



Strategic Non-cooperation as Soft Balancing: Why Iraq was not Just about Iraq

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Many commentators explain recent transatlantic rifts by pointing to diverging norms, interests and geopolitical preferences. This paper proceeds from the premise that not all situations of conflict are necessarily due to underlying deadlocked preferences. Rather, non-cooperation may be a strategic form of soft balancing. That is, more generally, if they believe that they are being shortchanged in terms of influence and payoffs, weaker states may deliberately reject possible cooperation in the short run to improve their influence vis-à-vis stronger states in the long run. This need not be due to traditional relative gains concern. States merely calculate that their reputation as a weak negotiator will erode future bargaining power and subsequently their future share of absolute gains. Strategic non-cooperation is therefore a rational signal of resolve. This paper develops the concept of strategic non-cooperation as a soft balancing tool and applies it to the Iraq case in 2002–2003.

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Introduction

When democratic partners disagree, traditional hard balancing is not a feasible solution. While Europe may boost its relative military capacity to increase its influence as a global actor, Europe is not aligning itself militarily with other states against the United States (US), nor is any increased capability a credible tool for transatlantic conflict resolution, and certainly not in the short run. This by no means renders the power balance inconsequential, however, and therein lays the dilemma for the weaker state. Depending on the structure of the problem faced, power asymmetry may give the stronger party greater capability to go it alone and greater sway with other nations. This affects the respective costs of agreement failure, which enables the stronger nation to hold out longer and ultimately gives it greater ability to obtain its preferred outcome. The weaker actor is therefore in a conundrum: Unwilling to accept inequitable ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ policy solutions, yet unable to balance against the other actor militarily, what is the weaker actor to do to avoid perpetually



being sidelined in decision making and repeatedly obtaining only minor concessions in cooperation? Indeed, work by Liska (1962) and Rothstein's (1968) study of small power military alliances identified a similar dilemma when noting that the weaker state runs the risk of having its autonomy constrained so severely that it becomes a mere satellite of the stronger state.

Using the transatlantic conflict over Iraq, this paper discusses the strategies of structurally weaker actors. I call these soft balancing in contrast to traditional hard balancing.¹ For purposes of the present analysis, soft balancing is a strategic effort by a weaker actor in overall structural terms² to increase influence vis-à-vis a stronger actor via non-military means. Importantly, soft balancing differs from hard balancing not only in methods, but also in goals. That is, soft balancing is not limited to military issues, and it does not seek a permanent confrontational stance. Rather, the goal is to nudge the other party back to a cooperative framework of mutual, rather than one-sided concessions and leadership.

Europe has been practicing at least two types of soft balancing strategies. One set of strategies might be called 'leveling strategies.' States use leveling strategies to restructure the situation either by seeking constraints on the alternatives of stronger states, or by increasing the alternatives available to themselves. Thus, the European effort to pursue an increasingly institutionalized multilateral system imposes constraints on states by stressing collective problem solving and equality before the law.³ And Europe's spearheading of initiatives from Kyoto to the ICC helps it build a role as global agenda setter. The resultant third nation support increases its alternatives and subsequently its influence in relation to the US.

This paper is about a different type of soft balancing, however, which I call strategic non-cooperation. Strategic non-cooperation is when a weak state seeks to increase future influence vis-à-vis a strong state by deliberately rejecting inequitable cooperation. While walking away from gains is perplexing in the short run, it makes sense if the bargaining outcome is highly asymmetrical. This is not necessarily because of the traditional relative gains concerns. Rather, states calculate that their reputation as a weak negotiator will erode future bargaining power and subsequently future share of absolute gains. Strategic non-cooperation is therefore a rational signal of resolve to increase influence in future decision making. As such, it is a soft balancing tool for weaker states to leverage their influence vis-à-vis stronger states. This paper develops the concept of strategic non-cooperation more fully and applies it to empirical and counterfactual analysis of the Iraq case.

When you Observe Conflict, Should You Always Think Deadlock?

The extensive debate about the transatlantic rift tends to focus on the substantive sources of the disagreements: divergence in norms (Risse, 2003),



capability gaps, and the variation in domestic and geopolitical interests (Walt, 1998; Asmus and Pollack, 2002; Kupchan, 2002, 2003; Cooper, 2003a, b; Cox, 2003; Daalder, 2001; Hoffmann, 2003; Joffe, 2003; Kagan, 2003a, b; Lambert, 2003; Pond, 2003; Gordon and Shapiro, 2004). These are essential elements of the transatlantic relationship. However, while they may imply an irreconcilable conflict, this need not be the case.

Parties seeking to align divergent policy preferences may face one of two basic situations, both of which naturally contain multiple variations on their themes (Table 1). At one extreme, their initial policy preferences may be truly incompatible. This is a situation of deadlock, and without side-payments, only some form of coercion can bring about policy alignment. Alternatively, although the parties' policy preferences differ, there may be a zone of possible agreement (ZOPA) where policy alignment, even if not at either party's ideal point, will still yield net benefits to each party. If the parties manage to align their policies, this is cooperation. If they do not, this is non-cooperation. It matters whether the transatlantic 'rift', or any conflict for that matter, is a case of deadlock or non-cooperation. Deadlock assures a grim future because it implies fundamentally irreconcilable preferences. Non-cooperation, however, retains potential and prescriptions for achieving cooperation.

It is difficult to ascertain the underlying preferences, because parties have incentives to misrepresent them. It is simplest to assume the problem away by arguing that behavior is revealed preferences, but this forces the fallacy that all non-alignments of policies are cases of deadlock. Indeed, deadlock is often a default explanation for lack of cooperation. As Oye has put it: 'When you observe conflict, think Deadlock — the absence of mutual interest — before puzzling over why mutual interest was not realized. When you observe cooperation, think Harmony — the absence of gains from defection — before puzzling over how states were able to transcend the temptations of defection (1986, 7).' While this may save a lot of academic wrangling, labeling all policy alignment failures situations of deadlock would be no more accurate than labeling all successful cooperation situations of harmony — an assertion that international institutionalists have contested over the years (Keohane, 1984; Axelrod and Keohane, 1986). Further, false positives (labeling situations as deadlock even if they are not) are costly in terms of foregone possible

Table 1 The difference between deadlock and non-cooperation

	<i>Non-overlapping winsets (no ZOPA)</i>	<i>Overlapping winsets (ZOPA)</i>
Underlying cause of lack of policy agreement	Structural deadlock	Strategic non-cooperation



cooperation. Indeed, from a policy perspective, one might turn Oye on his head and argue that: 'when you observe conflict, puzzle over why mutual interests were not realized, before dismissing possibilities for cooperation by thinking deadlock.' In reality, one must actually do both: examine the possibility that a situation was deadlock, as well as alternative explanations for cooperation failure, and then assess which explanations are most satisfying. The paper does this in the Iraq case.

Strategic Non-cooperation

If not all situations of conflict are situations of deadlock, what else may explain them? Failure to agree in spite of an existing underlying possible agreement need not imply that non-cooperation therefore was strategic. Indeed, negotiation and game theory presents a host of other explanations, many of them rooted in problems that international institutions or mediation in turn seek to overcome. These include information and communication flaws, high transaction costs, uncertainty, and collective action problems. Domestic constraints or tactical commitments may also constrain negotiators. Further, diplomats and real-life negotiators add a set of other factors related to psychology and culture. All these factors share the notable feature that they are unintended. If the parties could overcome them, they would. Thus the parties do seek mediation, and do establish institutions.

I discuss some of these explanations when discussing Iraq later. However, here I argue that the possibility that non-cooperation may be strategic should be taken seriously: a possible deal exists, but one party deliberately rejects it. The traditional relative gains argument falls in this category: states' insecurity in an anarchic world leads them to reject absolute gains if these represent a relative loss (Snidal, 1991, 704). The assumption is that the relative loss translates into a long-term security risk, which outweighs any short-term gain, because of the high premium states put on security (*ibid.*). While it may operate on security issues, the concept of strategic non-cooperation as soft balancing transcends the relative gains argument in that it does not depend on an assumption of security concerns. Indeed, strategic non-cooperation can operate between allies, not just between enemies. The logic of strategic non-cooperation rests on maximizing absolute gains by building a reputation that increases negotiating power over future outcomes. When a state rejects cooperation, it does not necessarily do so because it worries that the other state will attack it in the future. Rather, it rejects it because accepting highly asymmetrical gains is in and of itself a poor long-term optimizing strategy. As such strategic non-cooperation represents a form of intra-alliance bargaining. However, strategic non-cooperation can be a soft balancing strategy even in a



context devoid of security concerns, and as such it differs from traditional discussion of intra-alliance bargaining.⁴

Game theoretic experiments support the argument that actors may reject inequitable gains. In the 'Divide the dollar game,' also called the 'ultimatum game,' or in classical game theory, 'bilateral monopoly,' one actor proposes a division of a sum of money and the other actor either accepts the offer (in which case they both get the portion suggested by the proposer) or rejects the offer (in which case they both get nothing). The bilateral monopoly game envisions this as a situation with a single seller and a single buyer. It appears rational for the proposer to suggest highly asymmetrical distributions (say, in the case of the divide the dollar scenario 99 cents to himself and a penny to his partner), since it is better for the partner to accept something over nothing. Experiments show, however, that if the total stakes are not too high, then the second actor may reject highly inequitable, although rationally he then makes himself worse off (Thales, 1988; Rabin, 1993).

Most of the explanations for such rejections rest on unfairness: Rejection is not as much calculated as it is emotional. Strategic non-cooperation is a calculated soft balancing tool, however, used by the weaker actor to increase its influence vis-à-vis a stronger actor via non-military means. The weaker state believes that the game is repeated or that its reputation carries to other future interaction, and it therefore wants to avoid a reputation as a 'pushover.' The state calculates that incurring short-term costs will signal its resolve and impose costs on the other state, increasing the stronger state's willingness to compromise in the future in order to collect some part of the dollar. This actually resembles a labor strike. Since their strike hurts the business owners (and, quite consistent with the 'divide the dollar game' neither party gets anything while the factory stands idle), workers hope that the short-term cost of foregone pay will be outweighed by the concessions ultimately made by the owners for a more equitable distribution of the profits. It also has parallels in other uses of economic leverage, such as sanctions, which are also self-damaging protest moves to bring about beneficial changes in the behavior of the target state. Both strikes and sanctions only make sense when the long-term payoffs are considered.

That iteration of a game transforms actors' strategies is nothing new for game theorists. However, for strategic non-cooperation, the assumption is not repetition of a particular game, but the states' understanding that individual negotiations are embedded in a larger meta-game in which the overall patterns of bargaining are important. Reputation carries. IR scholars have often emphasized that the connectedness of all international cooperation makes reputation important. However, in this context reputation mostly refers to whether states can be counted on to do as they say.⁵ Most commonly, credibility refers to the commitment problem: Violating agreements hampers



states' ability to make credible commitments in the future.⁶ In strategic non-cooperation, on the other hand, 'reputation' concerns the character of the state *as a negotiator*. Schelling discusses this as the concept of 'bargaining reputation' (1960, 25). The uncertainty is not whether a state can be counted on to keep commitments, but whether it will concede under pressure. Strategic non-cooperation is a costly signal that the state is a strong and independent negotiator who will not accept any beneficial outcome, however inequitable.

Is Strategic Non-cooperation Rational? What Determines its Effectiveness?

Strategic non-cooperation is only rational if there is a reasonable chance that it will enhance your position in subsequent bargaining.⁷ Does the strong state have any reasons to compromise? There are at least two differing lines of argument on this. The classical realist argument is that such an expectation is illogical. If one actor is dictating the terms of cooperation to another, it is most likely that there is an asymmetry in the capabilities and resources of the states that allows the stronger actor to impose solutions on the weaker actor. A pure capabilities-based analysis therefore predicts that a stronger actor determines the final outcome, since he faces the same incentive of optimizing his long-term gains, and greater resources should enable him to hold out longer (Pen, 1952; Cross, 1969; Contini, 1968). This is consistent with Krasner's (1991) argument that power is often the determining factor in distributional bargaining. Indeed, in an analysis of asymmetric bargaining in the then Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Hopmann (1978) finds that one of the key factors in determining outcomes in asymmetric bargaining is unequal resources available to employ in influence attempts. Subsequently, in a narrow 'power as capabilities' analysis, strategic non-cooperation is an irrational optimizing strategy.

This is the paradox, however. A strong country pushes the weaker country around exactly because its government believes it can get away with it. However, this is the very same reason that the weaker country actually has an incentive to fight back: Its' government does not want to be stuck indefinitely in such an asymmetric bargaining relationship.

Therefore, another line of argument is that traditional power asymmetry is not always the determining factor in negotiations. When power is conceptualized not only at the aggregate level, but also at the issue-specific and behavioral level,⁸ then strategic non-cooperation may be both necessary and an entirely logical soft balancing strategy. Indeed, there are several reasons why the stronger actor may not win. As Lockhart (1979) argues, akin to Keohane and Nye's notion of issue-specific power: 'In order to have any influence in bargaining, national resources must create options that are useful within the context of the specific encounters a nation faces (92).' Further, Hirschman



(1978, 45) notes that a pure power-based analysis of influence fails to take into account 'the countervailing dialectical forces generated by these asymmetrical structural relations. A preponderance of objective capabilities may be countered by an asymmetry of opposing desires, as when the 'weaker' nation desires its freedom from domination more than the 'stronger' nation is bent on dominating it.' This 'willingness to accept economic (or physical) punishment — must be taken into account in assessing the stability of the dependence relationship (ibid., 47).' This is consistent with other arguments that asymmetric stakes and interests can create resolve that offsets asymmetric capabilities (Diesing and Snyder, 1977, 190; Lockhart, 1979, 92).

Hopmann (1978) also finds that another key factor in determining outcomes in asymmetrical bargaining is unequal cost from the failure to agree. While stronger states frequently have better alternatives, they may also have more at stake. The respective costs of non-cooperation therefore depend on each actor's vulnerabilities and sensitivities to non-cooperation over time (Keohane and Nye, 2001). This is also consistent with Shapley's (1953) original game theoretic finding that it is not sufficient merely to compare' payoffs from cooperation. Rather, asymmetrical costs of non-cooperation drive asymmetrical distributions of gains. Thus, the alternative to cooperation is important, and it is not necessarily the case that superiority in hard power correlates with lower cost of alternatives (Hopmann, 1978, 115). Subsequently, it is not given that strategic non-cooperation will produce a perpetual stalemate, or that the stronger actor will never relent. Therefore, a state that fears an emerging pattern of minimal influence not only has incentives to address this situation, but non-cooperation may be a rational signaling tool for doing so. This is why Zartman (1971) stresses the ability to withhold agreement as a principal source of power for weaker states.

Re-examining Iraq: A Case of Strategic Non-cooperation?

Strategic non-cooperation in the Iraq case would mean that the European war opponents rejected cooperation with the US partly in an attempt to redress the relative balance of influence of the US and Europe in the larger meta-game of global decision making. For this explanation to have meaning, however, it is necessary to make at least a plausible case that the situation was not one of deadlock, but that there *could* have been beneficial cooperation on Iraq. The proposition does not require an assumption that the US would have made major concessions. Clearly US preferences were to invade Iraq, and to do so before the summer heat and while the troops were still relatively motivated. Further, the political message of the White House hinged on resolute action as a demonstration of US power and resolve. However, even if one takes a US-led



invasion as given, all that is needed for the assumption of a possible cooperative solution to hold is that the Europeans war opponents, and France more specifically, would have reasoned that in the end it was better to support the US effort than undermine it.

Here it is tempting to look at events *ex post* and conclude that given the developments in Iraq, and the failure to find weapons of mass destruction the opponents to the war made a wise choice. In assessing the motivation for their behavior, however, it is essential to consider the *ex ante* situation. Again, this is complicated by lack of access to intelligence on what information each government actually had. One must recall, however, that all governments were serious that Iraq did present a threat. Thus, in reasoning similar to that surrounding the US missile shield plans, given that they were presented more or less with a *fait accompli*, Europeans, and in particular France, might have reasoned that the world, and ultimately they, would be better off lending their support, both practical and legal, to the US plans (Daalder and Makins, 2001, 63). Western unity if not outright cooperation in Iraq would improve the odds of a successful outcome and preserve United Nations (UN) legitimacy.⁹ Even if war opponents had economic interests to protect in Iraq, as some have accused France of doing, joining the US would be at least as strategically wise as opposing the US. As a spokesman for US Senator Richard Lugar said at the time: 'The case he had made is that the Russians and the French, if they want to have a share in the oil operations or concessions or whatever afterward, they need to be involved in the effort to depose Saddam as well.'¹⁰ France could also have avoided a punitive decline in economic relations with the US.¹¹ And yes, it might have deprived Chirac of a temporary popularity boost and angered the Muslim population in France, but had this been the major concern, France should also not have banned headscarves in public schools.

So overall, based purely on a calculation of immediate interests, it is plausible that the payoff to France from cooperating with the US would have been greater than that of non-cooperation. It could not only have supported French business interests, but cooperation could also have bolstered UN legitimacy (especially if based on solid P5 consensus). Such UN legitimacy in turn could have boosted the legitimacy of the operation itself thereby possibly reducing resistance somewhat, and, importantly, UN approval could have boosted Turkish support for the war thereby facilitating a more efficient invasion. Finally, cooperation might have provided for greater ability to address post-war problems, as the allies would have spent less time arguing with each other, and more time pooling their resources to solve the actual problems on the ground. A French *non* on the other hand, could not stop the US. The logic of this scenario is perhaps why so many observers at the time indeed believed that Chirac would ultimately support the US and why



Washington was temporarily encouraged by Chirac's remarks to his troops about the need for their readiness. Thus, on January 10, 2003, Jean-Marc Ayrault, president of the socialist group in the National Assembly told *Le Parisien*: 'I have the impressions that Jacques Chirac is aligning himself with George Bush.... Blowing hot and cold, he is preparing public opinion for an inevitable war, and for French diplomatic and military support for it.'¹² On February 4 the *Financial Times* noted that, 'The widely held view, in Washington and London, is that while he insists on UN resolutions to sanction any action in Iraq, he will still end up supporting the US to ensure French interests are protected.'¹³

If Cooperation were an Option, What Theories May Explain its Collapse?

Several theories offer possible explanations. Numerous writings on norms, values, military capabilities, geo-strategic and domestic interests have explained the preferences in the transatlantic disagreement over Iraq. However, recall here that I am not attempting to explain the cause of the preference divergence itself. Rather, positing that the divergence alone was insufficient to explain the lack of agreement, I examine other possible causes of the cooperation failure.

Negotiations procedures: As with any negotiations, parties may not reach agreement due to poor communication, lack of credible commitment mechanisms, and lack of trust. These are the factors studied by game theorists and employed by international relations scholars in analysis of how international institutions facilitate cooperation as discussed above (Keohane, 1984). Is it possible that the split in the UN Security Council, led primarily by Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, was the result of such imperfections in the basic negotiation conditions? This does not seem plausible: These are the obstacles that international institutions and reiterated interaction often serve to overcome, and since the relationship between the US and Europe is one of the most densely institutionalized in the world and rests on a long history of cooperation, these factors are unlikely to have been decisive.

Complexity: Negotiations may also fail due to sheer complexity (Crump, 2003; Zartman, 2003). This is a candidate explanation for transatlantic break in the Kyoto Protocol, for example. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that the Kyoto Protocol was the most complex negotiation in the world aside from trade issues (Kanie, 2003). However, while the Iraq case was complex in that extracting information on the weapons program produced high uncertainties, the decisions to be made were not overly complicated. There were not thousand



of proposals and amendments on the table that bogged down negotiators in obscurities. The decisions at hand were comprehensible.

Backfiring Tactical Commitments: Sometimes actors may fail to find agreement because they both make tactical commitments that result in an apparent elimination of the bargaining space (Schelling, 1960, 28). Actors, in hopes of holding out for a concession from the other party, may dig in their heels on a position. As Duncan Black observed already in 1958, the root of difficulty in international relations is not necessarily that nations cannot reap joint gains from cooperation, but that the often indeterminate solution to their bargaining introduces incentives for gambling and obstinacy, which can lead to failures to agree at all (1998, 175–177). That is, actors may stake out a position strategically, counting on a concession from the other party to resolve the crises (Hopmann, 1978, 65). In retrospect, if the other party walks away, the party might regret, but may still be unwilling to reveal this to avoid reputational damage in future negotiations. Thus, the negotiations cannot be salvaged.

Did this happen in Iraq? Schroeder had limited flexibility in his position on the Iraq war after he had made Germany's non-participation a public element of his re-election platform. Nevertheless, he could have become more subdued after his reelection, or, given a second UN security resolution, he could have softened his stance. However, even if there truly were a US-German impasse, this in itself is insufficient to explain the larger hold-up in the Security Council. Germany's position might theoretically have gone less noticed had France and the majority of the European population not aligned itself with it.

Chirac did have room for maneuver. Indeed, France did not commit fully to a position until quite late. He was preparing his troops for the possibility of war in the beginning of January 2003, when he told a group of French military officials to be 'ready for all eventualities.' This might have been a trick maneuver, but it seems unlikely. While we must await Chirac's memoirs to know when he made his final decision to oppose a US invasion, the first time Chirac explicitly said that France would veto a second United Nations resolution authorizing war 'no matter what the circumstances' was on March 10, in a TV interview. That decision reportedly came after a visit of his to Washington, when it was made completely clear to him that the US was going to war with or without his blessing and just hours after Russia said that it would oppose the US-backed resolution. Thus, at least up until that point, Chirac was not irreversibly committed, and a shift in his position could have enabled others to follow by providing a UN mandate.

Tied Negotiator Hands/Two Level Games: Theory on two-level games also point out that domestic politics can lead to cooperation failures. Putnam



(1988) discusses ‘involuntary defection,’ where two parties, who both place a high value on reaching agreement, fail to do so, because they cannot control their domestic veto players. However, although French relations with Iraq historically are closely intertwined with economic interests, French industrial lobbies also understood that it was not in their interests to exclude themselves from post-war cooperation with the US. Thus, the only constraint that remained was that of domestic opinion and anti-war groups. However, while French domestic opposition to the war was strong, it is not clear it tied Chirac’s hands. Indeed, concessions by Chirac could have released a second UN resolution, leading to an official UN mandate for the invasion.¹⁴ In this way, Chirac was not hostage to European public opinion as much as he was a contributing factor stoking the opposition. Considering European leadership more broadly, many national leaders did indeed take a supportive position to the US, often in spite of domestic opinion, suggesting that domestic constraints were not the main determinants of the national positions. Thus, negotiator inflexibility is also not a satisfying explanation.

Nested Games: Another possible explanation for cooperation failures is that actors are involved simultaneously in several games that revolve around the same move. Tsebelis (1990) refers to the ‘nestedness’ of the principal game to explain that what appears to be an irrational choice in one arena becomes intelligible when the whole network of games is examined. Nestedness of games thus refers to how an actor simultaneously has to consider various payoffs vis-à-vis different actors when making a policy decision. (It thus differs from strategic non-cooperation, in which the actor considers payoffs over time in seemingly unrelated games.)

A plausible version of such nestedness in the case of Iraq might have been that the decision to support the US invasion was nested in another game of intra-European politics. Specifically, France’s desire to sure up the Franco-German axis on the eve of the constitutional convention and an enlargement that diluted the power of France within the EU have also been put forth as possible explanation for Chirac’s position. Such arguments are difficult to prove, but there is certainly considerable evidence that the Franco-German engine was revving up significantly during the Iraq crisis. France and Germany circumvented the multilateral decision making of the EU by sealing a preemptive deal on the EU agricultural policy (CAP) in the fall of 2002. They also jointly spearheaded a proposal at the start of the Convention on the Future of Europe, charged with rewriting the founding treaties into one. Their renewed alliance facilitated core compromises between them and even led to speculation about a Franco-German union. In a cruder conspiracy version, France, and less so Germany, was using the occasion to sure up their



leadership in Europe. The rebuke to the candidate countries to not meddle and 'keep quiet' was a political blunder, but it was a 'Freudian slip' rooted in Chirac's leadership ambitions of which Germany remained a vital part. This hypothesis is viable, but it seems more likely to have been complementary to other explanations, than one that singularly drove the events. After all, Germany and France have not needed common opposition to the US to unite them in the past.

Iraq: Do Disparate Allies Resort to Desperate Measures?

If disagreement over Iraq did not derive from deadlock, and if other explanations are inadequate, is strategic non-cooperation a viable part of the explanation for the breakdown between key allies? Support for such a theory can primarily be sought in the reasoning of the involved actors. Naturally, a great deal of the rhetoric will concern the divergent preferences. Thus, there has indeed been considerable debate about means and ends as well as debate about norms including the role of international institutions. However, if the dispute was ultimately also about relative influence and decision parity and if European war opponents were therefore practicing strategic non-cooperation, then politicians should also emphasize more procedural issues of the relationship, such as the need for partnership, compromise, and consultation. They might even directly refer to equitable input into transatlantic decision procedures. In the case of Iraq, one should expect policy makers to complain that the US presented them with a *fait accompli*, and that such behavior is unacceptable. There should be complaints about inadequate consultation and US unwillingness to compromise. Policy makers should stress that such interaction is not the basis for a good working relationship and that it sets a bad precedent for future negotiations. There should be comments that policy makers were worried about letting the US completely get its way. Policy makers might comment that rules should apply to the US just like they do to everyone else, and that the US cannot simply bully others into serving primarily its own interests. Such rhetoric might have other motivations, and therefore would not prove that the policy was one of strategic non-cooperation. However, if strategic non-cooperation is occurring, such rhetoric should accompany it. Its absence would allow us to rule it out.

Indeed, several comments by European officials highlight that the desire for influence and respect, and the ability to protect own interests is at the heart of Europe's relationship with the US. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer has, for example, noted that Europe does not aim to compete with the US for leadership, but to ensure input into that leadership. Already in February 2002 he commented that: 'A world with six billion people will not be led into a peaceful future by the mightiest power alone...I do not support



anti-Americanism at all, but even with all the differences in size and weight, alliances between free democracies should not be reduced to following. Alliance partners are not satellites.¹⁵ In other words: we will not accept a decision-making paradigm where we are expected to make one-sided concessions.

French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine also has stressed the need for Europeans to voice their disagreements with a US that acted 'without consulting others, making decisions based on its own view of the world and its own interests.'¹⁶

Similarly, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana underscored just how important it is for Europe that policy is a result of two-way compromise. Responding to US Defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld's comments that 'The mission must determine the coalition, and the coalition must not determine the mission,'¹⁷ Solana instead argued that:

We must begin by reaffirming that we are partners and we are allies. Treat your friends like allies and they will behave like allies. Partnerships and alliances bind. They allow for and legitimize leadership by providing a forum for talking and for listening. For defining common tasks and identifying the means to accomplish them. Insisting that the alliance should determine the mission, and not vice versa, is not code for a de facto European veto on American initiatives. It is the best hope of restoring our joint sense of purpose. The alternative is to pick your partners, as you would select tools from a box. Sometimes there may be no alternative. But *in the long run* it is not a recipe for restoring common purpose. Most of us would prefer to be called an 'ally' or a 'partner' rather than a 'tool' in a box (emphasis added).¹⁸

This comment clearly emphasizes Europe's concern about the 'long run' and about the US not just cornering Europe, using Europe at its will for its purpose. A year and a half later, post-Iraq, he again emphasized that Europe needs to be 'a more influential partner in the American partnership.'¹⁹ Such comments are not just about burden sharing, but also about power sharing, which is the strategic goal of soft balancing.

Indeed, for the French, Iraq has been a battleground over influence ever since the first Gulf War. A close examination of cooperation in the security council between the Iraq wars reveal not only numerous differences in policies towards Iraq, but also consistent French hesitation to place any automaticity in security council resolutions and a preference that the US would always need to come back to the council for a clear mandate to take any military action. Thus already in 1993, France accused the US of 'going further in its attacks on Iraq than the United Nations resolutions permitted.'²⁰ In 1997, the US and the



UK failed to win inclusion of the language ‘serious consequences’ in resolution 1137. In a UN negotiated deal with Iraq in early 1998, the US and Britain wanted language providing for an automatic trigger, whereas France (as well as Russia and China) opposed this. Consistently, the battle over the language in Security Council resolution 1441 in the fall of 2002 centered on a two-stage plan, that in France’s view constrained automaticity.

Brian Crowe, Director-General for External and Politico-Military Affairs in EU Council of Ministers from 1994–2002,²¹ has argued that Europe must be able to protect its ‘interests’ vis-à-vis the US:

But a CFSP that works only when following a US lead is a fair-weather CFSP, and something more robust, fit for fouler weather, is going to be necessary. This is not to say that the EU should set out to be in opposition to the United States, with which the EU countries generally share a now long-standing and solid history of common values and objectives; *yet its common stance should be robust enough to ensure that the United States cannot simply dismiss it and the European views underlying it. US leadership is inescapable, and indeed necessary and desirable; but the EU needs to carry enough weight to ensure that the United States sees its own interests in that leadership being shared and not just imposed* (emphasis added).²²

As European Union Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten noted in early 2002, Europeans ‘get cross when we think America is throwing its weight around.’²³ Quite tellingly, on the same day, a senior American official said: ‘It’s pretty bad right now. ... The Europeans think that the United States is so powerful it can’t be constrained.’²⁴

Such remarks support the argument that Iraq was not just about Iraq, or merely about different European and American preferences for *how* to solve the problem, as many have emphasized. Rather, it was larger than Iraq and any specific policy: it was about the greater decision-making paradigm that underlies world order, at least as directed by the West.

The test of wills between the allies was brought about, not only by the end of the cold war and the American rise to unrivalled military leadership, but also by the European coming of age through enlargement, economic growth, introduction of the Euro and increased ambitions to be a ‘global actor.’ Thus, it is plausible that in the Iraq case, France, spearheading a smaller group of European countries, but capturing the opinions of a majority of the European population, chose non-cooperation partly to oppose a policy decision paradigm where the US consistently can rely on European allies adjusting towards US preference.

Although comments by Chirac testify to some anti-Americanism, which may serve also to boost his domestic standing, the substance of his argument as the Iraq invasion proceeded is compatible with the opinions of others cited above:



'But in order that [sic] balance to exist a strong Europe will be needed and a strong USA, which will be linked together by a strong pact, which is a pact of culture. This is what we defend, as far as we are concerned, and this of course implies that our relations - between Europe and the USA - are relations of complementary, relations of partnership between partners who are equals of course, otherwise there is no relation of partnership and it is another world different from the one observed and wished by France.'²⁵

Thus, while Chirac and de Villepin always insisted that opposition was 'principled', the 'principle' in question was not just one of the proper uses of force. (Indeed, France has been willing to overlook such principles before.) It was also a 'principle' about not letting the US dictate international policy. As Bush was sworn in for a second term, French foreign Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin said: 'It is not just France that must make concessions. A new relationship means that we respect each other. We are allies..... Each must take a step to the other...Alliance is not submission.'²⁶

This analysis therefore suggests that the *fait accompli* by the US in the case of Iraq solidified European fear of being sidelined in future global security decision-making sparked strategic non-cooperation as a soft balancing tool. A Turkish official captured the essence when he responded at a NATO meeting to US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's notion of 'coalitions of the willing.' What Rumsfeld really expected, he said, are 'coalitions of the obedient.'²⁷ Thus, as an envoy of one of the P5 council members said already in October 2002: 'The whole debate is about two issues. One is Iraq. The other is US power in the world. The second issue is the bigger part of the debate.'²⁸

Conclusion

Was the transatlantic conflict over Iraq about different policy preferences? Absolutely. Did cooperation collapse because these preferences were irreconcilable? Perhaps. However, this paper has argued that it is an analytical fallacy to assume that all situations of conflict are situations of deadlock. Rather, sometimes states deliberately opt for strategic non-cooperation as a soft balancing tool to regain influence vis-à-vis a stronger partner. Power and resource asymmetries across issues may lead to situations where stronger states attempt to dictate policy solutions to weaker states. This leaves the weaker state in a dilemma of how to escape from a pattern of diminishing voice and one-sided concessions in negotiations. When the states are both democracies, hard balancing is neither a credible nor a desirable bargaining tool. Weaker states therefore may resort to various soft balancing strategies to regain influence vis-à-vis the stronger state. When using strategic non-cooperation, a state rejects potential cooperation that it considers inequitable. The rejection is



a signal that its' cooperation cannot be taken for granted to the point that it can be repeatedly shortchanged in the decision-making process. Although it seems perplexing in the short run, the state is calculating that more equitable cooperation in the future will outweigh the short-term loss. Importantly, soft balancing does not aim for a permanent confrontational stance, but rather to nudge the other state back to a more equitable partnership.

Studying the Iraq case leads to the development of some hypothesis for future research about when nations will use strategic non-cooperation:

- As a form of 'soft balancing,' strategic non-cooperation is most likely between democratic actors for whom the interdependence makes non-cooperation more effective, and for whom the traditional hard balancing options based on force are closed.
- Given that strategic non-cooperation is driven by dissatisfaction with asymmetric influence in shaping an outcome, states will be more likely to use it as their preferences on substantive issues diverge.
- Given that strategic non-cooperation is driven by long-term calculations, states are more likely to use it when they believe the situation may set a precedent. Thus, the less unique a case is, the more likely that states will reject highly asymmetric deals.
- Given the underlying cost-benefit analysis, strategic non-cooperation becomes less likely as the cost of non-cooperation grows. Thus, states will only use strategic non-cooperation if they can tolerate the cost to themselves. Conversely, strategic non-cooperation becomes more likely as the net cost of non-cooperation decreases. This may occur, for example, if domestic factors partly offset the cost of strategic non-cooperation or if staking out an alternative position through strategic non-cooperation forms new cooperative relationships with third parties.²⁹
- Given that strategic non-cooperation is an act of defiance against the dominant actor, it is increasingly likely to occur the more weak states can unite. Coalitions have the dual benefit of spreading any punitive costs and of boosting the impact of the action. In addition, coalitions increase the value of alternatives to cooperation with the dominant actor. Thus, soft balancing is more likely to occur the less states are isolated in their preference divergence from the dominant actor and can overcome issues of collective action.

As the global system has evolved, US and European preferences have diverged due to normative differences, capability gaps, and changing geopolitical interests. These factors are all essential to understanding the transatlantic relationship. The extensive focus on these issues, however, has contributed to an interpretation of the conflict over Iraq in particular as a conflict of underlying interests that simply precluded agreement. While not



denying that preferences diverged considerably, through empirical and counterfactual analysis, this paper has set forth a plausible case that cooperation was still possible and that the rift was not just about substantive policies. Having examined other possible causes of non-cooperation, I have built a case that the transatlantic conflict over Iraq was also about principles of how power should be shared and implemented in the transatlantic relationship and the wider global system. That is, European war opponents did not reject cooperation with the US because net payoff to them was more favorable if the war effort proceeded without their support. Indeed, they likely knew that, given US determination to proceed, in the short run, the situation in Iraq and its implications for Europe would be better served by presenting a united international coalition with UN backing. They also knew, however, that this was exactly the US calculation. Thus, given the *fait accompli* nature of the US action, cooperation with the US risked setting a dangerous precedent that European support for US policies can be taken for granted, and therefore European input can be ignored. The rebuff to the US was thus a signal to the US that Europe represents a set of policy views and interests that the US cannot consistently sideline.

The complex cause of the fallout between the US and the European war opponents is immensely important. If we accept the default explanation that the conflict was the product of irreconcilable interests, then we risk drawing the wrong inferences about the nature of the relationship. Worse, these inferences may adversely become self-fulfilling predictions.

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Notes

1 In the last couple of years, the term soft balancing has been used somewhat loosely (Pape, Robert. 'The World Pushes Back.' *Boston Globe*, March 23, 2003. In a follow-up article, 'Exchanges & Returns Is the World Pushing Back,' on April 2, 2003, the *Boston Globe* published short responses by Max Boot, Josef Joffe, Andrew Moravcsik, Anne Marie Slaughter, and Joseph Nye). There is yet no consensus definition of the term. My use of the term is confined to my definition and may not be fully theoretically comparable to other uses such as



- that in Paul *et al.* (2004). Specifically, I do not conceptualize soft balancing merely as emergent hard balancing.
- 2 Using the qualifier of issue structural terms, Keohane and Nye (2001), implies that it is not necessarily always the militarily stronger state that has the capacity to push the other actor around. On security issues, the overall structural resources are naturally the key measure, but in other conflicts where military power is practically irrelevant, issue structural resources are more important and may even render the actor in overall structural terms as the weaker actor in a specific issue area.
 - 3 Several commentators have noted that the French and Germany effort to enmesh the US in the legalities of the United Nations was indeed an effort to 'tie Gulliver down'(Joffe, 2003).
 - 4 For an overview of relevant alliance theory, which this article has insufficient space to relate, see Snyder (1997). Snyder refers to alliance management as the 'processes by which alliance members try to keep the alliance alive and advance their own interests within it.' (3) However, his discussion is aimed at military alliances during times of crises and how allies bargain over the war plans and so forth (3–4).
 - 5 Discussions of honesty, bluffing, misrepresentation, the commitment problem and other types of credibility fall under this rubric.
 - 6 This is a core argument in most institutionalist literature. For a concise treatment, see Simmons (2000).
 - 7 That does not mean that there are not other forms of non-cooperation that could operate, such as principled non-cooperation, where a state might reject a beneficial deal based on a normative stance.
 - 8 For discussions of various conceptions of power and negotiations, see for example Habeeb (1988, chapter 2).
 - 9 After the war, in May 2003, 61 percent of Frenchmen said that the United Nations was 'less important now' — an increase of 19 percent from March 2003. There were similar trends in the US, Great Britain, Spain, Italy and Germany. *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*. Views of a Changing World, War With Iraq Further Divides Global Publics. June 2003. Available online on <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/185.pdf>. Accessed on January 26, 2005, 2004.
 - 10 *AFX European Focus*, January 23, 2003, US lawmaker says Russia, France should back US on Iraq if they want oil rights.
 - 11 In 2003, US acquisitions in France fell by 80 percent, while US investment in other big European economies grew or remained steady. Experts said the fall appeared related to the strained relationship over the Iraq war. *Financial Times*, August 11, 2004.
 - 12 *The Irish Times*, January 10, 2003, p. 11.
 - 13 *Financial Times* (London), February 4, 2003, p. 23.
 - 14 Opinion polls in Europe show that such a UN mandate would significantly have shifted public opinion on the war, raising German support to 48 percent, French support to 34 percent, and, in the most extreme case, raising Dutch support to 58 percent. Gallup International, *Iraq survey results 2003*, www.gallup-international.com, accessed on July 29, 2004.
 - 15 *New York Times*, February 13 2002, German Joins Europe's Cry That the US Won't Consult, 18.
 - 16 *New York Times*, February 13 2002, cited above.
 - 17 Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, remarks at National Defense University, Washington, DC, January 31, 2002. Available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2002/s20020131-secdef.html> accessed on February 4, 2004.
 - 18 *Ibid.*
 - 19 *Agence France Presse*, 2 October, Europe not seeking to rival United States with global role: EU's Solana.
 - 20 *The Times*, January 21, 1993. Paris breaks ranks with allies over Iraq raids.



- 21 Personal interview, February 16, 2004, Durham, NC.
- 22 Crowe 2003, p. 537.
- 23 *New York Times*, February 23, 2002. Europe Seethes as the US Flies Solo in World Affairs.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *BBC Monitoring*, April 29, 2003. France's Chirac calls for real partnership between Europe and USA.
- 26 *Agence France Presse*, January 20, 2005.
- 27 *Financial Times*, December 13, 2002, p. 21.
- 28 *Washington Post*. October 30, 2002. Fear of US Power Shapes Iraq Debate.
- 29 If other benefits fully offset the costs, then one would have to question whether the policy was really one of strategic non-cooperation, or merely of optimizing payoffs.

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