

# RESCUING THE U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL

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TURNING THE TIDE AT THE UNITED NATIONS MUST BEGIN WITH  
REJUVENATING THE EUROATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP.

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BY JAMES GOODBY AND KENNETH WEISBRODE

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan's September declaration that the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was "illegal" has rekindled still-powerful, and unpleasant, memories of last year's acrimonious Security Council debate. The conundrum the Council faced in early 2003 was that it was being pressured by President George W. Bush to enforce its own resolutions against a defiant Iraq — but through collective military action under American command, just as it did during the first Persian Gulf War. At the same time, the Council was being ordered by two key members of the Permanent Five — France and Russia — as well as its then-chair, Germany, to mobilize against armed intervention in Iraq until international inspectors had done more to clarify whether Baghdad possessed weapons of mass destruction. Adding to the dilemma, a majority of Security Council members supported the Europeans' view.

The Security Council thus found itself at an impasse. Nowhere in the U.N. Charter does there appear the right or duty of a single member or group of members to enforce Security Council resolutions against the collective will of the Council itself. And, as matters turned out, Iraq did not have a "reconstituted" nuclear weapons program and very few, if any, of the other programs listed on the indictment.

As a practical matter, another U.S. unilateral action of the

magnitude of Iraq does not appear to be on the horizon. But it is likely that another test case will arise somewhere, sometime. If the catastrophe of 2003 were repeated, "Realpolitikers" would certainly have abundant proof that political globalization, unlike economic globalization, has no rules to guide it except the rule that might makes right. Unilateralists would be encouraged in their quest to change the world through U.S. military power. This would be a deadly combination for the United States and for the Euroatlantic community.

We remain firmly convinced that the problem of internal conflicts requires an organization like the United Nations, that current divisive tendencies within the Euroatlantic community are preventing a unified response to international security problems, and that a renewed spirit of Atlanticism would also help save the Security Council. With that in mind, we offer the following analysis and recommendations to enable the Council to regain its central place in the 21st-century international order.

## The NATO Problem

There is a slogan often heard in Washington: "If America leads, others will follow." Yes, they will — if leadership is understood to mean acting as part of a community. That element has been lacking in the Bush administration's thinking, as becomes abundantly clear by examining the core international relationship of the contemporary world, the Atlantic Alliance.

Defensive alliances end when the threat they were created to thwart no longer exists. This rule of international life would explain why the Atlantic Alliance is in danger of being transformed into little more than a pool from which coalitions of the willing may be assembled by the dominant member, the United States. No longer the tightly bound, "one for all, all for one" alliance of the Cold War years, NATO lacks a common purpose. It is gaining new mem-

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bers, but the enlarged alliance is not stronger because of it. It goes through the motions of security consultations and defense cooperation, but the reality is that NATO, as a unified community, has been hollowed out. Its political cohesion has vanished. Its military utility has been demonstrated in the Balkans and elsewhere, but in Washington that utility is seen in terms of a follow-up police force rather than as a full partner at the cutting edge of military actions. The disparity in defense spending is one reason for this, but not the only one. A preference for total control by the United States is another.

Americans who favor an American-imposed international order have little use for transatlantic unity. Former government officials, now commentators, Richard Perle and David Frum, have criticized Secretary of State Colin Powell and the first President Bush's national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, for their "nostalgia for the alliances of the Cold War." Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has talked about "the New Europe," those nations of Eastern Europe who are more ready to accept an American-imposed international order than are the old allies of Western Europe. He has also said that "the mission defines the coalition," thus turning his back on the solidarity that was NATO's priceless contribution to world order for half a century.

The paradox is that, while exalting the American commitment to spreading democratic values, these Americans scorn the rule of law — the bedrock of democracy — and ridicule the international organizations which enable nations to work together in the cause of peace and security. They disdain internationalists like Kofi Annan who remind us that "those who seek to bestow legitimacy must themselves embody it; and those who invoke international law must themselves submit to it." Perle

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and Frum have referred to international law, the United Nations, and even the normal method of discourse among nations — diplomacy — as "exploded illusions about the way the world should work."

The transatlantic rift will never be closed if these views prevail in the United States. Fortunately, the American people have historically favored alliances and the rule of law as their preferred way of interacting with other states. They still do. This basic predisposition is strengthened by the cultural affinity between the democratic nations of the West. To be sure, there are differences, but the similarities are dominant. They reinforce the idea of community.

**The European Problem**

NATO's confusion about its common goal is in danger of being replicated by the European Union. But the root cause there is different. The debate between widening and deepening the E.U. was resolved in favor of doing both — a balancing act that has proven much more difficult than expected. It is becoming clear that taking in more members requires a change in the governance of the organization — namely, more reliance on majority voting on certain types of issues. If the member-states cannot pass that test of their commitment to a united Europe, the outcome is likely to be a tightly integrated inner core

surrounded by a larger group of members whose interests in the Union are primarily economic. That will not allow Europe to make its full weight felt on the world stage, and differences within the Euroatlantic community will be harder to resolve.

Farther to the east, in Russia and the states that once were part of the Soviet empire, the revolution of the last years of the 20th century has not finished its work. It was never likely that Russia would become another “normal” European power. Russia has its own deep-seated cultural traditions which set it apart from Europe. Even before the tragic recent events in Beslan, there were ample grounds for fearing that Russia is turning back toward an authoritarianism that will deepen the divide within the Euroatlantic system of nations that many in Russia, and in the West, had hoped to erase. It would be an enormous defeat for the globe’s democratic forces were that to occur.

The Euroatlantic world — North America, Europe and Russia — is clearly not a geopolitical system that has arrived at a calm and stable plateau, with all problems solved. Nor is it likely to arrive there for decades to come, at least. Despite all the crises that call out for attention in other parts of the globe, the building of a true Euroatlantic community, which is so essential to global peace, remains unfinished business of the highest importance. But, as often happens, the urgent is driving out the important.

### **The Security Council’s Agenda**

The medievalism that al-Qaida represents haunts the world like a specter of the Dark Ages or a premonition of future chaos. Bin Ladenism will be a threat for a long time to come even if its leader is eliminated. The danger that members of a movement like this will acquire nuclear, biological or chemical weapons is very real.

Neither NATO, nor the European Union, nor any other regional organization can tackle this threat by itself. A global organization is needed to integrate their efforts, if only loosely, and that organization is still the United Nations, led by the Security Council.

Those who focus on the recent disarray and dissension within the Council forget that for most of the body’s history, consensus in even the smallest matter was nearly impossible. When the Cold War ended, the hope was that the Security Council, and the U.N. itself, would enjoy a long-overdue renaissance. Indeed, following the first Persian Gulf War in 1991, the U.N. seemed to have entered its Golden Age.

Today, that optimism has vanished and the Security Council’s obituaries have already appeared. That is not because its members disagree over the desirability of peace, or even how peace should be maintained, but

instead over the relative authority of certain powers — above all, the United States — in determining which international problems take priority and the preferred means to manage or solve them. The disagreements are political and case-specific; they have little to do with national-historical legacies, nor should they.

The political pendulum in the United States has already swung back in the direction of a more traditional American regard for the opinions and interests of others, but the U.N. Security Council — and its servant, the Secretariat — have a long way to go in order to restore their ability to serve the cause of international peace and security. The striking fact about conflicts for the last quarter of a century, at least, is how many of them were internal affairs, rather than classic state-on-state aggression. The founders of the U.N. did not have that model in mind because, customarily,

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internal problems were not considered to be the business of the international community. That has changed, as Kofi Annan has consistently pointed out. The way a government treats its citizens has become a concern of other nations, possibly justifying intervention. Acquisition of weapons of mass destruction has become a threat to international peace and security, also justifying intervention in some cases. These new reasons for the imposition of peacekeeping or peace-enforcing forces have joined the more familiar causes resulting from the breakdown of order within a country.

Who is to deal with these types of conflicts? The legitimacy provided by the formal approval of the international community, or some large and relevant portion of it, is one reason why the U.N., or a surrogate, will have to take charge. Another reason is the need to use some neutral or impartial force in order to avoid exacerbating international rivalries. And a third reason is that the big powers may not wish to get involved directly, lest the conflict distract them from other perceived threats. Darfur is a recent case in point.

The U.N.'s key role in internal conflicts is directly connected to a matter much discussed these days in relation to the reconstitution of the Iraqi state. This is the assistance that the U.N. can provide in building the infrastructure of civil society. And it concerns not only elections, but also, and equally importantly, the creation of democratic institutions, like an impartial judiciary system, a police force, and free and open media. Even the skeptical Bush administration has belatedly acknowledged that the U.N. has a special competence in these matters that needs to be brought into play.

These types of intrastate conflicts and reconstruction efforts, therefore, will be a key preoccupation of the U.N. Security Council in the future. The U.N. may still be busy with mon-

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itoring cease-fires in conflicts between states, as in the past, but this may increasingly become the task of regional organizations, which also deserve a far more prominent role in the Security Council itself. It is easier to see NATO, for example, helping to maintain a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than the U.N. A NATO or E.U. seat on the Security Council might someday help to preempt the horse-trading that will otherwise accompany an inevitable revision of the post-World War II composition of the Permanent Five. So, too, would the participation of other regional security organizations alongside their member governments.

### **Connecting the Dots**

This is the context in which to consider the future of the Security Council and the rifts among its members. Have those rifts damaged beyond repair the strength of the Council? No, unity can be restored, but only upon a basis reflecting today's realities. Was the immediate advantage gained in Iraq worth the price that was paid in Europe? Not unless Americans and Europeans can work out some *modus vivendi* that will permit them to cooperate throughout the Middle East. In short, while Iraq was the proximate cause of transatlantic disarray, it can now be the common

cause that knits the alliance together again while restoring legitimacy to the United Nations.

What about terrorism? Europeans have suffered from terrorism for many years. But they have not endured the terrible catastrophe of having nearly 3,000 of their citizens killed at one blow in one of their largest cities in peacetime. America, so seemingly invulnerable, suffered a sudden shock that exceeded by far any one attack that a single European state suffered in the past generation. That is understood intellectually by Europeans but it has not been absorbed by them. It is only slowly becoming a basic factor in their understanding of what motivates Americans these days.

What about America's special vocation for spreading freedom and democracy around the world, a God-given mission proclaimed repeatedly by President Bush? Does it really divide Europeans from Americans? The Kantian idea of creating peace through spreading democratic values is what Europeans are accused of following, in contrast to the Americans' supposed deeper understanding that Hobbes was right when he wrote of "a war of all against all." Of course Europeans know that the anarchy of the nation-state system ends in a war of all against all; the reason that the Europeans created the Common Market, which evolved into the European Union we see today, is that they understood from bitter experience that wars result from unfettered national rivalry. They tried to overcome that systemic fault, and have succeeded to a considerable degree.

What the Bush administration claims to seek in the Middle East, through its "road map" and the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, sounds very much like the democratic peace that Europeans have created in the western part of their continent. It is a wor-

thy aspiration, and the president could not have said it better: “our security is not merely found in spheres of influence, or some balance of power. The security of our world is found in the advancing rights of mankind.” The real issue lies in the gap between the goal and the resources to achieve it. Only a renewal of transatlantic unity can fill that gap. And only the help of the “defunct” United Nations will allow the pursuit of democracy to be seen as anything other than an American crusade to impose subject governments worldwide.

### The Atlantic Partnership

Turning the tide at the United Nations must begin with rejuvenating the Euroatlantic partnership. Yet the value of such solidarity seems to be forgotten in some quarters today, leaving national security to be understood only in the narrowest of terms. Perhaps this is willful amnesia, or just

a perverse reaction to the age of high globalization, in which nations are more interdependent than ever. Either way, it must give way to common sense. “Imperial overstretch” was a premature diagnosis — at least with regard to the United States — when historian Paul Kennedy popularized the phrase in the late 1980s. Now it has to be taken seriously. No state, not even the most powerful, can survive and prosper outside a framework of international cooperation. The 20th century proved that national sovereignty must coexist with international organizations, like the U.N., which institutionalize cooperative behavior across borders.

That is the essence of what was once known as Atlanticism, a movement that emerged in the fight against fascism and survived to unite the West against the Soviet threat while sowing the seeds of peaceful global integration. Tyrannies were defeated but Atlanticism survives tenuously as an

ideology in search of a role. That is a pity — and potentially a tragedy — yet one that can still be avoided if the leaders of the Security Council rediscover the utility of collective security in the 21st century. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a peaceful world in which its two most advanced and compatible regions, Europe and America, work at cross-purposes both internally and externally, and against the very institutions they designed 60 years ago to further their mutual interests.

While national ambitions will always collide, the notion of “multipolarity” for its own sake is just as dangerous as doctrinaire “unilateralism.” Both should be set aside in favor of the Atlanticism that served the world so well since the end of World War II. That spirit embodied the spirit of community or commonwealth. It is very different from ad hoc coalitions. And it must be made to work today — for there is no rational alternative. ■

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