

THE ROAD HOME

Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky

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Efforts are under way to patch up America's alliances in the wake of discord over the Iraq War. Even though hardly any of the allies have been willing to offer meaningful assistance in Iraq, commentators warmly approve the renewed civility and express hope that the alliances will regain their pre-war strength. But if the efforts to resuscitate the alliances succeed, then the United States will have missed a great opportunity to reconsider fundamental aspects of its foreign policy.

The war highlighted the extent to which America's current alliances are unhelpful and anachronistic. The alliances in Europe, Asia, and the Persian Gulf were originally created as instruments of sound security policy, but frankly, their problems have been evident for years. They survived because, like many government undertakings, they found political constituencies to support them. Diplomats and military professionals develop habits and follow standard operating procedures. Their tendency when confronted by new threats is to look

for ways to respond using existing partnerships. Real adjustment takes an extra push; without a dramatic event to provoke action, inertia prevails.

If American leaders seize the moment, the Iraq War could serve as such a dramatic event. Memories of pre-war wrangling and post-war sniping are fresh in the minds of policymakers. This is the time to re-consider what benefits America's alliances bring to the United States. Ironically, the rift that has opened between the United States and several allies, usually portrayed as one of the Iraq war's greatest costs, is actually a blessing.

DIVORCING SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia and the United States have always been an odd couple. The former is a hereditary monarchy governed according to strict Muslim law and an alleged sponsor of anti-Western terrorism. The United States is a liberal democracy with a fondness for exporting values that is currently waging a deadly serious global war against Muslim terrorists. Saudi society grants full rights to very few, with especially tight restrictions on women, while American society strives for openness and equality. It is hard to conceive of two less likely allies. Not surprisingly, the U.S.-Saudi relationship is a marriage based not on love but on convenience – the core being a shared fear that Saddam's Iraq would invade Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and capture their substantial oil reserves.

The Iraq War created important opportunities for the United States vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. The Bush Administration has already seized the chance to withdraw American military forces from the Saudi desert. Two days before President Bush declared that major combat was over in Iraq, the United States quietly announced that American forces were leaving Saudi Arabia. By the end of August they were out. But the United States could go a step further. The Saudis are now in a much better position to take tough measures against terrorists and those who support them within their Kingdom. And the elimination of the Iraqi threat allows the United States to dramatically increase the pressure it places on the House of Saud to crack down. The double standard can now end. The United States can send the Saudis the same message that was passed to Iran, Sudan, and others who used to allow al-Qaeda to recruit and plan: continue at your peril.

For more than a decade, the United States maintained military forces in Saudi Arabia to deter and contain Iraq. The 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait surprised and terrified Saudi leaders. They knew that their military was as powerless to stop an Iraqi invasion as the Kuwaitis had been, so they asked the Americans to protect them from Saddam. Operation Desert Storm chased Iraq out of Kuwait, but it left an angry Saddam Hussein to stew in Baghdad and plot his revenge. The Saudis understood that they were still in danger, so they took the

momentous step of inviting the U.S. military to establish an indefinite presence in the Kingdom to contain Iraq. Soon several thousand American airmen, technicians, and defense contractors were living in the Islamic Kingdom.

From the American perspective, containing Saddam—i.e., preventing him from seizing Kuwait and Saudi oil reserves—was an eminently reasonable strategic choice. Saudi Arabia's role in the global oil market makes events there profoundly important to the United States. If a single country were to seize control over all the Persian Gulf's oil reserves, that country could manipulate the short-run price of oil and threaten to disrupt the global economy. If Saddam had grabbed Kuwaiti and Saudi fields, he would have amassed a dangerous amount of market power. He could then threaten to create oil shocks whose costs would fall disproportionately on the oil-hungry United States. Even though the U.S. gets most of its imported oil from the Western hemisphere, worldwide oil sells for one price. With control of Kuwaiti and Saudi oil, Saddam would have gained leverage even against a superpower. The United States could not risk allowing Saddam to consolidate control over the lion's share of Persian Gulf reserves.

But containing Saddam had great costs. The indefinite deployment of U.S. troops in the Saudi Kingdom enraged extremist Muslims, who wanted to drive the "Crusader forces" away from Mecca and Medina. The continued American military presence in Saudi Arabia was the primary reason that al-Qaeda declared

war on the United States. Bin Ladin's 1996 "Declaration of War" proclaimed that al-Qaeda would fight against "the Americans occupying the land of the two holy places" and vowed to "to expel the infidels from the Arab Peninsula." The culmination of al-Qaeda's violence was the September 11th attacks that killed thousands of Americans.

The containment policy had other major costs: the sanctions on Iraq, a key part of containment, fueled Muslim anger around the world and fed the recruitment pool for al-Qaeda. Saddam manipulated the sanctions, especially after the initiation of the "oil for food program," to distribute pharmaceuticals and food to his supporters and to deny them to regime opponents. Soon he was claiming that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children were dying due to sanctions – maintained, he argued, at the insistence of the United States. Al-Qaeda picked up this "blood lie" and spread it through the Islamic world, inflaming hatred against America. Muslims and others came to believe that the U.S. government was intentionally killing Muslim children or at least was casually indifferent to their fate. Thousands of Muslims contributed to charities that turned out to support terrorism, and others, many educated in fundamentalist religious schools poisoned with anti-American rhetoric, joined groups linked to al-Qaeda.

Finally, the containment policy had a third negative effect. The presence in the Saudi Kingdom of American troops—the same infidels who were supposedly

killing Iraqi children—weakened the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy at home, thereby strengthening the hand of organized fundamentalists and terrorists. The American soldiers that indirectly helped guard Islam's holy shrines were dubbed "conquering Crusaders" by fundamentalist clerics and al-Qaeda leaders, and the American presence helped rally religious-backed opposition to the House of Saud. To deflect criticism, the Saudi government made deals with the extremists, paying them large sums of money and allowing them to control state-supported religious schools. Even relatively pro-Western members of the Saudi royal family valued domestic stability more than anything else, so they were willing to acquiesce to the clerics' demands.

Now that Iraq has been conquered, the United States can redefine its relationship with Saudi Arabia. The Bush Administration already took one major step in the right direction by removing American troops from Saudi Arabia. Except for attachés and a small number of trainers for the Saudi armed forces, they are all gone. The Iraq War thus allowed the United States to undercut al-Qaeda's recruitment by eliminating two of its most powerful symbols: Christian soldiers protecting the holy mosques and Muslim children being killed by American bombs and sanctions.

The U.S. decision to withdraw from Saudi Arabia was not a sign that the Bush Administration would bargain with al-Qaeda. On the contrary, the United States

is still committed to tracking the terrorist network's members and killing or capturing them. But by withdrawing from Saudi Arabia, the United States eliminated an issue that had radicalized and mobilized thousands of Muslims for jihad against America.

The war with Iraq also finally allows the United States to turn the screws on the Saudi leaders if they do not crack down on anti-American terrorist groups. In the 1990s, the United States was so fixated on containing Saddam that the Saudis could ignore American complaints about links among the Saudi Princes, hard-line clerics preaching hatred of the West, and terrorists. The Saudis even hindered the American investigation of the Khobar Towers bombing — presumably out of fear that a thorough investigation of extremist groups in the Kingdom would turn up embarrassing evidence of Saudi links to terrorism. The U.S. simply had no leverage.

Now the tables have turned. The United States does not need Saudi bases to keep the region's oil divided, because there's no Saddam to threaten to seize it all. And the House of Saud no longer has a good excuse for being soft on terrorism: the "Crusaders" are out of the Kingdom. So there is no reason for the United States to make an exception to its general policy in the War on Terror: any country that allows active sponsorship of al-Qaeda operations from its soil

should have to answer to the United States. The United States should hold the Saudi government to the same standards that it applies to everyone else.

UPDATING TRANS-ATLANTIC RELATIONS

The Iraq war created a second key opportunity for the United States: it exposed the growing fault-lines within NATO, revealing the alliance to be the anachronism that it is. Americans and Europeans have reflexively begun to smooth out hard feelings and reiterate the enduring strength of the Alliance. They should instead use the dispute over Iraq policy as an opportunity to address NATO's fundamental contradictions and to reconsider its continued relevance to European and American security. Reevaluating a venerable institution requires overcoming tremendous political inertia – an impossible task thus far. But the Iraq War may provide the political energy to do so. A new Western security arrangement would create a stronger foundation for friendly Trans-Atlantic ties.

The NATO framework once made sense. During the Cold War it was a vital national interest—for both the West Europeans and the Americans—to keep non-Communist Europe out of Soviet clutches. The Western Europeans were initially too weak to counter Soviet power alone, so the United States deployed troops to the Continent to keep the Soviets at bay.

Over time, tensions arose among the NATO Allies. Europeans began to view American-style Containment as brash and militant. And they feared that American aggressiveness and miscalculation would trigger war, a war that would be fought across Europe. But at the same time, they had learned to enjoy their “cheap ride” on the U.S. security effort. They complained publicly over issues like escalation in Vietnam, promises to build ballistic missile defenses, talk of an evil empire, and deployment of Pershing missiles, but in the end there were only shrugs and acquiescence. To break with the Americans would have required a major increase in European defense spending, and European politicians were never willing to take that step.

The United States grew frustrated with NATO, too. The Europeans never carried much of the Alliance’s military burden, preferring to use their taxes for domestic subsidies and social welfare programs. Americans thought of the Europeans as overly legalistic, with strong inclinations toward pacifism and appeasement. But through it all, the United States was willing to bear the heavy defense burden because the potential costs of the loss of Europe were too terrible to risk.

Furthermore, the American military happily used the Europeans' lackadaisical effort to justify America's forward deployment and large defense budgets. So the alliance held firm.

Today, though, the NATO alliance makes no sense for the United States. The argument that Europe needs America's security help, already somewhat dubious by the end of the Cold War, is now absurd. Europe has never been so free or so secure. Of course Europe still faces threats – for example, from instability and ethnic hatreds on Europe's periphery – but 450 million Europeans, with a combined economy about as large as America's, can clearly handle those threats without trans-Atlantic assistance. Europe's poor performance in the former Yugoslavia prior to American intervention showed Europe's lack of *will*, not an inherent lack of capability, had they chosen to spend real resources on defense.

NATO is actually worse than unnecessary; it breeds trans-Atlantic resentment.

The Alliance creates unrealistic expectations on both sides of the ocean, as displayed by the ugly dispute over Iraq policy. The Americans expect the Europeans to be "loyal allies" and support U.S. policies, because America defends them. Europeans demand a say in important U.S. foreign policy choices because, after all, they're America's partners. *Neither* is a fair expectation.

Americans should not expect Europe to march in step unless the Europeans get a vote on America's national security policy; and Europeans should not expect a say in America's decisions unless they are willing to share equally the costs and risks. American and British, not French and German, troops would have died if Saddam had attacked Kuwait a second time. The Continentals, in essence, want representation without taxation.

The resentment caused by NATO's inequalities is not only unpleasant, but it also threatens to undercut the real benefits of America's good relationship with Europe. Economic cooperation between the U.S. and Europe does not depend on the existence of NATO. But trans-Atlantic acrimony has tainted WTO negotiations, triggered consumer boycotts on both sides of the Atlantic, and raised the volume of threats to use sanctions to settle economic disputes. Escalating tensions may create more long-lasting economic rifts. A more civilized diplomacy born of a rebalanced security relationship would allow flourishing commerce to benefit consumers and producers alike.

The Iraq war can help American and European leaders realize that the current relationship is unhealthy. It may be the political impetus needed to get the U.S. and Europe to phase out the Cold War relationship. America's previous post-Cold War reviews of its national security strategy – like the "Bottom-Up Review," the two Quadrennial Defense Reviews, and the reports of special panels like the National Defense Panel and the Hart-Rudman Commission – have been squandered: they have been used to justify existing capabilities and spending patterns. Purely internal discussions are just so much paperwork. But dispute over policies in a real war – a time when decisions about the military and alliance partnerships have clear and present costs – can have greater consequences, if political leaders so choose.

The Europeans may appear to be taking the initiative in changing the relationship; there is much discussion in Europe about gaining security independence from the United States. But so far this is only talk. Only France has increased its defense budget; the other European nations have not followed suit, and several have actually cut their military spending. The number of multinational military projects has expanded, but these endeavors are mostly designed to preserve European defense industry jobs, not to build substantial independent military capability. Even so, European governments always have trouble coming up with the money that they have promised each other to spend. The projects that they do fund are hardly prioritized in keeping with a plausible European grand strategy. And relatively low-cost plans for new command structure, integrated defense policies, and interoperable forces have bogged down in the typical endless cycle of European summits and working groups, whose products are generally ignored. Few Europeans seem ready to trade café life for barracks life, and their governments know this and act accordingly.

But change may still come from the American side: it is now clear that America no longer needs the old NATO alliance. What the United States does need is a smoother economic and diplomatic relationship not colored by resentment and unrealistic expectations. During the Cold War, the security threat provided the glue to hold the alliance together in the face of internal tension and

disagreement. Today, that threat is gone, so both sides can afford to let the alliance go.

Defenders of the old trans-Atlantic relationship confuse *ends* and *means*.

Preserving NATO is not a vital interest for either the Americans or the Europeans.

NATO is an instrument that in the past served a goal that *was* vital: defending a major center of geopolitical power from hostile influence. It had the important additional benefit of maintaining friendly, cooperative ties, but unfortunately the instrument is now getting in the way of good relations. Rather than preserve an anachronistic alliance, the members should restructure their relationship to preserve what is truly critical, friendship between Europe and America.

The comedian Jerry Seinfeld once observed that ending a relationship is like tipping over a Coke machine: it cannot be toppled with one shove but must be rocked back and forth before it will fall. By exposing the contradictions and resentments in NATO, the Iraq War may be a blessing in disguise. In the long run, a new relationship with more realistic expectations on both sides of the Atlantic would be far better for trans-Atlantic relations.

ENDING HALF-MEASURES IN ASIA

The pre-war diplomacy between the U.S. and its Asian allies appeared polite and cooperative compared to the trans-Atlantic rancor, but it was still revealing and disappointing. When America asked for assistance, many Asian allies agreed, but they proved to have remarkably little military capability to offer. Small contingents from Australia and the Philippines served in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and small Thai and Korean forces have contributed to post-war stabilization efforts. The American ally in Asia with substantial military power, Japan, offered only symbolic support.

For more than a decade, American strategic planners have known that their Asian allies do not actually *need* the assistance that the United States generously provides. But the revelation that the allies are too weak or too unwilling to help America — along with the rising demands on America's own force structure of the occupation of Iraq — may overcome the inertia that has sustained America's Cold War alliances in Asia.

The Japanese humanitarian intervention in Iraq is a microcosm of the U.S.-Japan alliance, and it provides an example of the sort of problems for the United States built into the broader Asian security environment. After great hand wringing, the

Japanese government finally agreed to send a few hundred lightly armed peacekeepers to help stabilize a relatively quiet sector of Southern Iraq. The Japanese troops are permitted to use force to defend themselves and Iraqi non-combatants, but they are not permitted to assist allied soldiers under fire. The Japanese peacekeepers are actually a military liability: if they are attacked, they expect the nearby British contingent to show up with real firepower to rescue them; but if nearby international forces are attacked, the Japanese will sit on their hands, and they are not really prepared for a tough fight anyway.

The United States has the opportunity to withdraw its troops from Asia to force its allies to take responsibility for their own defense needs. The allies have the latent power resources to do what they need to do; all that they lack is the will. Currently 32,000 American soldiers are deployed on the Korean Peninsula to defend the South Koreans from a country with about one-thirtieth of their economy and less than half their population. The South Koreans may need to remain under the U.S. nuclear umbrella to neutralize North Korean nuclear threats, but the notion that U.S. soldiers and airmen are needed to defend the South strains credulity. Similarly, American forces still defend Japan – nearly 40,000 US troops are stationed there — even though Japan has the biggest economy in East Asia and the most powerful defense force in the region.

Military threats in Asia have been exaggerated for decades to justify a large post-Cold War American military. The North Korean Army—which envies the equipment and training of the Iraqi Republican Guard—has been described in absurdly flattering terms. And *trends* in Chinese power, which suggest that China will enter the great power ranks in a couple of decades, have been conflated with *current* reality, so politicians, pundits, and the public are led to believe that China is far more powerful today than it actually is.

In the aftermath of the Iraq War, the truth about that exaggeration is starting to come out. As soon as the United States realized that it needed the Marines regularly stationed in Okinawa for a rotation in Iraq, the dubious argument that they were critical for South Korea's defense was quickly forgotten. They are going to the Sunni Triangle. Closer to the front, the United States announced last fall that American forces in Korea could stand back from the demilitarized zone; now, there are hints that major elements of the Second Infantry Division, the bulwark of the U.S. ground force in South Korea, are also in line for deployment to Iraq.

But pulling American forces out of Asia, particularly away from Korea, is only a half step toward a rational Asian alliance system, because the United States still has a legally binding defense commitment to rush to South Korea's aid in case of war. South Korea wouldn't really need our help, but we would still be obligated

to go. And that treaty commitment and regular public declarations about its continued relevance threaten to stunt South Korea's political maturation. The United States needs to proclaim loud and clear that South Korea can and should do more for its own defense. The best way America's Asian allies can contribute to American national security is not through symbolic deployments to the Middle East; it is through responsible actions to take care of their own defense.

DISCOVERING THE LIMITS OF EMPIRE

The final opportunity the Iraq war offers is even more sweeping than the others. The continuing difficulties of Iraqi reconstruction presents the United States with a chance to re-learn important lessons about the limits of American power and the difficulties of nation building without suffering a serious military disaster. These lessons should have been learned in Vietnam. The exuberance that America felt in the early 1960s to "bear any burden" and slay Communist dragons everywhere was only slaked after an awful war that demoralized the American military, divided American society, and claimed more than 50,000 American lives. But America's near costless victories over Iraq in 1991, Serbia in 1999, and the Taliban in 2001 rekindled this exuberance and triggered heady talk about American power and destiny. If there is a silver lining to the current difficulties in Iraq, it is that ill-considered notions of Empire will now likely be abandoned.

In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the US discovered that removing an offending regime is easier than replacing it. Although many Afghans and Iraqis welcomed the destruction of their despotic governments, agreements on constitutions and new governments have been difficult to obtain. Worse, continuing insurgency has required the U.S. to station large combat units in both countries and has delayed vital relief and reconstruction efforts. Costs and frustrations for America have been high.

Most notably, the U.S. is finding it difficult to rotate its forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. American troops have come to expect time limits on hardship or dangerous deployments. But the mission in Iraq has forced the U.S. to draw heavily on its military reserves, including active duty forces designated for strategic and regional contingencies as well as National Guard units. Already, the dependence on these reserves is causing domestic political problems – and much more political controversy is likely to erupt when entire Guard brigades are sent to Iraq, a step planned for the spring.

The official denials are thick, but evidence of serious strain on the U.S. military is mounting. Higher reenlistment bonuses are being offered, and unusual “stop loss” orders are being enforced to prevent the retirement or departure of service personnel with crucial skills. American reservists in Iraq have been

photographed displaying the slogan, "One Weekend a Month My Ass," expressing a common if crudely stated complaint of Guardsmen called from their civilian jobs to active duty. Long overseas tours and family separations take a toll. Few American will volunteer to patrol hostile, far-off lands, and even fewer will join the reserves if that kind of duty is likely.

The substitution of newly trained Afghan and Iraqi police and soldiers for the American presence is not likely to relieve much of the burden. To be sure, the early handover of the security mission is a crucial step toward achieving local self-government, and it is both wise and popular. But no matter how quickly the occupying American troops are replaced by indigenous forces, the ultimate responsibility for Afghan and Iraqi stability will remain American for a long time to come. Having destroyed the previous regime and shaped the successor in these countries, the U.S. is the *de facto* guarantor of Afghan and Iraqi domestic and international security. Thus a substantial American overseas presence backed up by suitable reserves at home will be required for years to come. There are no quick release interventions. And the bigger and more politically important the intervention, the more permanent the strain on American resources.

America's military manpower problem alone seems likely to quell the once easy talk about preemptive strikes against North Korea, Iran, and Syria. The strange

idea expressed by some that America should bring democracy to the Middle East, by the sword if necessary, has faded. It seems the ambition to manage a global empire to fulfill altruistic or patriotic dreams has succumbed to the very real and very difficult problems of pacification and nation building. Instead of global empire, there is only a war against militant Islamic extremists that is being fought globally.

TAKING THE ROAD HOME

Americans can choose to ignore these lessons. The hurt feelings on both sides of the Atlantic can be patched up, and NATO can plod ahead unchanged. The United States could decide to protect South Korea indefinitely, no matter how weak the North Koreans become. The United States could continue to enable Japanese free riding, forever treating them like unreliable partners who are best given no real global responsibilities. The United States could remain cozy with Saudi leaders, even as they violate our values and support our enemies. And finally the United States public could embrace the possibilities of Empire and ever-greater military activism abroad. But the Iraq war offers opportunities to correct errors in all these areas and to change the course of U.S. foreign policy.

The road to a better foreign policy is the road home. America's Cold War allies have become tiresome dependants, resentful of their inferior status, but

unwilling to share much of America's dangers or to provide for their own security. The less the United States does for them, the more they will have to do for themselves. The multilateralism they seek is illusionary without the military capabilities to be independent and the willingness to use such capabilities. As long as The United States offers free security to the nations that can provide for themselves it will gain little help when it itself needs some.

The price of Iraqi containment was the rise of al Qaeda. The struggle to destroy Bin Laden's terror organization is not over. America will need to remain vigilant for decades to ensure that al-Qaeda does not reemerge in Afghanistan or take root in the chaos of post-War Iraq. That responsibility, we *cannot* shed. We can, however, shed draining alliances and needless commitments. Watching Afghanistan, Iraq and wherever al Qaeda hopes to hide is the task at hand for the United States. The resources for that task can be found in our garrisons in Europe and Asia, kept there too long after the Cold War.