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Power, Principles and Procedures

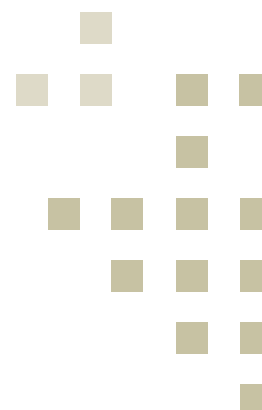
Reinterpreting French foreign policy towards
the USA (2001–2003)

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Reinterpreting French foreign policy towards
the USA (2001–2003)

Pernille Rieker

[Abstract] French foreign policy towards the US is often understood as particularly confrontational and based on traditional power politics, or a wish to re-establish “la grandeur de la France”. This article aims at investigating the validity of this widely held view. It further seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the French positions by studying the arguments used by the French political leadership and the implications of the Iraq conflict for bilateral cooperation at lower levels. This study questions the common assumption of IR theory that national identities and/or interests are fixed and independent of structural factors such as international norms and values. It also questions the value of focusing exclusively on diplomatic or “top-level” bilateral relations, without looking at “low-level” or practical bilateral cooperation and/or conflicts.

Introduction

French policy towards the USA has always been particularly confrontational – or so it is commonly argued. This is often explained as the result of a wish to ‘balance’ the USA, and thus as being based on traditional power politics. French policy is also viewed as being linked to an “inherent characteristic” of national identity, characterised by ambitions of re-establishing the country as a great power in world politics. It is in this light that French policy towards the USA up until the Iraq war has been largely interpreted. Since that time, it is often maintained that the conflict over Iraq was more serious than any previous French–US disagreements (Hoffmann 2003; Tardy 2003).¹

This article aims to investigate the validity of these widely held views. It further seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the French positions by studying the arguments used by the French political leadership and the implications of the Iraq conflict for bilateral cooperation at lower levels. This study questions the common assumption of IR theory that national identities and/or interests are fixed and independent of structural factors such as international norms and values. It also questions the value of focusing exclusively on diplomatic or “top-level” bilateral relations, without looking at “low-level” or practical bilateral cooperation and/or conflicts.

Alternative ways of understanding French foreign policy

What is meant by “foreign policy”? According to Carlsnaes (2002) it may be defined as “those actions which, expressed in the form of explicitly stated goals, commitments and/or directives, and pursued by governmental representatives acting on behalf of their sovereign communities, are directed toward objectives, conditions or actors – both governmental and non-governmental – which they want to affect and which lie beyond their territorial legitimacy” (Carlsnaes 2002: 335).

Traditional foreign policy analyses focus on the state as a unitary actor with given interests, which are understood mostly in material terms. However, this approach basically ignores the importance of norms, values or

This article is part of a post doctoral project aiming at analysing different aspects of French foreign and security policy. The analysis is based on data collected during a three weeks stay in Paris/IFRI in June 2004. It is based on information gathered from interviews with a number of French officials, news paper articles, speeches, official documents, in addition to existing literature on French foreign policy. I would like to thank Frédéric Bozo at IFRI for making it possible for me to stay at IFRI. I would also like to thank Guillaume Parmentier, Dominique David and Jolyon Howorth for sharing their ideas and views on this topic. I would also like to thank Jef Huysmans, Walter Carlsnaes, Martin Sæter, Andreas Selliaas, Kari Osland, Nina Gæger, Christian Marius Stryken and Kristin Marie Haugevik for commenting on earlier drafts. Finally, I would like to thank Guillaume Desmorat who has done a great job as a research assistant on this project.

¹ France and the US have had several rows over the past 50 years. The most serious were the Suez crisis (1956) and the French withdrawal from NATO (1966), and more recently the quarrel in NATO over AFSOUTH (1995-1997), and finally the Iraq crisis (2002-2003).

other social factors such as culture and national identity. Since the early 1990s, a reaction to this “rationalist” dominance has gradually evolved, resulting in a large literature more focused on the importance of norms and social factors. But these constructivist analyses have, in turn, tended to ignore material factors in order to compensate for the earlier over-emphasis on such factors. Social Constructivism has been identified as a middle ground between these two extremes (Adler 2002); however, few empirical studies actually manage to live up to the ambition of including both material and societal factors.² Walter Carlsnaes also argues in favour of a more comprehensive approach, stressing that “explanations of actual foreign policy actions must be able to give accounts that do not by definition exclude or privilege any of these types of explanatory or interpretative factors” (Carlsnaes 2002: 335, 342).

Although there exist constructivist analyses of French foreign policy, their conclusions do not differ much from those of more traditional (rationalist) studies. While the constructivist or the rationalist studies are based on various different explanatory or interpretative factors (power politics, institutional centralisation or identity) they all seem to conclude that France has had one major foreign policy goal since the end of the Second World War: to re-establish its position in world politics – often referred to as “la gloire et la grandeur de la France”. This is then seen as the main explanation for the actions of French leaders on the international scene.

Analyses based on a *realist approach* generally argue that French foreign policy in general, and in relation to the Iraq conflict in particular, is a result of traditional power politics (Hoffmann 1965; Kramer 1994; Hoffmann 2000b; Lansford 2002). France is seen as defending multilateralism and international law either because of its “weakness” (compared with the USA), or because this is deemed the only way for France to have an important role in international politics.

An *institutionalist approach* would emphasise the highly centralised political system in France, and point out that the realist approach is a result of the French political system (Blunden 2000). The centralisation of political institutions and the strength of the French president mean that the French foreign policy is defined in almost a permanent symbiosis between the Elysée (the Presidential Palace) and the Quai d’Orsay (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Thus, it is not correct to see the Presidency, the Prime Minister’s Office, the Quai d’Orsay, the Minister of Defence and the Ministry of Finance as separate entities, engaging in regular but informal contacts. In practice, the leaders of these institutions are in uninterrupted contact, continuously informed of the same events, often before these are made public. Thus, the members of this group acquire a distinctive common culture;³ and this, according to Margaret Blunden, goes far in explaining the

² Social constructivists claim that their theory is built on a middle ground both in relation to ontology (both social and material factors), epistemology (between explaining and interpretation) and theory of action (the mutual constitution of structures and agents).

³ This habit of strong collaboration, which is due to what one may refer to as the “ENA-phenomenon” – the fact that most of the political, administrative and economical elite has been formed at Ecole National d’Administration (ENA) – foster a shared view of the world, which spans political parties, and makes possible a consistency across governments and presidencies, extending to leaders of the major French companies.

exceptional and much-noted continuity of French foreign policy (Blunden 2000: 28-29).

And thirdly, a *constructivist approach*, as indicated above, would focus particularly on the importance of cultural factors and discourse. Even though this approach includes non-material factors like identity and culture, the conclusions are quite similar to those of traditional realist approaches. In practice, they interpret the importance of power politics in the French foreign policy discourse as an expression of French identity (Larsen 1997; Holm 2000; Holm 2002; Gaffney 2004). Larsen, for instance, argues, “it can be said that the French discourse on the nature of international relations possessed many features of the realist school of thought. Norms and values, although present in the language, do not seem to be integrated in the main argument” (Larsen 1997: 126).

While all three approaches provide important contributions for understanding French foreign policy, none of them incorporates the possibility of change. Nor do they account for the possibility that international norms or structures may influence French national interests, identity and thereby also policy. Such a perspective may be useful for a more comprehensive foreign policy analysis. It is based on the ideas presented for instance by Jepperson and colleagues (Jepperson et al. 1996).

French foreign policy towards the USA, 2001–2003

Shortly after the events of 11 September 2001 there was widespread sympathy with the USA in France. As indicated by the headline in *Le Monde*, “Nous sommes tous Américains” (*Le Monde*, 13 September 2001), the French reaction to the terrorist attacks was one of unquestioning solidarity – both in public opinion and at the political level (Tardy 2003: 115). Having the Presidency in the UN Security Council at the time, France also drafted Resolution 1368 of 12 September, as well as participating in Operation Enduring Freedom against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan from the outset. However, US and French analyses of the meaning of 11 September began drifting farther and farther apart after President Bush’s State of the Union address in January 2002, where he launched his “axis of evil” metaphor. The split weakened when Washington’s intention of changing the regime in Iraq became obvious. France’s firm solidarity with the USA immediately after the events of “9/11” thus stands in clear contrast to the conflict that later developed between the two countries.

From solidarity to reluctance

While official French policy was supportive of the US military campaign against Afghanistan and the Taliban regime, there was greater scepticism to the Bush administration’s insistence on launching a *war* on terrorism (*Le Monde*, 15 September 2001). At this point, some minor differences between

the French President and the Prime Minister became evident. President Jacques Chirac argued, in an interview with CNN on 13 September, that he was not willing to call this a “war on terrorism”, but then went on to say that France totally supported the USA and would certainly assist the US administration. By contrast, the French Prime Minister at the time, Lionel Jospin, was more cautious. Without expressing less solidarity with the USA, he took care to emphasise the importance of French sovereignty and independent decision-making (*Le Figaro*, 20 September 2001). Personal relations between President George W. Bush and Chirac also seemed better than ever before. This was rather surprising, since Jacques Chirac, shortly after Bush was elected, had argued that “he had never known an American administration more reactionary than this one”, and had also openly criticised the USA on many occasions (*France-Amerique*, 29 September–5 October 2001).

In the end, the French leadership supported UN Resolution 1368, which allowed the USA together with Britain to launch a military campaign, Operation Enduring Freedom, against Afghanistan. This operation, which started on 7 October 2001, was seen as justified because of what was perceived as the obvious linkage between the Taliban regime and the attacks of 11 September.

In French public opinion, however, support diminished quickly. Whereas about 70% of the French supported the military campaign from the USA ten days after 11 September, 66% supported a military campaign against Afghanistan in the middle of October, and by the beginning of November, support was down to 51% (*L'Evenement*, 3–4 November 2001). Official French criticism of Washington’s approach started as a reaction to Bush’s State of the Union address, given on 29 January 2002. Negative reactions were provoked by his continued emphasis on the “war” on terrorism, the need for “pre-emptive action” and his “axis of evil” metaphor, with reference to countries like Iran, Iraq and North Korea. The French foreign minister at the time, Hubert Védrine, was perhaps the most explicit, in terming the US approach “simplistic” and “not well thought out” in an interview with the radio channel France Inter: “today we are threatened by a new simplistic approach that reduces all the problems in the world to the struggle against terrorism” (reported in *International Herald Tribune*, 7 February 2002).

For most of that winter and spring, the French leaders were preoccupied with the presidential elections in April and May, which brought about the re-election of Chirac but otherwise a change of government. During the summer, however, when the Bush administration argued even more strongly for a regime change in Iraq, the French leaders began to voice their views. In August, when the new French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, chaired an annual conference for ambassadors in Paris, he firmly stated, “no military action could be undertaken without a decision taken by the UN Security Council” (de Villepin 2002).

In a September 2002 interview with the *New York Times*, Chirac spelled out the French position. It was, he explained, based on four key principles: the importance of multilateralism; prevention rather than pre-emption; emphasis on the link between Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and

also the link between poverty and terrorism. Chirac argued that preventive action could be undertaken only if truly necessary and only if decided by the international community, as represented by the UN Security Council (UNSC). He went on to say that France opposed any policy towards Iraq that would go beyond the strict terms of UNSC Resolutions, and that France did not consider regime change a legitimate objective. He hoped there would be a UNSC Resolution on the return of weapon inspectors to Iraq; and, that if the inspectors were not allowed to return, there would be a second Resolution determining whether or not there were well-founded reasons for an intervention (*New York Times*, 8 September 2002). The French leadership, he explained, opposed the idea that the international community should give the mandate for a change of the Iraqi regime: such a policy could be dangerous, in that it might lead other, less democratic states, to refer to such a principle in pursuing their own national interests. In addition, the French feared that such a policy could lead to a rise in anti-Western sentiments throughout the world. Chirac further made it clear that the Iraq question could not be de-linked from the Israel–Palestine issue. He argued that the US, with its connection to the Israeli authorities, rather should use its influence to stabilise the region. Chirac also emphasised that poverty rather than authoritarian regimes should be in focus when fighting terrorism. In his view, it is poverty that primarily creates a fertile ground for mobilising minorities in favour of terrorism (*New York Times*, 8 September 2002).

While there was widespread agreement in France that such a war would probably lead to more terrorism rather than less, it is important to note that France did not totally reject military intervention against Iraq as long as this could be done under strict control from the Security Council. Thus, the position taken by France may be seen as a middle ground between Germany's pacifism and Britain's band-wagon approach. Some French intellectuals and political personalities were even explicitly in favour of military intervention in Iraq. The best-known representatives of this position were the philosopher André Glucksmann and the socialist politician Bernard Kouchner. Both agreed with the US intervention in Iraq – not because of the expected existence of weapons of mass destruction and the hypothetical links between the regime and al-Qaida, but rather on grounds of humanitarian intervention.⁴

Speaking at the UN on 12 September 2002, Bush confirmed his willingness to work with the world organisation – but he also emphasised that the USA was keeping open the option of acting alone if Saddam Hussein did not cooperate or if the Security Council did not manage to develop a Resolution. Negotiations on Resolution 1441 on Iraq were long and intensive. It took almost eight weeks of high-level diplomatic contacts to reach an agreement. Initially France wanted to include a formulation in the text that emphasised the need for a second Resolution in order to allow the use of force, but this was not acceptable to the US administration. In mid-October a compromise was finally reached. While the French leaders agreed to drop the formulation on the need for a second Resolution, the USA agreed

⁴ See <http://www.tsr.ch/tsr/index.html?siteSect=315201&sid=4308184> for an interview with André Glucksmann, and *Le Nouvel Observateur* 19 to 25 February 2003 for an interview with Bernard Kouchner.

to omit a reference to automatic use of force in case of non-compliance. The USA also accepted that the Security Council should meet to consider the situation in Iraq if necessary. This Resolution, adopted on 8 November 2002, was supported by all five permanent members of the Security Council, as well as by countries as diverse as Mexico, Cameroon, Ireland and Syria. In the main, the Resolution represented the considered and unanimous view of the international community that Iraq must end its defiance of the United Nations and meet its obligations.

The French policy was still based on three major concerns: First, to make sure that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction that could fall into terrorist hands. Second, to give the weapons inspectors a reasonable chance to do their job properly. Third, to ensure that any decision to use force would be taken by the Council and based on the reports of the inspectors (*Le Monde*, 17 February 2003).

Opposition

It is interesting to note that when the USA started to deploy its forces in early January 2003, Jacques Chirac instructed the French military “to be ready for any eventuality” (*Le Figaro*, 8 January 2003). On both sides of the Atlantic this was interpreted as indicating that French was coming around to support the war. However, according to French officials, on this point there was a fundamental misunderstanding between the USA and France. While the French believed that the Americans were serious about letting the inspections proceed to a natural conclusion and that there was thus no hurry, the Americans thought the French would support the need to use force without delay, if the inspections did not succeed.

However, the French position was made clear when the French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, explicitly opposed the US policy at a press conference held in Paris⁵ by saying “that there is nothing today that justifies a military action against Iraq”. In response to a question from a journalist as to whether France would use its veto, he replied, “we are going all the way”. This was the first time France had clearly said no, as Germany already had. Colin Powell, who had cancelled other important engagements⁶ in order to come to Paris, felt betrayed. From that point onwards, the conflict between France and the USA became increasingly polarised (*Le Monde*, 22 January 2003). When Chirac shortly after⁷ argued that France and Germany would have “the same policy towards the Iraq conflict”, this was perceived as the final proof of a true radicalisation of the French position, which until then had not excluded the use of force as a last resort. It was this incident in particular that led Donald Rumsfeld to distinguish between “the old and new

⁵ France, which was holding the Presidency of the Security Council, decided to have a minister meeting on terrorism the 20 January 2003. Due to the disagreement Iraq was not on the agenda of the meeting.

⁶ He decided to come to Paris on Martin Luther King’s day – an important day for most Afro-American politicians.

⁷ At the occasion of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Franco-German Elysée treaty 22 January.

Europe". In his view, France and Germany were making themselves irrelevant: the centre of gravity in Europe was now moving east (*Le Monde*, 25 January 2003).

The problems continued at the NATO meeting in Brussels in February when France, along with Germany and Belgium, refused to support a US proposal that NATO should give formal guarantees to Turkey in the event of an anticipatory Iraqi strike. The refusal was legitimised on the grounds that such a guarantee had to be interpreted as a tactical move to prejudge the Security Council decision on war. France insisted that the UN weapons inspectors should be allowed the necessary time to complete their work. This led the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, along with seven other European leaders, to sign a letter of support for transatlantic relations – later referred to as the “letter of eight”. Chirac responded by denouncing the “Atlanticism” of the Central European signatories and even threatened to block their future membership of the EU.⁸

In an interview with *Time* magazine, Chirac argued that his position had not changed on whether or not to support the use of force; rather, he said, he did not see that Iraq represented an immediate threat. In his view, a war would create more problems than it would be able to solve (*Time*, 16 February 2003). On 5 March, France, together with Russia and Germany, issued a common declaration, where they emphasised that their common objective was the disarming of Iraq according to UNSC Resolution 1441, and that they deemed this possible to achieve by the use of inspectors (*Déclaration sur Iraq*, 5 March 2003). At the same time, Tony Blair convinced the USA to draft a second Resolution. By giving the UN a final chance to “prove its credibility” the US president was seeking to plaster over the cracks in his administration, as well as responding to electoral pressure. However, when France threatened to use its veto against the military campaign, the USA withdrew the proposed Resolution and decided to launch a war by the coalition of the willing. This was on 19 March 2003.

These incidents led to a period of French-bashing in US media⁹ – not only in the tabloid press, but also in more serious fora like the *New York Times*, where columnist Thomas Friedman went so far as to declare France as the real enemy of the USA (*New York Times*, 9 February 2003; 18 September 2003). While there had been a certain francophobia in the USA also in the past, this took a new turn in late 2002 and the first half of 2003. As Justin Vaïsse argues: “while a benign image of France, or at least indifference, has prevailed in the past among the general American populace, a sharply negative image now seems to have found its way into heartland America. If the same old tired clichés are being put to work again, it is their widespread diffusion that constitutes a new factor, coinciding of course with diplomatic tensions about Iraq” (Vaïsse 2003: 10). While traditional anti-Americanism in France was also fuelled by this conflict, it never reached the same level as French-bashing in the USA.

⁸ Press Conference by Jacques Chirac after the informal and extraordinary reunion of the European Council in Brussels, 17/02/2003.

⁹ See for instance the interview with Tony Smith from the French-American Foundation at Fox News (<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0%2c2933%2C80794%2C00.html>.)

A policy of power or a policy of principles?

As noted, most analyses of French foreign policy have focused on the importance of one major foreign policy goal, with France determined to re-establish its historical position as a great power in international politics. This is seen as a result of French national identity and traditions, French state centralism and elitist society, or simply as a result of traditional power politics. While there are important differences between these approaches on the theoretical (and meta-theoretical) level, they all present a rather static view of French foreign policy, focusing on the importance of a certain kind of policy of power and ignoring the possibility of learning and change.

A policy of power

The current French foreign policy discourse is, as we have seen above, dominated by an emphasis on multilateralism and the importance of international law. Still, most students of French foreign policy would argue, along the same lines as Robert Kagan, that Europe (here: France) has deliberately stepped out of the Hobbesian (realist) world and into the Kantian (liberal) world due to its “weakness” in international politics. In other words, multilateralism must be perceived as the power politics of the weak (Kagan 2003). This would mean that in supporting multilateralism, the role of the UN and international law, France is merely seeking to express its role in international politics. In this view, France is still acting purposively on the international scene. But, in the competition with a superpower, it finds no other choice than to opt for multilateralism.

Unlike other European allies, France does not fear that opposing US policy will jeopardise transatlantic relations. For quite a few European states, it was their relationship to the USA that was the major concern, and to a lesser extent the situation in Iraq. Although France remains a strong ally of the USA, it is also ready to contest the domination of the superpower and to assume the costs associated with such a policy (Tardy 2003: 107). But the French leaders also realise that they cannot alone propose an alternative policy, and thus see the EU as the most important instrument in that regard. It has been argued that French foreign policy and European foreign policy are perceived as synonymous in France (Parmentier and Brenner 2002: 19; Holm 2003), and that this explains why France is willing to transfer sovereignty to the EU. Despite disagreements among some European governments, the French leaders have felt and still feel that they are speaking on behalf of the European people. According to public opinion polls, the citizenry was also largely against the war – even in those countries that officially supported the US policy. This can explain why Chirac got so much support among the French people, also among his traditional political opponents. With his stance, he succeeded in making the French people feel proud of their country and its role in the world (Holm 2003: 44).

The argument that the principle of multilateralism was deliberately used in the conflict over Iraq is supported by references to the French support for the war against Serbia in 1999 – a military intervention without UN

mandate. This shows that the principle of international law is not always followed, and strengthens the argument that France, just like the USA, uses the argument of multilateralism only when it is deemed suitable (Holm 2003: 46). The ambition of the former French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, was to make France the voice of a “different world” (Villepin 2003) – an approach that emphasises the importance of multiculturalism and the need to provide the UN with increased power and legitimacy. However, Pierre Hassner has argued that this support for multilateralism could very well hide other intentions. He points to a paradox in French foreign policy today: it emphasises the role of the UN and of the Security Council, the only institutions in its view with enough legitimacy to play the role of a worldwide referee, and yet it makes constant reference to Charles de Gaulle, who refused to acknowledge that this institution could influence the French position. According to Pierre Hassner, this “Wilsonian Gaullism” attitude is too confusing to remain credible for a long time (Hassner 2004). Similarly, Ulla Holm argues that France would never abandon its traditional ambition of re-establishing “la grandeur de la France”, but for political reasons this ambition can be kept hidden behind the concepts of multipolarity and international law (Holm 2003: 50; Kagan 2004: 76).

According to this logic, French universalism may therefore be understood as being similar to that of the USA. Still, it competes with rather than complements the US ambition. Both states genuinely believe that there is no discrepancy involved in following their own interests and aiming at a better world for all. However, when French universalism is often perceived as anti-Americanism, this is because it is based on a completely different model. The US liberal model is seen as opposed to the centralised and state-dominated model of France (Hoffmann 2000a: 66).

Why was it so important for France to avoid a war with Iraq? It has been argued that this was seen as an opportunity for France to make its voice heard in international politics, and to be presented as a defender of the UN and international law. Moreover, it has also been maintained that it was in French national interest to avoid a regime change in Iraq. Some have referred to France’s historical connection with Iraq, and French economic interests there. It is true that France has had close contacts with Iraq ever since the 1920s. After decolonisation in the Maghreb region, France attempted to compensate for its loss of influence with increased engagement in the Middle East. The Iraqis reacted positively to de Gaulle’s condemnation of the Six Days’ War, and in 1967 France was asked to take over the British and the US interests in the country. In fact, this Iraqi–French relationship proved mutually beneficial for both countries. While France needed the Iraqi oil to reduce its dependence on Saudi Arabia, Iraq needed French technological competence in the military area. Thus a strategic alliance between the two countries was established. In the early 1990s, 30% of Iraqi weapons were produced in France. All the same, France participated in the war against Iraq in 1991. This led to a reduction in the trade agreements between Iraq and France. By that time, Iraq had started to focus on its relations with other Arab countries; France retaliated by continuing its trade with Iraq through its companies in the other Arabic countries. Then, in 1995, the French oil company, Total, managed to get new important

contracts with the Iraqi authorities. These were long-term contracts involving as one quarter of Iraq's total oil production potential. The contracts were signed in 1995 and were to be implemented once the sanctions against Iraq were abolished. It has therefore been argued that uncertainty as to whether a new regime in Baghdad would honour these agreements was a major reason behind the French opposition to the war against Iraq (Orban 2003: 12). However, the importance of the economic aspects should not be exaggerated. After all, economic arguments did not stop the French from participating in the Gulf War in 1991. In addition, if monetary concerns were a main issue for France, it would have been far better off fighting alongside the Americans, to make sure that French companies would get some of the contracts after the war.¹⁰ While the economic arguments seem less convincing, the fear that a war would lead to increased terrorism in France seems a more credible and rational consideration on the part of the French authorities.

While economic considerations may have played a certain role, the most likely power-politics explanation seems to be French multilateral universalism. But then we must ask: is it really so that France so keenly aspires to act as a systematic rival to the USA alone?

A policy of principles

According to Jolyon Howorth, part of the problem in IR theory is that the notion of "balancing or counter-weighting" is seen as motivated by hostile or aggressive intentions. France's policy during the 2003 Iraq crisis was usually presented in the USA in this light. But, as Howorth argues, "if 'balancing' has any clear meaning in French discourse, it appears to signify the creation of more equality within a community of values. It implies the sharing of leadership rather than disputes over leadership" (Howorth 2003-04: 184–185). The strong French support for the military campaign in Afghanistan also indicates that the conflict over Iraq was more a disagreement on principles.

While an alternative analysis of foreign policy would agree with Kagan that most European states have moved beyond the Hobbesian phase, it would emphasise that this change has come about through a process of learning. In other words, it may represent not only a change of political strategy, but perhaps also of national identities and interests (Jepperson et al. 1996). Another policy analyst, Robert Cooper, has argued that Europe (and thus also France), has moved from the modern world into the post-modern world¹¹ where the *raison d'état* and the amorality of Machiavelli's theories of statecraft have gradually been replaced by a moral consciousness that applies to international relations as well as to domestic affairs.

According to Robert Cooper, the EU is the most developed example of a post-modern system that developed through a process of integration and

¹⁰ Interviews undertaken in Paris in June 2004.

¹¹ Robert Cooper distinguish between premodern, modern and postmodern world. Cooper, Robert (2003). *The Breaking of Nations. Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Atlantic Books.

learning. Thus, there are reasons to believe that interests are not fixed and that learning is an important aspect of international politics. Cooper argues:

... questions about war and peace are emotional as well as rational. Analysts from the old (realist) school might say that the objective of policy is precisely to remove the emotional element and to set limits to the damage which conflict might do. The trouble with this view is that it ignores the fact that nations are communities and communities are, in their essence, non-rational. The ties that bind may be religious, tribal; or they may be based on shared experience and shared values. For better or for worse, foreign policy – on issues that affect the national destiny or the national identity – will reflect these factors as much as any rational concept of interests. At a moment of crisis especially, it is likely that a nation will return to its roots and its myths and respond as the heart urges rather than as the head advises (Cooper 2003: 136).

Further:

The mark of a real international community, in which not just interests but also identity and even destiny are shared, will be that foreign policy becomes part of domestic policy. This is already beginning to happen in Europe. It is bad politics in either France or Germany to be at odds with each other (Cooper 2003: 150).

If the European states gradually, and increasingly since the end of the Cold War, have moved beyond the modern world, this can also explain why the difference between the USA and Europe has become even more pronounced after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. While the Americans feel that they are engaged in a war, the Europeans feel they are engaged in preventing one (Tardy 2003: 116). Even though there were differences among the European states, these may have been less important than they seemed. One clear indication of this can be seen in the progress that has been made in the European integration process after the Iraq crisis – with the adoption of a European Security Strategy and a Constitution (Rieker 2004). As pointed out by Howorth, “the difference between the French notion of greater balance in the transatlantic relationship and Britain’s notion of partnership is one of political semantics rather than of political principles” (Howorth 2003-04: 186).

According to this perspective, the French position in the Iraq conflict must be understood primarily as a genuine disagreement with the US administration on the circumstances and conditions for the application of power, and only to a lesser extent as an expression of France’s traditional urge to balance the USA. Unlike the US administration, the French authorities did not see how international security could be strengthened by such a war. Their concern was rather the converse – that such a conflict could very well jeopardise world security by reinforcing resentment against the USA and its allies in the Arab-Muslim world. War could undermine international law and the very basis of multilateralism. There was genuine disagreement between the two countries regarding what kind of threat Iraq

represented, and the consequences of such a war. The French leaders feared that such a war could lead to a strengthening of fundamentalist, anti-Western forces in the Arab world (Orban 2003). According to this view, in *threatening* to use its veto, France hoped that the USA would withdraw its Resolution and thereby contribute to maintaining the legitimacy of the United Nations.

This approach does not seek to refute the centralisation of the French institutional and political system, but it adds the importance of strong societal, cultural factors in French society, as well as processes of learning and change. Such an approach would indicate that France has moved into a different way of thinking about international politics: international law and multilateralism are seen as important principles to defend *as ends in their own right* – and not merely as means for regain “la gloire et la grandeur de la France”.

Combining the policies of power and principles

In this particular conflict, French foreign policy can be seen as primarily a policy of principles. However, this does not mean that there are no elements of power politics. According to Thierry Tardy, French foreign policy must be interpreted as a policy that combines a well-founded realist approach with the realisation that norms and institutions also matter. In his view, France and the USA are the only countries to cultivate with a certain degree of confidence the idea that they, as countries, are necessary to the world (Tardy 2003: 106-107). All French presidents under the Fifth Republic have searched to combine a special position in international politics (member of UN security council, and special relations with former colonies), a certain degree of hard power (nuclear capability and military assets) with an increasingly more pronounced soft-power discourse focused on human rights, values and diplomacy (Tardy 2003: 106–107). While France argued in favour of multilateralism and respect for international law and expressed its scepticism towards the US approach, there are also elements of *Realpolitik* in the French approach. And, at a certain point, Chirac also realised that France and he personally could gain politically by confronting the USA.¹²

In addition, it is also likely that French national interests have changed since the end of the Cold War. Too often, the acceleration of the integration process and the socialising mechanisms operating within this multilateral institution are ignored when studying the policy positions of one major EU country: however, we may assume that the European integration process in the post-Cold War period has led to greater pragmatism also in French foreign policy. This seems to be the case in relation to the French conception of “Europe puissance”, which instead of representing a strong and independent EU dominated by France, now seems to refer to a strong union legitimised by the respect for international law and human rights (Vedrine 2003). In addition, the objective of creating a common European defence is

¹² Interviews with French officials in June 2004

now interpreted in less traditional terms, and rather with a focus on the importance of international crisis management, conflict prevention and comprehensive security. Finally, there has been an evolution in the French traditional comprehensive intergovernmentalist (Sæter 1998) approach, towards tendencies of a more federalist approach – as the case in the discussions within the Convention preparing the European Constitution¹³ All this means that we may ask whether the 200-year old symbiosis of the centralised state and the political nation is lessening (Holm 2000: 189).

Since the 1990s, the EU has increasingly been consolidated as a comprehensive security actor, with multilateralism and the importance of a broad approach to security as collectively accepted norms (European Council 2003). In a recent study I showed how norms accepted at the EU level have also influenced the national security thinking of the Nordic states (Rieker 2003). While this was a study of the smaller states with different formal relations to the EU, it seems probable that also major EU states like France are being subject to similar influences. Thus we may argue that France has, through a process of Europeanisation and socialisation (see Rieker 2003: chapter 3), moved more towards a “post-modern” phase (in Cooper’s understanding of the term), with a foreign policy increasingly based on a genuine respect for collective security, international norms and rules – at the expense of traditional power politics.

The main challenge for the post-modern world, according to Cooper, is to get used to the idea of double standards – “that among ourselves, we keep the law but when we operate in the jungle, we must also use the laws of the jungle”. While this is a challenge for many European countries, it has long been inherent in French foreign policy practice. The disagreement between the USA and France is not on whether or not military force may be used, but rather on what basis the use of force can be legitimised. While the case of Kosovo is often cited to demonstrate the inconsistency in French foreign policy, there is a difference between the two conflicts. The war against Serbia was legitimised by referring to the principle of humanitarian intervention. While a few intellectuals and politicians were in favour of a war against Iraq on the basis of this principle, the majority did not see in Iraq a similar humanitarian situation that could justify a military attack.

If French foreign policy is to be understood as a combination of power politics and politics of principles, the question that remains is when, and under which circumstances, the different mechanisms work. While several scholars favour a comprehensive approach, there have been few concrete proposals as to how this may be done. I would argue that there seems to have been an evolution in French foreign policy. While power politics characterised French foreign policy positions in earlier periods, today these are largely influenced by norms and values that are recognised and institutionalised at the EU level. Not only do these norms and rules exert a constraining effect on policy alternatives, they also constitute and shape national interests. While this is happening in whole range of areas, it is especially interesting when it takes place in areas traditionally perceived as of vital national interest.

¹³ Interviews with French officials in June 2004

We have seen that French foreign policy seems more complex than often assumed, and that it should be understood as based on a combination of power politics and a policy of principles. Let us now take this discussion one step further, investigating whether and to what extent French opposition to US policy has had implications for practical bilateral cooperation and procedures. This can give us an idea of the seriousness of the conflict.

Implications for bilateral cooperation and procedures

At a conference at the Brookings Institution in May 2003, Jean-Louis Brugière, first vice-president of the “Tribunal de Grande instance de Paris” and responsible for coordination of the legal aspects of the fight against terrorism in France, expressed his concern with the Bush administration’s tendency to focus on the link between the terrorist threat and certain states. He was worried about the over-emphasis on military means at the expense of other counter-terrorist methods such as intelligence and diplomacy. He also feared that the war in Iraq would increase rather than reduce the terrorist threat in the West. But, despite the many confrontations between France and the USA over the Iraq issue, Brugière still argued that practical US–French collaboration on anti-terrorism remained excellent. As we shall see, this seems to be the case both in the area of intelligence and military cooperation.¹⁴

Intelligence cooperation

The diplomatic conflicts do not seem to have created problems for intelligence cooperation between France and the US. On the contrary, shortly after Bush declared the end of hostilities in Iraq, a veteran CIA analyst admitted that collaboration with the French had not only weathered six months of degenerating relations between France and the US, but in fact remained “better than ever” (Townsend 2003). The same was emphasised by the US ambassador to France, Howard H. Leach, in an interview with the journal *Défense* (Capuano 2003). Ever since the events of 9/11, Washington has been particularly interested in stronger cooperation with France in the area of counter-terrorism. It has even been revealed that France possessed useful information that could have prevented or at least limited the attacks. In an interview with *Le Monde* one year after 9/11, the director of the *Direction de la surveillance du Territoire* (DST), the French equivalent to the FBI, noted that there is daily contact between the DST and both the CIA and the FBI on matters related to the fight against terrorism (*Le Monde*, 11 June 2002).

¹⁴ See “Summary of Remarks by Jean-Louis Brugière” at www.brook.edu/cufs/events/20030512cusf.htm

In the course of its 30-year battle against terrorism, France has adopted security measures that appear to have successfully deterred terrorist cells, such as those involved in the 9/11 attacks against the USA, from conducting activity on French soil. The cornerstone of the French system is a special counter-terrorism section within the office of the Paris public prosecutor that works hand in hand with a sister division in the French police and the DST. This counter-terrorism section is made up of four judges, and was created after a series of deadly bombings in Paris in 1985 and 1986, later found to have been the work of the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah group.

Jean-Louis Broguière began focusing on hunting down Islamic terrorists in 1994, the year the Armed Islamic Group, an Algerian terrorist organisation, launched a wave of attacks in France. Two years later – having identified what would later become a well-established pattern: Arabs living in Europe, travelling to Islamic training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan and then returning primed to commit terrorist acts – Broguière opened “an Afghan file”. This effort resulted in the dismantling of an al-Qaida cell active in Europe and Canada, as well as the arrest of the Algerian Ahmed Ressam, who was trying to smuggle explosives from Canada into the USA, in late 1999. After Broguière testified as an expert witness in the trial against Ahmed Ressam, who was found guilty of conspiring to bomb US sites during the Millennium celebrations. Broguière also managed to have Djamel Benghal, the alleged ringleader of a plot to bomb the US embassy in Paris, arrested in July 2001 in Dubai (*Wall Street Journal*, 25 September 2001).

In August 2001, one month before the attacks on the USA, Zacarias Massaoui, a French citizen of Moroccan descent, was arrested in Minnesota. Massaoui had been picked up on a visa violation after suspicions had been aroused by his request to be taught how to steer a jet plane but not how to land one. Even though the French intelligence and Broguière warned FBI officials of the link between Massaoui and the al-Qaida network, this was not followed up by the FBI. Instead the FBI lawyers denied the field officers’ requests for a licence to examine Massaoui’s computer – a failure that may have cost the USA its best opportunity to foil the 9/11 hijackings. However, when FBI contacted Jean Louis Broguière concerning Zacarias Massaoui after September 11, Broguière, who had a file on Massaoui with information that dated back to 1994, was not allowed by the French authorities to transmit it to the USA in a form they could use for prosecution him. The main reason behind this decision was the fact that Massaoui risked the death penalty in the USA.

The Direction Generale de la Securité Exterieur (DGSE), the French equivalent to the CIA, also had information about Afghanistan that interested the US authorities after 9/11. This information was based on the special contact between DGSE officials and the anti-Taliban leader Ahmed Shah Massoud, who was killed in Afghanistan 9 September 2001. This relationship went far back, even though Afghanistan has not been the primary concern for French authorities.¹⁵ The DGSE had first-hand knowledge about the islamistic terrorism and the network of Ben Laden, based on human sources and the technical elements provided by the French

¹⁵ http://www.dgse.org/index.php?ID=&categ=11&id_artic=360

military satellite, Hélios – which, according to the DGSE provided photos of better quality than those the Americans could get. It was due to the information provided by French intelligence that the USA did manage to destroy one of the most important terrorist training camps in Afghanistan.¹⁶

Even though cooperation in this field was still good, some intelligence professionals started to question how long their collaboration could remain healthy when relations between their political masters were so rocky (Townsend 2003). The French feared that that anti-European parts of the US administration would put pressure on Washington to withhold intelligence and shut French out of joint investigations in other parts of the world, US intelligence officials were also worried that their French counterparts would become less helpful (Townsend 2003). However, according to French officials, these fears have not yet materialised.¹⁷ If things had been somewhat difficult for a few months, there was political will on both sides to re-establish the cooperation. On 29 December 2003, one week after French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin had cancelled several flights between Paris and Los Angeles due to the perceived risk of hijacking, the White House organised a meeting between French and US anti-terrorist experts. The French delegation was led by the ambassador to the USA, Jean-David Levitte. The other French representatives were from the General Secretariat for National Defence (SGDN), the DST, the DGSE and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the US side there was Tom Ridge, Secretary for the Homeland Security Department, together with representatives from the FBI, the CIA and the President of the National Security Council, Condoleezza Rice. The aim of the meeting was to examine ways of strengthening bilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism. The participants found the meeting successful, especially as to cooperation in air transport and the productive exchange of information (*Le Monde*, 30 December 2003). According to the French government, French and US inter-agency cooperation on terrorism is also well functioning and ongoing – in Africa, notably East Africa; in North Africa; in the Mid-east; and in the Caucasus, where several terrorist organisations with al-Qaida links are based.¹⁸

This indicates that anti-terrorist intelligence cooperation between France and the USA has *not* been significantly influenced by the increasingly tense diplomatic relations between the two countries. In the next section we will see whether there have been negative implications for bilateral military cooperation.

Military cooperation

Another area in which France and the USA have been involved for some time is military cooperation. France was a major contributor to the Operation

¹⁶ http://www.dgse.org/index.php?ID=&categ=11&id_artic=360

¹⁷ Interviews undertaken in Paris in June 2003.

¹⁸ Information from the French embassy in the US' home page. See http://www.info-france-usa.org/news/statmnts/2003/france_us_facts_060603.asp

Enduring Freedom against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.¹⁹ The first French contingent was sent to Afghanistan in November 2001 and some 5,500 French soldiers were deployed to the region. France sent the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* and bombers to Kyrgyzstan. Logistical support, transporting coalition troops and equipment were also supplied with the assistance of French detachments stationed in Uzbekistan and resupplying US warships and US Navy fighter planes.²⁰ In addition, French special forces (about 200 troops) have participated in anti-terrorism missions together with the Americans: these include spying missions, support to control of the Gulf and the Horn of Africa and a series of actions by special anti-terrorist forces. The US authorities have been very satisfied with the French contribution. President Bush specifically praised the French participation in a speech he held in March 2002.²¹

Also in NATO, cooperation seems to be rather smooth. Even though France is not an integrated part of the military structures in NATO, the country remains one of the largest contributors to NATO operations. According to the US ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, military cooperation between France and the USA within the alliance has been working well despite the many disagreements (*Le Monde*, 8 October 2003). When, back in 1966, France withdrew its participation from the integrated military structure, the French ambition was to develop a strong European security and defence policy and a more balanced alliance between a unified Europe on the one hand and the USA on the other. This soon became a main characteristic of French post-war foreign policy. Non-participation in NATO's integrated military structure meant that no component of the French army could be placed under NATO command, no foreign forces could be stationed in France, and no French officers could be integrated into NATO's headquarters. In addition, France did not participate in the Military Committee or in NATO defence planning.

Then, with the end of the Cold War, NATO's adoption of a new strategic concept, with increased emphasis on crisis management, however, made it possible for France to participate to a greater extent than earlier. France became one of the major contributors to NATO's crisis management operations in the Balkans (Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces 1999). These changes in NATO, combined with the development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy in the EU, explain why a process of redefinition of the France-NATO-relations was considered possible from 1995 onwards (Rieker 1998). France rejoined the Military Committee, and the French Minister of Defence started to attend meetings of the North Atlantic Council (NAC). French president, Jacques Chirac, also emphasised that France was willing to fully reintegrate into the military structures if the USA would agree to share the command structure with its European allies. It

¹⁹ General Jean-Paul Raffenne, who was in charge of the French liaison mission with the Americans in Afghanistan, was sent to the US Central Command (USCC) under the direction of general Tommy Franks in Tampa, Florida (*Le Monde*, 13 October 2001).

²⁰ Information from the French embassy in the US' home page. See http://www.info-france-usa.org/news/statmnts/2003/france_us_facts_060603.asp

²¹ See <http://www.cnn.com/2002/US/03/11/gen.bush.speech/>

was on the basis of this logic that President Chirac wanted a European commander-in-chief to be appointed to NATO regional headquarters AFSOUTH in Naples. When Washington refused, France aborted its initiative of complete reintegration (Rieker 1998).

All the same, France has remained an important contributor to NATO operations. Over the past ten years France has been the second-largest (after the USA) contributor of troops to NATO operations. France also supported the US proposal to create a NATO Response Force (NRF) from the very beginning, and is today the second largest contributor to this force as well (Taverna 2003).

In general, Washington has been very pleased with the French participation in NATO. Despite the disagreements between the two countries over Iraq, SACEUR General James Jones and the US ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, have expressed their satisfaction with the French military and their capacity to organise their cooperation within NATO. In an October 2003 interview with *Newsweek*, General Jones even declared that:

France has probably the most expeditionary army [i.e., ready to deploy to distant battlefields] in Europe. And writ large. They have impressive military capabilities across the whole spectrum of operations. They're good at peacekeeping; their Air Force is modern, state of the art; their Navy is modern; their land Army I know because I served with them in northern Iraq 11 years ago, and I know their generals – this is a very, very fine army (*Newsweek*, 6 October 2003).

The US ambassador to France, Howard H. Leach, has also explicitly stated that diplomatic disagreements between France and the USA have not changed the fact that the US and French military respect each other and work well together. As an example of bilateral cooperation in this area, he points out that 22 US officers are present in various military units in France, and that France has about 50 officers participating in US operations (Capuano 2003).

Power, principles and procedures

In this article I have proposed an interpretation of French foreign policy towards the USA between September 2001 and March 2003 that combines the importance of power and principles. It introduces the mechanism of Europeanisation and socialisation as important factors explaining the changes in French foreign policy, and suggests that the traditional “Gaullist” foreign policy, dominant at an earlier stage, is being altered, perhaps as the result of an ongoing process of learning and socialisation within the EU.²² Further, we have seen that the French–US conflict in this period was mainly a diplomatic disagreement with few, if any, negative implications for

²² I am currently working on a paper that systematically investigates the extent of this Europeanisation of French foreign and security policy.

practical cooperation at lower levels – in intelligence and military cooperation, for example.

Whereas diplomacy is often defined as a form of communication between strangers that aims at minimising differences (Neumann 2002: 109), French–US diplomatic contacts in this particular period appear to have been the converse. While diplomatic relations were tense, lower levels of bilateral cooperation between the two countries seem to have been unproblematic. Although this does not make the conflict any less real or less interesting, it is an important element for understanding the character of the disagreements, and may explain why a serious diplomatic “crisis” can be followed soon after by close cooperation.

Thus, we may conclude that modern-day French foreign policy towards the USA must be understood as a combination of policy of principles combined with elements of power politics and institutionalised cooperation procedures.

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Hvor Hender Det? (HHD) er et ukentlig nyhetsbrev som gir deg bakgrunn om internasjonale spørsmål i konsentrert og forenklet form. HHD er det du trenger for øyeblikkelig oppdatering, som en hjelp til å forklare inntrykk og se dem i sammenheng. I mange fag og sammenhenger har vi behov for kortfattet framstilling av konflikter og samarbeid, prosesser, utfordringer og utviklingstrekk i det internasjonale samfunnet. HHD ligger også på Internett. Godt over 100 artikler fra tidligere årganger innenfor en rekke emner er lagt ut i fulltekst. www.nupi.no/pub/hhd/hhdliste.htm.

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