts by external actors in Iraq will lose credibility and support within the Arab countries. Iran is a separate issue, and the European Union is well placed to reach an understanding with the authorities in Teheran, which can lead the country to play a positive role in transition in Iraq, the success of which is certainly in its interest as well. During his visit to Europe, President George W. Bush repeatedly acknowledged the importance of the Palestinian question; more specifically, he referred to the need for Israel to 'freeze settlement activity, help Palestinians build a thriving economy, and ensure that a new Palestinian state is truly viable, with contiguous territory on the West Bank. A state of scattered territories will not work'.[11] Bush's declaration implies acceptance of a viable Palestinian state on the terms that the EU has long urged the parties to commit to. To date, though, there are no signs that the United States is implementing any such policy.

11. George W. Bush, speech in Brussels, 21 February 2005.