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1. The original paper entitled “How does the US influence EU foreign policy and to what extent has the situation changed from the Iraq war to the Syrian crisis?” was submitted by the author in partial fulfillment of the Politics and Government in the European Union MSc degree in August 2013. At the time, no such comparison had been made in the literature yet.

Updated to February 2016
Objectives and Method

The aim of this study is to show how the US influence on EU foreign policy has changed due to a shift in US foreign policy itself. In order to prove this change, a comparison has been made between two case studies: the war launched against Iraq by former President George W. Bush in 2003 and the crisis experienced in Syria under the Obama administration ten years later. These two events have been compared from three different perspectives: I. Causes, II. Venues of influence and III. Results. To be scrutinized though is not how the two administrations have conducted the “war on terror” but rather how they reacted in the face of an analogous phenomenon: the alleged possession and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) by the Hussein regime in the case of Iraq and of chemical weapons by the Assad regime in that of Syria.

Sources

As for Iraq, a critical assessment of published literature and online newspaper articles from 2003 to present has been performed. As for Syria, considering that the events in question are relatively recent and not much is available on the topic yet, an innovative interpretation of such events has been offered. Published literature from 2011 to present was reviewed but the limited amount available has forced the writer to rely mainly on online newspaper articles. This is the reason why there is a need to include more quotations in part II, to produce more compelling arguments. In addition, expert opinions have been requested. In particular, professor emeritus Michael Cox from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) was interviewed in July 2014 as an expert on transatlantic relations and American foreign policy.
Introduction

Western powers have long tolerated authoritarian regimes considered essential for the stability of the Middle Eastern region. This attitude, however, changed in the light of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as undemocratic states like Afghanistan and Iraq began to be identified with Islamic terrorism and became, according to the American view, legitimate targets of military intervention.

In February 2002, two months after claiming victory at Tora Bora, the Bush administration began shifting intelligence resources and special operations forces to Iraq, starting what turned into the longest and costliest war (when taken together with the war in Afghanistan) in all of American history. At first, the pretext to invade Iraq was found in its refusal to cooperate with the United Nations Special Commission.

Iraq (UNSCOM) inspectors sent to the region to verify compliance with UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) on WMDs. Yet, the truth is that Saddam Hussein never expelled the UN inspectors but that they were evacuated from Iraq by the prior Clinton administration in anticipation of Operation Desert Fox aimed at hampering the region’s ability to produce WMDs. Yet, it would be misleading to suggest that regime change was already central to US foreign policy during the Clinton’s presidency. Despite the passage of legislation calling for regime change in Iraq (the Iraq Liberation Act) and the bombing campaign that followed, Clinton’s policy was still one of containment, as the Act set no strategy to achieve that liberation. Full implementation comes only under George W. Bush with Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I. CAUSES

Regime change
Iraq had been considered “unfinished business” since 1990-1991 and regime change had been discussed for a long time. The 43rd President of the United States pictured his father - the 41st President of the United States George H. W. Bush - as weak for not daring to extend the Gulf war beyond the UN mandate and go after Hussein. Driven by the example of Thatcher’s Falklands war in 1982, he strongly believed that “one of the keys to being seen as a great leader is to be seen as a commander-in-chief” and that the secret to a successful presidency lay in beginning a small war with a pretext of sort and quickly transforming it into a success. Therefore, as attested by former Secretary of the Treasury Paul O’Neill and then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, part of the administration was already focusing on ousting Saddam Hussein in early 2001. After the tragedy of 9/11, regime change in Iraq was also deemed necessary to reaffirm US political and military strength as it had proven incapable of protecting its citizens within its own territory.
How does the US influence EU foreign policy? A comparison between the Iraq war and the Syrian crisis

Neoconservatism and the Bush doctrine

As pointed out by Mearsheimer “the dispute about whether to go to war in Iraq was between two competing theories of international politics: realism and the neoconservatism that underpins the Bush doctrine”11.

The Bush administration was an amalgam of Jeffersonians, neoconservative Wilsonians and Jacksonians, in which key positions were held by neoconservatives: Dick Cheney was Vice President (VP), Donald Rumsfeld Secretary of Defense (SoD)12, Paul Wolfowitz Deputy Secretary of Defense13. As co-founders of the think-thank Project for the New American Century (PNAC) they strongly believed in:
- American exceptionalism14 and consequent duty to promote democracy abroad
- military power and bandwagoning logic
- unilateralism
- preemptive war15

These principles were the core of President George W. Bush’s doctrine16.

Neocons believe the United States “holds a unique place and role in human history”17, it is a positive leader and example for the rest of the world, and it has a moral obligation to export its own model - which exceptional status, according to Lipset, stems from its liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire18- abroad19.

12. Although Fukuyama wrote that they “were not known as neoconservatives before their tenures”. Fukuyama F. (2006) America at the Crossroads. Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative legacy, Yale University press, p.4
13. Tocci N. et al. (2008), Who is a Normative Foreign Policy Actor? The European Union and its Global Partners, Centre for European Policy Studies, p.95
14. This can be understood as “America’s peculiar form of Eurocentrism”, as traditionally it tends to diverge from the “European-established way of doing things”. When it comes to FP, exceptionalism means that America considers itself as a symbol of democracy and freedom, and it believes it has a “special mission” to promote its model abroad and needs no permission to do so. Beinart P. “The End of American Exceptionalism: The very attributes conservatives say make America special—religiosity, patriotism, and mobility—are ones they’ve inadvertently undermined. Is it any wonder millennials are less impressed with their country?”, National Journal, February 3, 2014
16. A Presidential Doctrine is generally intended as the set of “presidential philosophy or world view, strategy and tactics and statement or statements which outlines this world view and expresses the principles and values that underpin it”. Murray D. (2013). “Military action but not as we know it: Libya, Syria and the making of an Obama Doctrine”, Contemporary Politics, 2013 Vol. 19, No. 2, p.148
17. American exceptionalism as defined by the GOP official website gop.com/platform/american-exceptionalism/
19. “No foreign policy faction in the United States has been so animated by the wisdom of democracy promotion, nor so convinced that the U.S. must play a primary role in this endeavor, as the Neoconservatives” Keck Z. “Only realists spread democracy. History leaves no doubt that realists have been the most successful foreign policy faction in exporting democracy”, The Diplomat, March 7, 2014, p.3
Thus, neoconservatives strongly believe in democratic peace theory which holds that democratic states are extremely unlikely to engage in armed conflicts with one another and thought that the terrorist threat coming from the Middle East was rooted in the absence of democracy\textsuperscript{20}. Persuaded “that there has never been a state on earth that has as much relative military power as the United States”\textsuperscript{21}, they believed the best way to export democracy\textsuperscript{22} and “reshape the world”\textsuperscript{23} was a unilateral military action\textsuperscript{24}. As a consequence, Bush and his staff thought that a “well-carried out military invasion, followed by fairly simple reconstruction afterwards”\textsuperscript{25} would lead to a democratic and stable Iraq. Also, confident as they were that “international politics operate according to bandwagoning logic”\textsuperscript{26} they thought that regime change and democracy promotion in Iraq were likely to have a spill-over effect in the rest of the region or even elsewhere\textsuperscript{27}. As Mearsheimer puts it, following this logic they were convinced that once Saddam was toppled “the Iranians, the North Koreans, the Palestinians and the Syrians... would all throw up their hands and dance to Uncle Sam’s tune”. Had they been successful in democratizing and stabilizing the Middle East, chances for al-Qaeda and affiliated organizations to recruit would certainly have been reduced\textsuperscript{28}. Therefore regime change in Iraq was seen and sold to the American people as a crucial step to win the war on terror and defeat islamic terrorism once and for all.

On the other hand, GOP\textsuperscript{29} realists like the first President Bush’s National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and scholars of international security affairs like prof. Walt and prof. Mearsheimer, warned that although Saddam Hussein was unmistakably a “murderous despot” and Iraq would be better off without him “war with Iraq (was) not in America’s national interests”\textsuperscript{30} and the best possible option was for the US to “maintain

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Mearsheimer J.J. “Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq war: realism vs. neo-conservatism”, p.3
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.1
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Bush conceived democracy as the cure against terrorism and believed that “the only path to lasting peace is the expansion of freedom and liberty”, President Discusses Democracy in Iraq with Freedom House, georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/03/images/20060329-6_d-0237-515h.html, March 29, 2006, p.1
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Mearsheimer J.J. “Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq war: realism vs. neo-conservatism”, p.1
  \item \textsuperscript{24} As Mersheimer puts it, they believed that “if a state has awesome military power and can rely heavily on that power to do business in the international system, then it will not often need allies”. Mearsheimer J.J. “Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq war: realism vs. neo-conservatism”, p.3. This inclination to “go it alone” was already evident before the Iraq war was even set in motion, as president Bush notably withdrew from many multilateral negotiations - the International Criminal Court, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the protocol implementing the Biological Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the Kyoto Protocol on climate change.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Hallenberg J. and Karlsson H. The Iraq war: European perspectives on Politics, Strategy and Operations, p.24
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Mearsheimer J.J. “Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq war: realism vs. neo-conservatism”, p.2. To put it simply according to bandwagoning logic “the display of power and resolve by the United States will discourage further resistance and lead more and more states to conclude that it is time to get on our side”. Walt S.M. (2005) Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy, W. W. Norton, p.184.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Fawcett L. “The Iraq war ten years on: assessing the fallout”, p.329; Zakaria F., “Long Road to Hell: America in Iraq”
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Hallenberg J. and Karlsson H., The Iraq war: European perspectives on Politics, Strategy and Operations, p.24
  \item \textsuperscript{29} GOP stands for Grand Old Party. The acronym is frequently used to refer to the Republican Party
  \item \textsuperscript{30} War with Iraq is not in America’s national interests, bear-left.com/archive/2002/OP-Ed.pdf, September 26, 2002
\end{itemize}
vigilant containment of Iraq”\textsuperscript{31}. There was in fact little if no evidence that Saddam was involved in the 9/11 attacks, unlike al-Qaeda he did not pose an imminent threat for the United States and, in the words of Brent Scowcroft, unilaterally attacking Iraq would “seriously jeopardize if not destroy the global counterterrorist campaign”\textsuperscript{32} and “spread instability in the Middle East”\textsuperscript{33}. In addition, as highlighted by former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger who did not oppose invasion but notably disagreed with the way it was casted - namely democracy promotion - as much as regime change in Iraq was desirable, it was very “naive” and “unrealistic” to think that by simply removing Hussein from power the country would automatically turn to democracy\textsuperscript{34}. His concerns were also shared by some inside the neoconservative movement, like author of “The End of History” professor Fukuyama who highlighted how “democracies (cannot) be created anywhere and everywhere through sheer political will”\textsuperscript{35} and how America does not really have a positive record when it comes to nation-building\textsuperscript{36}, with the only exception of Germany, Japan and South Korea in which cases though “US forces came and then stayed indefinitely”\textsuperscript{37}. All pointed in the direction of a long occupation\textsuperscript{38}, which according to Kissinger is “beyond the resources of any one country”\textsuperscript{39}. Later on as the war unfolded, more and more security scholars, grouped under the name of “Security Scholars for a Sensitive Foreign Policy”, joined the debate condemning the shift of resources from Afghanistan to Iraq and urging for a “change in American foreign and national security policy”\textsuperscript{40}. In October 2004 in “An Open Letter to the American People” signed by 851 scholars of foreign affairs including prof. Cox, prof. Hoffmann, prof. Ikenberry, prof. Posen and of course prof. Walt and prof. Mearsheimer, the group labelled the war against Iraq as “misguided” and the policies that led to it as based on “distortions” and called for an open debate in order to have a reassessment of the American strategy in Iraq\textsuperscript{41}. “It is striking how accurate (realist) warnings were”.\textsuperscript{42}

31. Ibid., Mearsheimer J.J. and Walt S.M. “An Unnecessary War”, Foreign Policy, January/February 2003, p.58
33. “War with Iraq is not in America’s national interests”
34. Fukuyama F. “The Neoconservative Moment”, National Interest, Summer 2004, p.3; von Mittelstaedt J. and Follath E. “Interview with Henry Kissinger: do we achieve world order through caos or insight”, p.3
35. Ibid., p.3
37. Ibid., p.4
38. “War with Iraq is not in America’s national interests”; von Mittelstaedt J. and Follath E. “Interview with Henry Kissinger: do we achieve world order through caos or insight”, p.3
39. von Mittelstaedt J. and Follath E. “Interview with Henry Kissinger: do we achieve world order through caos or insight”, p.3
40. “An Open Letter to the American People”, sensibleforeignpolicy.net/letter.html, October 6, 2004
41. Ibid.,
42. Walt S.M. “Who was right about invading Iraq?” Foreign Policy, March 6, 2013, p.1
Alleged possession of WMDs and preemptive war

The administration also insisted Iraq still possessed WMDs and might use them against the US or transfer them either to terrorist groups or neighboring countries like Iran, part of an “axis of evil” together with Iran and North Korea. The 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) made clear that “to forestall or prevent... hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively” if they are perceived as a “threat to the United States or our allies and friends.” Therefore, even in the event that Iraq did not possess any WMDs, which was true, just their potential development in the near future was enough to take action as Saddam’s past proved he was “unintentionally suicidal” and “deeply ignorant of the outside world.”

Also, former VP Dick Cheney, former SoD Donald Rumsfeld and former Deputy SoD Paul Wolfowitz pressed the case that Saddam might transfer WMDs to Osama bin Laden. Notwithstanding the fact that the National Security Council (NSC)’s counterterrorism advisor, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) found no evidence of such a connection, Cheney and Rumsfeld championed and influenced the executive into taking a position that considered the very risk of such an alliance tantamount to a “casus belli.”

43. In this respect, Mearsheimer and Walt emphasized how containment was still a viable option even in the event that Saddam really possessed nuclear weapons. This is because the “historic record” showed how the US had already managed to prevent a superpower like the Soviet Union from using its nuclear arsenal. Mearsheimer J.J. and Walt S.M. “An Unnecessary War,” p.52. Also, they insisted it was one thing for Saddam to use chemical weapons against the Kurds and the Iranians and one thing to use them against the United States as the latter “can retaliate with overwhelming force and weapons of mass destruction” Mearsheimer J.J. and Walt S.M. “Keeping Saddam Hussein in a Box” The New York Times, February 2, 2003, p.1


46. NSC former director for gulf affairs Kenneth Pollack argued that those in favor of deterrence based their assumptions on “a dangerous misreading of Mr Hussein”, whom he describes as “unintentionally suicidal” meaning that he tends to “miscalculate his odds of success and frequently ignores the likelihood of catastrophic failure”, “a risk-taker who plays dangerous games without realizing how dangerous they truly are” and “deeply ignorant of the outside world”. Pollack K.M. “Why Iraq Can’t Be Deterred”, The New York Times, September 26, 2002 p.1


48. As indicated by former CIA deputy director Michael Morell, Czech intelligence reported of an alleged meeting between one of the 9/11 hijackers –Mohamed Atta- and an Iraqi intelligence officer, at the Iraqi embassy in Prague just a few months before the attacks took place. “VP Cheney was the first US official to confirm the story.” However, even after the Czechs and the FBI further investigated the matter, coming to the conclusion that neither Atta nor the Iraqi spy were in Prague during that period, VP Cheney continued to publicly imply of an ongoing relationship between Saddam and bin Laden. He and his staff, repeatedly attempted to politicize intelligence on the matter. Morell M. (2015), The Great War of Our Time: The CIA’s Fight Against Terrorism, Twelve, p.80-81 and 86-88

49. On this matter Mearsheimer and Walt argue how “the lack of evidence linking them is not surprising” if one considers the “deep antipathy between fundamentalists like Osama bin Laden and secular rulers like Saddam Hussein”. However, “even if American pressure brings these unlikely bedfellows together, Mr. Hussein is not going to give Al Qaeda weapons of mass destruction. He would have little to gain and everything to lose since he could never be sure that American surveillance would not detect the handoff. If it did, the United States response would be swift and devastating” Mearsheimer J. J. and Walt S.M. “Keeping Saddam Hussein in a Box”, p.2
II. VENUES OF INFLUENCE

The UN

The United Nations (UN) played a major role both during and after the crisis: it was the main forum where Iraqi disarmament was debated and had a central role in post-conflict stabilization.\(^{51}\)

Under Chapter VII of the UN Charter the use of force is only allowed in the event of self-defense or if collectively exercised by UN members previously authorized by the UN Security Council (UNSC).\(^{52}\) Art. 51 states that “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a member of the UN, until the UNSC has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.”\(^{53}\) and has been traditionally construed as precluding the aggressed state the right to counteract when the attack is no longer in progress. Although broadened after September 11 and invoked for the war in Afghanistan, Art. 51 did not apply to Iraq. While the attack on Afghanistan gained international backing because evidence proved al-Qaeda was behind the attacks and that Afghanistan served as a safe haven for the terrorists involved, no such evidence was ever found for Iraq.

For these reasons, US Secretary of State (SoS) Colin Powell and British Prime Minister (PM) Tony Blair eventually succeeded in persuading Bush to address the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and seek its authorization. The result was that the Council unanimously agreed on a lowest common denominator resolution – Resolution 1441 -, stating that Iraq was in "material breach" of its disarmament obligations under past UNSCRs and offering it a “final opportunity to comply”.\(^{54}\) It called on Saddam to readmit UN inspectors and gave him 30 days to produce documentation of its biological, chemical and nuclear weapons or of their destruction.\(^{56}\) However, the resolution was ambiguous. The Americans and the British deciphered it as a legitimation of war, underscoring the words “final opportunity to comply” and the reference to previous resolutions, under which Iraq was already in material breach.\(^{57}\) The other permanent members - France and Russia - plus Germany, who opposed intervention instead, regarded it as an alternative to war, objected to automaticity and maintained that in case of non-compliance further discussion within the UNSC was mandatory.\(^{58}\)

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52. Ibid., p.92
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., p.2
Eventually, the latter triumphed as the US agreed to convene for a second resolution. Accordingly, in February 2003 Powell addressed the UN, evidencing how Iraq was still in material breach and had ties to al-Qaeda\textsuperscript{59}. The US and the UK then worked on a draft of a second resolution holding that, as the declaration submitted by the Iraqi government “contain(ed) false statements and omissions” Iraq “ha(d) failed to comply with, and cooperate fully in the implementation of that resolution”\textsuperscript{60}. However, on the grounds that Iraq had been cooperating with UN inspectors since the first resolution was adopted and that the inspectors had found no WMDs yet, the bulk of the members insisted on the need to reinforce the inspections regime and allow inspectors more time and were inclined to vote no or abstain\textsuperscript{61}.*For the strongest state in the world not to be able to have its way in the UNSC on an issue of great national interest could only be seen as a heavy defeat*\textsuperscript{62}, for this reason the Anglo-Americans dropped the draft and, after a last ultimatum to Hussein and his sons, opened hostilities on March 20.

Despite its inability to receive a green light from the UN and its members regarding the approval of a second resolution, the US was able to exert a form of influence over the international community. It is unquestionable that the UN did not back invasion, nor did it stymie it. A special UNGA could have been summoned to overcome deadlock or the International Court of Justice (ICJ) could have been asked for an advisory ruling\textsuperscript{63}. Yet, despite the fact that intervention was explicitly declared illegal by the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan as it had no legitimate basis under neither international law nor the UN Charter \textsuperscript{64}, nothing similar ever took place.


\textsuperscript{60.} Draft resolution on Iraq: text, bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2795747.stm, February 24, 2003, p.1

\textsuperscript{61.} Baker P. Days of fire. Bush and Cheney in the White House, p.252

\textsuperscript{62.} Hallenberg J. and Karlsson H. The Iraq war: European perspectives on Politics, Strategy and Operations, p.38

\textsuperscript{63.} Fawn R. and Hinnebusch R.  Iraq war: Causes and Consequences, p.263
The special relationship with the UK

Great Britain has always been considered by Washington as its most important partner on FP, even more so after she joined the European Economic Community in 1973. The Iraq venture seems to confirm this trend\textsuperscript{65}.

Blair’s alignment with American FP started under Clinton, when he backed Operation Desert Fox, an operation of selective bombardment of Iraq\textsuperscript{66}. Later on, when the second Bush took office, the PM agreed on the need to enforce democracy in the Middle East. His intent on siding with Bush, however, was to temper his unilateralism\textsuperscript{67}. He expressed concerns about going to war without UN blessing to Powell, and together they persuaded the President of the need to take the issue to the UNGA\textsuperscript{68}. Notwithstanding the fact that the Joint Intelligence Committee’s draft provided little evidence that Iraq possessed any WMDs, on September 24, 2002, Britain released the first British dossier on Iraq maintaining that it was capable of launching chemical weapons “within 45 minutes” of an order to do so, posing a “current and serious threat”\textsuperscript{69} for the country. Soon after the dossier was published, the CIA released the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) upholding the British allegations\textsuperscript{70}. The British dossier together with the NIE helped Bush achieve a Senate vote of 77 to 23, that gave him unprecedented war-making authority\textsuperscript{71}. Additionally, it was Blair who convinced him of the need for a UN resolution, approved by all 15 members in November 2002\textsuperscript{72}. Later on, doubts raised by the British intelligence were eventually erased by the publishing of a second dossier, known as the “dodgy dossier”, as it emerged that part of it was copy-and-pasted from a thesis on the first Gulf War by an American Ph.D student\textsuperscript{73}. Despite massive public demonstrations, on March 18 Blair obtained 412 votes in favor of war (only 149 voted against, of which 15 from his own party) in the House of Commons and three days later went to war alongside the US\textsuperscript{74}.

\textsuperscript{64}. MacAskill E. and Boger J. “Iraq war was illegal and breached UN charter, says Annan”, The Guardian, September 16, 2004

\textsuperscript{65}. Fawn R. and Hinnebusch R. Iraq war: Causes and Consequences, p.38


\textsuperscript{67}. Fawn R. and Hinnebusch R. Iraq war: Causes and Consequences, p.38

\textsuperscript{68}. Cornish P. The Conflict in Iraq, 2003, p.63


\textsuperscript{70}. For more information on the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate please consult nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB129/nie.pdf

\textsuperscript{71}. Cornish P. The Conflict in Iraq, 2003, p.64

\textsuperscript{72}. The reference is to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441

In the light of these events, it is evident how at first, Blair declared he would back regime change in Baghdad only under certain conditions - that both the UN and public opinion sided with intervention - but when it became obvious they would not materialize, he made the choice of siding with Britain’s longtime ally, the United States of America. The decision to preserve the special relationship by supporting US efforts took precedence over any concerns Blair may have had on intervention, and on British membership to the EU. Blair went to war against his own majority and citizens, and when it became clear that he and Bush would never persuade the other two members of the Quad - France and Germany - he abandoned his EU colleagues, even accusing them of making intervention unavoidable.

On the very day he stepped down as PM, President Bush appointed him Quartet representative to the Middle East - a role he has recently resigned from - while at home Tony Blair was accused of leading Britain to her “biggest foreign policy blunder since the 1956 Suez crisis” becoming one of the most controversial figures in British politics. Since 2009 Blair and his entourage have been the center of the Iraq Inquiry, also known by Chilcot Inquiry after its chairman Sir John Chilcot, whose final report is still to be published. It is therefore a fact that, through its special relationship with the UK, the US was able to influence EU policy and divide its position on the invasion of Iraq.

**NATO**

Amid the crisis, some North American Treaty Organization (NATO) members, led by Britain, emerged as staunch supporters of the American approach. Even though only the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland (Bulgaria was holding a rotating seat in the UNSC, though) were NATO members at the time, the whole of Central Europe and the Baltic region behaved as a loyal and trustworthy ally. On January 30, 2003, an op-ed called “the Letter of the Eight” appeared in the Wall Street Journal. The letter, co-signed by Britain, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, expressed concerns about Iraq and conceded that resolution 1441 was its last opportunity to peacefully disarm.

After Powell made the hard pitch for war in the UNSC, another letter known as “the Vilnius letter,” signed by Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, stated that the SoS had provided

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75. Ibid., p.37 and 45
76. As pointed out by Fawn R. and Hinnebusch R. “Blair faced unprecedented critics and unrest from within his own party as well as public resistance... On 15 February 2003, upward of 1 million marchers took to the streets of London and Glasgow to demonstrate against war”. Fawn R. and Hinnebusch R. *Iraq war: Causes and Consequences*, p.42
77. Ibid., p.37; Helm T. “J’accuse!”, *The Telegraph*, March 15, 2003
78. As Groll E. reminded us “The position was given to him by the Bush White House — reportedly over the objections of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice — as a kind of consolation prize for going along with the Iraq War and ruining his career in British politics as a result”. Groll E. “After eight years and few wins, Tony Blair steps down as Middle East peace envoy”, *Foreign Policy*, May 27, 2015
81. Statement by the Prime Ministers of Britain, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland “United We Stand”, wsj.com/articles/SB1043875685267040744, January 30, 2003
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clear evidence of Iraq’s violation of the UNSCR and that they were inclined “to contribute to an international coalition to enforce its provisions and the disarmament of Iraq”.

“Since the collapse of the Soviet empire no state has had greater influence on the security architecture in Central Europe and the Baltic region than the US.” Their traumatic past with the Soviet Union made them particularly concerned about national security and highly reliant on NATO. Poland, whose president Kwasniewski was heard saying “if it’s President Bush’s vision it is mine”, was the most active supporter, providing direct military assistance to the operation. The CEE countries thus sided with America, and for that were regarded by the Pentagon as “friends”. SoD Rumsfeld approvingly named them the “New Europe”, stressing how “the center of gravity (was) shifting to the East” and even suggesting to move troops from Germany to Romania as a reward. Consequently, the US managed to exert leverage on its NATO allies. NATO transformed into a battleground: 16 members led by Britain, Italy, Spain and the CEECs endorsed the idea of a military strike, while 3 - France, Germany and Belgium - were firm in their opposition. Polarization was the product of US influence over the Atlanticist bloc.

The Quad

From the beginning to the end of the Iraqi crisis the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was hardly visible. Inaction was the result of division among the “Big Three”, who during the crisis in the Balkans had formed together with the US an informal directoire. The Quad, known as the Quint before 9/11 as it also included Italy, is an informal grouping whose members actively discuss FP events and coordinate their policy positions. It has the ability to influence the EU decision-making process and to shape its outcome, affecting interests of other EU member states without their participation. For this, it is not regarded in a positive way by other large member states and is considered by part of the literature as a competitor for the EU due to its frequent usage as an alternative framework for FP discussions. Still, considering that when it comes to FP matters, especially security and defense, the Big Three’s points of view are the hardest to reconcile, it has the merit of facilitating the EU in reaching a common position. Yet, the reverse is also true: when France, Germany and Britain cannot reach a deal, it is almost impossible for the EU to deliver a unified stance. This is exactly what happened on Iraq. As a result of their inability to compromise the fracture extended throughout the EU, frustrating any chances for the bloc to speak with a common voice.

82. Ibid., Fawn R. and Hinnebusch R. Iraq war: Causes and Consequences, p.84
86. Baker P. Days of fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House, p.242
90. Ibid., p.338
III. RESULTS

EU
In response to the attempt by the Franco-German axis to revive its leadership in the context of the 40th anniversary of the Elysee treaty, the leaders of some European countries signed two letters without consulting other member states, including Greece, who held the rotating presidency on the European Council at the time. Even though EU members eventually came to agree on a common position, it is clear, as observed by SoD Rumsfeld, how such pro-American statements produced the effect of polarizing Europe. The “Old Europe” as he designated active opponents to the Anglo-American policy led by France and Germany, against the “New Europe” namely Anglo-American supporters led by Britain and the CEECs. However, such a division was not the immediate result of Iraq but rather of antithetical views concerning relationship with the US: the Atlanticist one of bandwagoning-appeasement vs. the Gaullist one of balancing. The Iraq war served as a catalyst: it only brought those divergences to the surface and made the “gap between continental and Anglo-American countries on the one side and Old Europe and the Central and Eastern European candidates on the other” grow deeper.

CSDP
This partition had a strong impact on security and defense as Iraq forced Europe to re-address the issue of development of independent military capabilities and of relationship with NATO, reinforcing the position of the Atlanticists on both matters. Part of the literature believes Iraq had a positive impact on Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and even contributed to its relaunch. Not only did it become fully operational (as proved by the launch of EU Policy Mission in Bosnia in January 2003, Operation Concordia in FYROM the following March and Operation Artemis in Congo the following June) but also that November Chirac, Blair and Schroder agreed on the creation of a permanent civilian/military cell in order to enhance cooperation in the planning of civilian/military operations. However, since the criteria set for joining was capacity to deploy intervention forces, the outcome was much closer to the British than to the Franco-German idea of European defense. The same goes for the European Security Strategy (ESS) as the final document conferred more importance to NATO and relations with the US.

Enlargement
With regard to the European project, despite Chirac’s outburst criticizing EU candidate countries for having “missed a good opportunity to shut up” on Iraq and stressing how their accession to the Union had yet to be ratified, the split does not seem to have dramatically impaired enlargement as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia joined in 2004, Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 and Croatia in 2013. Thus, not only was the enlargement process not subject to a halt but it even empowered the Atlanticist bloc within the EU by the addition of these Atlanticist-minded countries.

91. Ibid., p.340
92. The Economist “Who speaks for Europe? France and Germany can no longer call the shots in Europe” February 6, 2003
Transatlantic relations

The decision to take with Iraq “was not war or peace but war according to the criteria of the US or to the legality of the UN”\(^\text{98}\). The clash on Iraq was a clash between two divergent ideas of security. Absolute security, which implies that when national security is at stake there is no alliance that holds, the endangered nation will endeavor to exercise control on everything it perceives as a threat to its territorial integrity or political independence (rogue states in this case) and it will be more keen on unilateral action\(^\text{99}\). The other idea is relative security, which stems from the Westphalian order and binds potential invaders in that “system of collective security” based on common institutions, procedures and obligations, that is the UN\(^\text{100}\). As shown, unlike Afghanistan where the international community full-fledgedly supported military action, for Iraq military action was never authorized by a UN resolution and was therefore illegal under the UN Charter\(^\text{101}\): absolute security thus triumphed over relative security.

What clashed, however, was also a very different perception of the terrorist threat. As pointed out by Keohane, at the time, the Europeans already considered terrorism to be a long-term challenge. They were more inclined to get to the root of the problem by trying to understand why sections of the society supported and eventually joined terrorist groups, and were more concerned about homeland security, especially after the Madrid and London bombings. The Americans on the other hand, in the aftermath of 9/11, favored a much more short-term approach. Their goal was in fact preventing a second 9/11, and were more concerned about the situation abroad, especially in the Middle East\(^\text{102}\). Therefore, “the Europeans did not support the idea of a war on terror and characterized the American approach as overreactive and militarily driven.”\(^\text{103}\) These are the reasons why international support for the American war on terror quickly dissolved in the aftermath of the Iraq venture and strong anti-American feelings began to pervade Europe. “Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and CIA renditions have damaged America’s standing in the world and have compromised our common struggle against terrorism”\(^\text{104}\). On those grounds, the Bush years took a grievous toll on the nation’s image. Not only did they “hurt the US’ standing as a global symbol of democracy and rights”\(^\text{105}\) but even “eroded transatlantic trust”\(^\text{106}\) as the administration showed no respect for the international legal obligations it had contributed to create and for international human rights law, in doing so detaching from the core values that characterize the West\(^\text{107}\).

97. CNN.com/World, “Chirac lashes out at new Europe”, February 18, 2003
98. Levy D. Pensky M. and Torpey J. Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic relations after the Iraq war, p. 172
99. Ibid., p.169-172
100.Ibid., p.169-172
101.MacAskill E. and Boger J. “Iraq war was illegal and breached UN charter, says Annan”
103.Ibid.
104.Ibid.; On the point see also “An Open Letter to the American People”
Part II: THE SYRIAN CRISIS

Introduction

A decade after the events in Iraq, the issue of chemical weapons and their use by an autocratic regime alarmed Western countries once again. In this case, though, the scenario happened to be slightly different as Iraq’s neighbor Syria was acknowledged by the whole international community to possess WMDs and to have used them against its population.

The Arab uprisings that brought down the autocratic regimes of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, did not spare Syria where anti-government protests quickly precipitated into civil warfare. As violence escalated, the Obama administration - currently on its final year - abandoned its policy of mere declarations condemning the government’s action and encouraging it to undertake democratic reforms. It became progressively more aggressive: sanctions were imposed, the opposition armed and, when the crisis reached its peak, military intervention threatened.108

After the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Assad’s atrocities and the bloody Syrian strife seemed to have been put on the back burner.109 However, recent events have proven this to not be the case. As the war dragged on, killing more than 250 thousand people and forcing millions to flee the country, and as Russia joined the coalition, the White House increased its efforts to remove Assad from power and bring the civil war to an end, efforts recently backed by the United Nations with the passing of UNSCR 2254.110

107. Zaborowski M. et al. (2006), Friends Again? EU-US Relations after the Crisis, European Union Institute for Security Studies, p.36; It was exactly as the realists had anticipated: “There is virtual no consensus in the world against an attack on Iraq... Ignoring that clear sentiment would result in a serious degradation in international cooperation with us against terrorism” Scowcroft B. “Don’t Attack Saddam”, p.2; “War with Iraq will jeopardize the campaign against al Qaeda by diverting resources and attention from that campaign and by increasing anti-Americanism around the globe. “War with Iraq is Not in America’s National Interests”


109. Groll E. “Syrian doctor: Assad’s barrel bombs have us fearing the sun”, Foreign Policy, May 26, 2015
I. CAUSES

Regime change

Regime change in Syria was not among the White House’s major FP objectives, at first. Actually, the Middle East as a whole was not a top priority; Asia was and former SoS Hillary Clinton made no secret of it. Therefore, when the Arab spring exploded, the President and his staff were suddenly forced to refocus on the Arab world and gave an uncertain and wary response because they had formulated no clear policy on the Middle East yet. They were unsure “about the value of political change for underlying American interests in the region”. Also, they wanted “to avoid situations where the US would break all ties with leaders from those countries” and believed that “the US should avoid putting itself at the centre of potential political change in other countries”. As a consequence, their first reaction was to encourage the government of President Bashar al-Assad to put an end to violence and pursue democratic reforms. Like its European allies, the US was also worried that regime change could undermine the already delicate regional equilibrium and even open the ground to al-Qaeda and similar terrorist organizations. The quest for regime change only came as a response to the worsening of the civil war following the August 2013 attacks. And even after Assad crossed his red line on the use of chemical weapons, Obama did everything in his power not to intervene militarily. Rather, he attempted to empower the moderate opposition by recognizing the Syrian National Coalition as “the legitimate representative” of the Syrian population, and later responded by providing the rebels with arms. Yet, this does not mean that the administration had no real desire for regime change, only that it did not wish to get involved more than necessary. Despite SoS John Kerry’s efforts during the Geneva II talks to support the opposition in its call for a transitional government, Assad and his key allies - mainly Russia - managed to put an end to the negotiations by announcing that new multi-candidate elections would be held in the region, a “parody of democracy” as Assad won another seven-year term. Later, when the jihadist group led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi launched a reconstruction of the old caliphate establishing itself on a territory that stretches from...
Aleppo in Syria to the province of Diyala in Iraq\textsuperscript{118}, Obama and his team have seemingly put aside the issue of Assad’s ouster and prioritized the halting of ISIL’s expansion. In reality however, the Vienna talks and the more recent UNSCR 2254 indicate that the administration has been seeking agreement to initiate a political process that will lead to a new constitution and new elections, this time to be closely monitored by the UN, which should mean that the Syrian dictator is experiencing his last term in office.\textsuperscript{119} 

**Realism and the Obama doctrine**

When Barack Obama took office in January 2009 his top priority was to end his predecessor’s marked interventionist FP\textsuperscript{120}. To deal with the legacy of the Bush administration, the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize winner and 44th President of the United States seems to have opted for the realist approach, as realists strongly believe in:

- nationalism
- diplomacy and negotiation
- soft power and balancing logic
- multilateralism.

“Realists tend to believe that the most powerful political ideology on the face of the earth is nationalism, not democracy” - Mearsheimer writes - and that “People in the developing world (especially in the Middle East) believe fervently in self-determination, which is the essence of nationalism”\textsuperscript{121}. This explains why, as it happened for Iraq, in those countries “liberators (soon turn) into occupiers, who then face a major insurrection”.\textsuperscript{122} As a consequence realists believe that democracy is not something that can be forced or imposed on other countries but rather something that local populations need to build and gain for themselves: the US can support democratic movements in their efforts but not be the driving force. For this reason as highlighted by Mearsheimer “realists are often accused of disliking democracy or even of being antidemocratic”\textsuperscript{123} and, in the case of President Obama, of undermining American exceptionalism\textsuperscript{124} simply because they claim American power has limits or that there is a “limited need to exercise it”\textsuperscript{125}. However the truth is that realists understand that there are circumstances under which democracy promotion, especially by force, may be counterproductive. They argue that diplomacy, which “by definition is very much a multilateral enterprise”\textsuperscript{126} and negotiation alike

\textsuperscript{117}Gerges F.A. “Syria: Elections in the time of carnage”, aljazeera.com, April 28, 2014

\textsuperscript{118}BBC.com “Battle for Iraq and Syria in maps” June 18, 2015; Napoleoni L. The Islamist Phoenix: Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East, p.13 and 54


\textsuperscript{120}“Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with the sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use. Our security emanates from the justness of our cause; the force of our example; the tempering qualities of humility and restraint”. President Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address, whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/president-barack-obamas-inaugural-address, January 20, 2009, p.3

\textsuperscript{121}Mearsheimer J.J. “Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq war: realism vs. neo-conservatism”, p.4

\textsuperscript{122}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., p.6. Although, as observed by Keck “American realists, like most Americans, favor liberal democracies” and “American realists’ democracy promotion record looks particularly impressive when compared to neoconservatives”. Keck Z. “Only realists spread democracy. History leaves no doubt that realists have been the most successful foreign policy faction in exporting democracy”, p.2

\textsuperscript{124}Beinart P. “The End of American Exceptionalism: The very attributes conservatives say make America special—religiosity, patriotism, and mobility—are ones they’ve inadvertently undermined. Is it any wonder millennials are less impressed with their country?”

\textsuperscript{125}Walt S.M. “Is Barack Obama more of a realists than I am?”, Foreign Policy, August 19, 2014, p. 4
are the best way to advance America’s national interests. That is because, unlike neoconservatives, they believe that the world operates according to balancing\textsuperscript{127} not bandwagoning logic. Therefore, according to their view, the best way to achieve US goals is engagement not only with America’s friends but even more with her foes. In the light of these considerations, perhaps professor Walt is right when he suggests that Obama may be more of a realist than he himself\textsuperscript{128}. In an attempt to restore world’s confidence in the US as a positive leader, President Obama has in fact relinquished hard power and based his doctrine on diplomacy, negotiation, soft power and multilateralism. With this, he hoped to overcome the crisis with its European allies and seek a rapprochement with the Arab world.\textsuperscript{129} As a consequence, although aspiring to have regime change in Syria, unlike Bush in Iraq, Obama has proved reluctant to act militarily. “Obama prefers more of a political settlement that eases Assad out of power than a prolonged armed conflict that may destroy the Syrian state”\textsuperscript{130} and have embraced a non-confrontational and containment strategy.\textsuperscript{131} Although he came to threaten military intervention as the crisis in Syria escalated, he did so only in an attempt to reinforce the credibility of his diplomatic efforts.

### Alleged possession of WMDs but no war

A year after Obama drew a red line on the use of chemical weapons, the Syrian government launched chemical attacks against sleeping civilians in the Damascus suburb of Goutha. Unlike Iraq, it was not only the US and the UK claiming to possess evidence that Syria possessed chemical weapons. France\textsuperscript{132}, and later UN inspectors\textsuperscript{133}, reported evidence of the use of the deadly nerve agent sarin against civilians. Despite the regime’s denial, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) inspectors reported that “The evidence available concerning the nature, quality and quantity of the agents used on 21 August indicated that the perpetrators likely had access to the chemical weapons stockpile of the Syrian military, as well as the expertise and equipment necessary to manipulate safely large amount of chemical agents.”\textsuperscript{134}, which seems to imply that the attack came unmistakably from the Syrian government\textsuperscript{135}. Therefore, contrary to Iraq, evidence of chemical weapons was soon found. Yet, military intervention was avoided.

\textsuperscript{126}Ibid., p.2

\textsuperscript{127}Contrary to the bandwagoning logic, this logic postulates that “when one state puts its fist in another state’s face, the target usually does not throw its hands in the air and surrender. Instead, it looks for ways to defend itself: it balances against the threatening state”\textsuperscript{127}, p.3

\textsuperscript{128}Walt S.M. “Is Barack Obama more of a realists than I am?”


\textsuperscript{130}Gerges F.A. “The Obama approach to the Middle East: the end of America’s moment?”, p.310

\textsuperscript{131}Wergin C. “Is Obama’s Foreign Policy Too European?”. To some Obama is even adopting a “buckpassing” strategy. Walt S.M. “Is Barack Obama more of a realists than I am?”, p.3

\textsuperscript{132}Sanchez F. in Washington and Farmer B. in Brussels “US unmoved by French evidence of sarin use in Syria. America has appeared to show little urgency in response to growing calls for intervention after France said evidence showed Syria’s regime was using chemical weapons”, The Telegraph, June 6, 2013


II. VENUES OF INFLUENCE

The UN

Like Iraq, the UN was the main forum where disarmament was discussed. After draft resolutions on Syria were vetoed by Russia and China, finally on September 27, 2013, the UNSC managed to unanimously agree on a resolution. Resolution 2118 prohibited Syria from “using, developing, producing, otherwise acquiring, stockpiling or retaining chemical weapons, or transferring them to other States or non-State actors” and underscored that “no party in Syria should use, develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer chemical weapons.” 136 Additionally, on September 14, 2013, “the Syrian Arab Republic deposited with the Secretary-General its instrument of accession to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction and declared that it shall comply with its stipulations and observe them faithfully and sincerely.” 137 On these grounds, the resolution also required Syria to allow personnel from the OPCW or the UN into the country and provide them with “immediate and unfettered right to inspect any and all chemical weapons sites.” 138 However, unlike in the vetoed resolutions, Syria was not condemned for the events of August 21, 2013, nor were sanctions threatened in the event of non-compliance. As emphasized by the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, unlike the case of Iraq, the resolution was not passed under Chapter VII. 139 As it happened for Iraq, the UN was divided but along different lines. It was not an internal European division. The US and the UK had no need to convince France and Germany that the Syrian government possessed and made use of chemical weapons, since their own intelligence services came to the same conclusions. 140 The rest of the international community did not need much convincing as well since UN inspectors found “clear and convincing evidence” 141 that in the attacks perpetrated in the Ghouta district the Assad government had used nerve gas agent sarin. 142 This time the UN experienced a split which consisted of the US and its European allies including Israel, Jordan, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies on one side, and Russia and China, eventually backed by Brazil and India, on the other.

From an ideological point of view, being autocratic and repressive regimes themselves, Moscow and Beijing could never have favored toppling an analogous regime like that of Bashar al-Assad and there has been no change to that to this day. Also, as a realist approach would suggest, both regimes have significant interests in the Middle East, especially in Syria. In 2010, the European Commission listed China as Syria’s third-largest importer, while Russia had arm deals with Syria for around $4 billion. 143 Geopolitics plays an important role as well. The

135. Chulov M. “Sarin gas in attack on Syrian civilians probably government’s, says UN”, The Guardian, March 6, 2014


137. Ibid., p.1

138. Ibid., p.5 and 7

139. The Economist “The UN and Syria: It’s a deal” September 28, 2013

140. Levs J. “What’s the evidence of Syrian chemical weapons attack?”, CNN.com, September 4, 2013


142. Levs J. and Yan H. “War crime: U.N. finds sarin used in Syria chemical weapons attack”, CNN.com, September 17, 2013; Chulov M. “Sarin gas in attack on Syrian civilians probably government’s, says UN”
Kremlin is in fact particularly concerned about the prospect of regime change in Syria, fearing it could hamper his clout in the region. As a result, up to September 2013, due to their status as permanent members of the UNSC, they were blocking any proposal that would sanction the Syrian government’s crimes or ask for its resignation, thus provoking a UNSC gridlock. In this context the US impact was crucial. By threatening military intervention and turning to Congress, President Obama gave the impression that he was serious about the prospect of invasion and was able to unblock the UNSC and save the day. As pointed out by The Economist “still angry about the military intervention in Libya…which was framed as protecting civilians but ended with the death of Muammar Qaddafi at the hands of rebel forces, Russia is unwilling to endorse similar action in Syria”. By threatening military intervention, the US thus managed to persuade Russia to assume a more conciliatory tone, to the point that the Kremlin even broached the idea of putting the Syrian chemical arsenal under international control and voted in favor of UNSCR 2118.

The special relationship with the UK
On Syria, Great Britain once again backed the US. British PM David Cameron took the lead, together with François Hollande, in confirming American laboratory test results concerning the use of sarin and advocating a military response. However, on August 29, 2013, he was unable to persuade the British Parliament to favor intervention. On that very day the House of Commons rejected the government’s motion on Syria by 13 votes - 285 votes to 272. On this basis, a few commentators have argued that the special relationship between the UK and the US might be endangered. Yet Cameron himself emphasized that “Britain isn’t going to be involved in this specific military action, but the special relationship between Britain and America is as strong today as it was” before. On the other side of the Atlantic, SoS John Kerry seemed to be of the same mind. In a press conference in London, he reassured the PM by saying “Our bond is bigger than one vote, it’s bigger than one moment in history, it is about values. It’s about rules of the road, rules by which human beings try to organize their societies and offer people maximum freedom and opportunity, respecting rights, and finding a balance in a very complicated world. And we have no better partner in that effort than Great Britain and we are grateful for that. Our special relationship with the UK is not just about Syria”. However, after the UK general election made exiting the EU a real possibility, feelings might well change on that side of the Atlantic.

143. Yan H. “Syria allies: Why Russia, Iran and China are standing by the regime”, CNN.com, August 30, 2013
144. The Economist “Syria’s crisis: The UN stands divided” February 5, 2012
145. Ibid.
148. Wintour P. “Sarin gas was used in Syrian chemical weapons attack, says David Cameron. British PM says British laboratory tests confirm use of nerve gas as leaders meet for G20 summit in Saint Petersburg”. The Guardian, September 5, 2013
The truth of the matter is that the UK Parliament voting against military action was only one among the many legacies of Iraq. The former PM is highly disliked in Britain for leading the country into a “bad war” and the current one had to distance himself from the way things were handled back in 2003. Cameron admitted it himself by stating “for some in the debate in the House of Commons it wasn’t about evidence, it wasn’t about chemical weapons, it was about how they felt let down over Iraq.” In other words, public opinion did not back intervention because it did not want to get enmeshed in another Iraq. The same can be argued for the United States. It is very likely that Capitol Hill would have voted against an authorization of military force (AUMF) in Syria if it was offered the possibility. That is because, like the UK has what professor Cox calls the “Tony Blair factor” the US has the “George W. Bush factor” affecting its public in a similar way. Thus, the US did not get to influence the UK position on military intervention for two reasons: firstly, the use of force was not Obama’s first option and as a consequence he had no intention to pressure his ally in that sense; the second is the “Tony Blair factor” and the need for the new occupant of 10 Downing Street to draw a line with those FP decisions that led to the Iraq disaster. In other words, America was unsuccessful in exerting leverage only because there was no real desire to, as she was reticent about war herself. Perhaps Cameron realized that, which explains why he did not strive to persuade his own majority and public.

**NATO**

Like the case of Iraq, NATO experienced a split because, while all major NATO allies agreed on the need to punish the Syrian government because “any use of such weapons is unacceptable and cannot go unanswered”, not all agreed that the response entailed military action. Among those leading the charge for a military solution was France. Hollande announced his readiness for a military campaign against Syria “even in the face of hostile public opinion” and his foreign minister Laurent Fabius attempted to keep the military threat credible by proposing the adoption of a resolution under Chapter VII. Germany, traditionally non-interventionist since World War II, although more cautious at first, came to agree that the use of chemical weapons was “a serious breach of the international convention, which categorically bans the use of these weapons” and it had to “be punished” and could not “remain...
without consequences”. Berlin stated that if confirmed, “Germany would be among those who consider consequences to be appropriate”, implying that it might even take part in a targeted military intervention.

As for Central and Eastern Europe, contrary to 2003, it showed no enthusiasm at the prospect. Poland declared itself indisposed to “participate in an intervention in Syria” and convinced it would not “put a stop to the crimes”. Poland was the first to float a possible diplomatic solution was for Russia to secure Syria’s chemical arsenal. A similar response came from the Czech Republic, where the transitional government of Jiri Rusnok balked “We are not happy about the conflict, but we do not believe that a solitary action can solve anything. We remain skeptical.” And Hungary, whose government no longer regarded the Assad government as legitimate, but still announced it would not participate in the event of military intervention. Latvia was the only exception, as its government declared full backing to a military solution even in the absence of a UNSCR. Considering that the above mentioned declarations were all made in September 2013 following the UK no vote, and that the UK is the unwritten leader of the Atlanticist bloc in Europe, it is reasonable to think that the CEECs, unsure about what to do, chose to follow the UK position. Rumsfeld’s “Old” and “New” Europe thus switched seats. Yet, this produced no effect as military intervention never occurred.

**The Quad**

Its members, until the UK vote, did not appear deeply divided over Syria as they were over Iraq, as proved by the EU’s united call for Assad to resign in August 2011. As emphasized by the former French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Alain Juppé, “the EU was the first to impose sanctions against Bashir al-Assad…The freezing of assets, visa bans, the oil embargo: we took strong measures without delay”. However, when the issue of military intervention was raised the European members of the Quad - France, Britain and Germany - answered the call as individual nation states not as EU member states. The rest of the EU simply followed the positions taken by one of the three - Denmark joined France, Italy and Spain the UK, the Netherlands Germany etc.

Reaching a common position on Syria could have been easier this time as evidence of WMDs was found and confirmed, but national foreign policy considerations were prioritized. The UK endorsed the US at first, but then public opinion and the legacy of Tony Blair forced her to retreat. As for France and Germany, they were particularly concerned about enhancing cooperation with the US. The French “have been wanting a rapprochement with the US ever since (2003)...France has been on a long rapprochement with the US and it found a culmination, a conclusion with what Hollande would have done if he could have done it. He would have intervened”. In Germany, when Merkel said she

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159. The Economist “France and Syria: The French resolution”, September 10, 2013; “France takes on Britain’s former US wingman role over Syria: Britain has abandoned its longtime role as America’s loyal wingman after Parliament halted Cameron’s march to war against Assad”

160. Hewitt G. “Syria crisis response is test for Europe”, BBC.com, August 27, 2013


162. Salzmann M. “Eastern Europe split over Syria intervention”, wsxs.org September 6, 2013

163. Ibid.; Day M. in Warsaw and McElroy D. “Syria: Polish foreign minister takes credit for chemical weapons plan America and Russia came together on a plan to put Syria’s chemical weapons under international control after a lobbying campaign by the Polish foreign minister who put the idea to both sides last month”, The Telegraph, September 11, 2013

164. Ibid.

165. Ibid.

166. Ibid.

167. ambafrance-us.org “Europe/integration – Arab Spring/Syria – CSDP” February 17, 2012

168. Morillas P. “Assessing the EU’s Response to the Syrian Crisis”
would have favored a targeted military intervention her intent was to not “sound like Schroeder”, accused
of having taken Germany alongside Russia and France over Iraq, harming relations with the US for
reasons of personal interest.¹⁷⁰ As a consequence, the US was once again able to divide the EU and
influence its response, because both France and Germany were driven by their determination to foster
better relations with it.

III. RESULTS

EU

On June 24, 2013, the EU agreed on a comprehensive response to the events in Syria. Four objectives were set: supporting a political solution, preventing further destabilization of the region, discussing repercussions of the conflict for the EU, and providing economic and humanitarian assistance.¹⁷¹ The author believes a closer analysis of these goals reveals what the EU strategy in Syria is, and more generally what the EU’s role in the Middle East is.

The resort to the verb “support” to express the first goal is simply crucial. Oxford dictionary defines supporting as “giving approval, comfort or encouragement to someone” or “giving assistance to someone, especially financially”. This is exactly what the EU is doing. First of all, the EU is supporting (in this case, it is obviously the first meaning that applies) a political solution. The EU is in fact not actively taking policy decisions, rather its actions seem limited to approving or encouraging what the Americans propose - perhaps with the exception of sanctions, as it was the EU who took the lead. The Americans call for Assad to step down, then the EU calls for Assad to step down. Again, the Americans recognize the National Coalition, then the EU recognizes the National Coalition. This pattern continues, and these are just a few examples to show how the EU is reacting to what other international actors, mainly the US, are doing not playing an active role in the Middle East.

As for the other objectives, they are interconnected. The EU is deeply concerned with the consequences that conflict has within its borders, mainly immigration, and is providing support (in this case it is the second meaning that applies) to the region in order to avoid its further destabilization, meaning more refugees. There is no doubt that the EU is the largest humanitarian donor to Syria with a total funding to the region of upward of €5 billion, including contributions coming from its member states, plus another €3 billion pledged at the “Supporting Syria” conference recently held in London.¹⁷² However, despite its efforts, since civil war erupted in 2011 over 11 million people, of which about 814 thousands have applied for asylum in the EU, have fled Syria, too often with tragic consequences, triggering the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II.¹⁷³ The EU in a supporting role, thus, perfectly depicts the role the EU is playing in Syria. It is supporting the US and it is supporting the refugees. As a consequence, the EU is still “more of a payer than a player” in the Middle East and is hiding its migration concerns behind the mask of a civilian power.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹. Interview with Cox M.
¹⁷⁰. Ibid.
Transatlantic relations

In 2002 Robert Kagan suggested that “Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus: they agree on little and understand one another less and less”. Syria has proved his argument to be completely wrong. Contrary to his prediction, not only have transatlantic relations survived, but they have even strengthened as America and Europe are becoming more alike. The charges against Obama’s FP are thus legitimate. His FP is really “European” as it is based on negotiation, diplomacy and engagement, rather than the military and the use of force. However, it is not too European. The term “European” is mainly used by the GOP to accuse Obama of destroying American exceptionalism by pursuing a more consensus-based FP and limiting interventions overseas. Yet Obama’s FP perfectly reflects public opinion’s concerns. “The Iraq experience…altered American perceptions of the wisdom unilateralism, the utility of force and willingness to act”, turning Americans against military intervention. They want less involvement abroad and on a more consensual basis. This is why the President gives more credit to the international community and where it stands and this is the underlying basis for how he has conducted the situation in Syria thus far.

Therefore, if someone has become more European,

**GRAPH 1**

American public opinion on potential US military invasions*

*The above bar chart is based on a table in [gallup.com](http://gallup.com)*

174.europarl.europa.eu “Middle East peace process: EU must be a full player, not just a payer” July 13, 2010


176.Wergin C. “Is Obama’s Foreign Policy Too European?”

177.See graph I - Jones J. M. “Support for Iraq Military Action Low in Historical Context: Americans oppose Iraq military action by 54% to 39%”, [gallup.com](http://gallup.com) June 25, 2014

178.Fawcett L. “The Iraq war ten years on: assessing the fallout”, p.337

179.Beinart P. “The End of American Exceptionalism: The very attributes conservatives say make America special—religiosity, patriotism, and mobility—are ones they’ve inadvertently undermined. Is it any wonder millennials are less impressed with their country?”
Perhaps it is the Americans rather than Obama. Still, one huge difference exists between American and European FP. America is a military superpower who has recently embraced diplomacy and negotiation tactics but still possesses military capabilities and the ability to deploy them, as President Obama has recently made clear during his statement in the context of the historic nuclear deal with Iran. The EU, on the other hand, is a civilian/normative power who relies on soft power, diplomacy and negotiation, and who only possesses limited military capabilities and extraordinarily agrees on their mobilization. America has credibility because it is capable of backing diplomacy with military means. For George W. Bush hard power was the first option, for Barack Obama it is the last. Either way, it is still an option for the Americans to use and should the circumstances arise, although reluctantly, Obama would resort to armed forces, as he did in Libya and as he did in Pakistan when bin Laden was killed.

Conclusions
The aim of this paper was to establish how the US exerts influence on EU FP and whether any fundamental change in this sense has occurred in the decade between the Iraq war and the Syrian crisis.

As for the first point, the paper illustrated how essentially four areas are the venues through which the US exerts leverage - the UN, the special relationship with the United Kingdom, NATO and the Quad. Of the four, the most crucial one is unquestionably its special relationship with the UK as by guiding the Atlanticist bloc Britain acts by and large as America’s most reliable partner in the other three frameworks. The proposed interpretation maintains that the partnership has not been damaged by the vote on Syria, resulting from the “Tony Blair factor” and likely to remain an isolated case, as recently confirmed by the British parliament’s vote in favor of airstrikes against ISIL. As a corollary, the quasi-identification between American and British FP objectives and thus US influence in Europe was expected to endure if not increase, at least until May 2015 when the Tories won another mandate relaunching the prospect of the “Brexit”.

As for the second point, it is undeniable that something has changed. The fundamental consequence of Iraq was a complete rejection by the American public of those policies that produced it. America has changed because Americans have shifted their attitudes against invasions abroad. They have reverted to non-interventionism, diplomacy and multilateralism and elected a president who made these promises and is largely abiding by them.

On the other side of the Atlantic, despite an apparent change in alliances due to internal dynamics, the EU does not seem to have undertaken any substantial change. Its policy in critical situations is still one of bandwagoning and of privileging humanitarian aspects over military ones, which makes coordination on security and defense matters difficult. As a consequence, while the US has increased its credibility by turning to diplomacy, the EU instead keeps hiding its incapacity to acquire independent military capabilities behind its alleged civilian role.

The conclusion of this study is that transatlantic relations, contrary to expectations, have strengthened as a reaction to the Iraq war. However, it is very likely that they will be put to the test again soon if the EU does not take a step into the US direction as well, which something like Syria showed is not really the case for now, and in the event Britain decides to abandon the EU.

180. Ibid.
181. Statement by the President on Iran, whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/14/statement-president-iran, July 14, 2015
183. See graph I - Jones J. M. “Support for Iraq Military Action Low in Historical Context: Americans oppose Iraq military action by 54% to 39%”, gallup.com June 25, 2014
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L’Istituto Italiano di Studi Strategici “Niccolò Machiavelli” è un’associazione culturale senza scopo di lucro costituita a Roma nel 2010.

L’Istituto, think tank indipendente, nasce dall’iniziativa di un gruppo internazionale di personalità del mondo economico, accademico ed istituzionale civile e militare, con l’obiettivo di contribuire alla rinascita del pensiero strategico italiano.

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