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Explaining the War on Iraq

The Concept of Preemption

The world has changed for all Americans after September 11, 2001, especially for American policymakers and the President. We discovered on September 11, 2001, how vulnerable we were as an open society to the kind of terrorist attack that took place on that day. We understood more or less immediately that what happened on September 11 could happen again. Next time it could possibly happen with weapons of mass destruction: chemical, biological, nuclear or radiological. Anyone could kill, not 3000 people, but 30 000, 300 000 people. We realized that we had against us people deeply determined to achieve their vision of an Islamic Universe, an extremist version of Islam. An Islamic Universe in which infidels, mostly Muslims as well as non-Muslims, would be forced to live by their beliefs. That is deeply ideological, like fascism, or Nazism, or communism in a sense. Therefore, we were compelled to respond to September 11. On that day, President Bush said something of great importance which was not understood, and may even by now has not been understood: "We will not distinguish between those who committed these acts and the states that harbor them". For the first time the American President was saying: "We will hold responsible not just individual terrorists, but the countries that make it possible for them to operate by offering them support, including what is the most important: sanctuary". Indeed, Al-

Qa'ida had enjoyed the sanctuary of Afghanistan, the place to which young people could be recruited, where they could be observed and trained. The most talented among them could be selected with respect to the mission they might one day carry out. They had research facilities, modern communications, sophisticated ability to produce documentation and all the infrastructure that it takes to support an organization capable of an action similar to September 11. When our President said: "We will not distinguish between the terrorists and the states that harbor them", he set the stage for what became and what remains.

Following this first pronouncement made by the President, we went to Afghanistan. We have destroyed the Taliban and the Iraqi regime. We went to Iraq because after September 11 the possibility of weapons of mass destruction remaining in the hands of a regime that hated the United States and that had a history of weapons of mass destruction presented a risk that could not be ignored. As for the history of weapons of mass destruction, we had the testimony of UN security inspectors: Rolf Ekeus and Richard Butler. We had the accounting of weapons which had been produced in Iraq without documentation of their destruction. The UN had expected Hans Blix to verify evidence from Saddam's regime that they had destroyed their weapons of mass destruction. Such evidence was not presented. In consequence, we took military action.

There are people who suggest today that it was a wrong decision to invade Iraq due to the fact that weapons of mass destruction were not found. That's more like saying that because your house did not burn down last year, it was a mistake to buy insurance against fire. Decisions to deal with risks, decisions to manage those risks, are based on the best information available at the time. There is no other way to manage risk, except on the basis of the best assessments. The assessment we made was Saddam's failure to account for the destruction of his weapons. His pattern of hiding objects strongly suggested that he had hidden weapons of mass destruction. If he had done so, the risk after the experience of September 11 was intolerable, and we should not apologize for that decision. It was the right decision.

There were other reasons, apart from weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Saddam's regime. They were not given prominence in the debate before the invasion of Iraq, even

though they really deserve it. There should be more discussions on what it means to stand by wavering while a regime like Saddam's regime is carrying out a brutal, sadistic policy. We are now exhuming mass graves in Iraq and when we are finished, we will probably count 300 000 to 400 000 people murdered by Saddam Hussein.

We took that action and we made some mistakes. Baghdad fell down after 21 days of the operation. It was not the war that many people had expected it to be. In many of the debates at that time, including in Europe, people were predicting tens of thousands of civilian casualties. During the weaker days of the war, there were stories on how we were backed down. We should have turned over responsibility to the Iraqis immediately upon entering Baghdad. We did not do that, and the liberation became an occupation, which is not a good situation. Nobody wants to be occupied. We made a mistake, which has been corrected by now. We have been turning things over to the Iraqis. There are going to be elections in January and the worst is over, even though the Iraqis will continue to be bombed by desperate people and by Jihad's holy warriors. They have understood that they have no future in democratic Iraq, because success in Iraq will be a very serious blow to their ambitions and beliefs.

The discovery of September 11 that we had waited too long to take action against Al-Qa'ida led us to an idea that it is necessary from time to time to act preemptively, rather than wait until the moment when we have been struck. It is controversial in Europe and even among some people in America. There is nothing exaggerated about the idea of preemption; it is nothing more than common sense. If there were missiles being placed on a launching pad and we could destroy them before they could be launched, we should do so. We don't have to wait for the missiles to land, we can destroy them on the launching pad. Obviously, it is a more controversial and more difficult decision if we are not thinking about a missile on a launching pad, but maybe about a missile in a missile-producing factory. Maybe it is nuclear material, which is in the process of being converted from furnaces into weapons.

I. From Deterrence to Preemption

The idea that we can only act after the fact of aggression seems inadequate in the 21st century. The idea that one can only respond to acts of aggression is a consequence of the aftermath of World War II. The United Nations Charter, the UN concept rose out of the experience of Poland. The international community was not going to stand by again and watch tanks come across the border. This is not a threat that we are facing in the 21st century. The threat we are facing today comes from fanatic terrorists, and it is simply not acceptable to wait until an attack has taken place. During the Cold War we felt that we were able to protect ourselves by having deterrent capability. We were strong enough to resist local aggressions. We deterred possible aggressors, hence NATO and the American troop deployments in Europe, plans for reinforcements in Europe and the nuclear capability that could have been used if we had been attacked by nuclear weapons. The attacker knew that we could respond and deliver a terrible punishment. It was not a rational decision to make the attack in the first place.

The United Nations is well out of tune with the threats of the 21st century. The UN needs to be modernized, to make itself relevant to the 21st century. One way to do that would be to embrace the principle that nations are justified to take action preventing acts of terror against those who prepare or facilitate acts of terror. The United Nations would give its approval for preemption in very specific circumstances. The prospects are not very good that the UN will do it any time soon. There is no chance that they will do it until we start discussing and debating the merits of such an approach. An argument has been made that if the United States demands the right to act preemptively to protect itself, everybody else can demand the same right. The implication is: the US should not demand this right, because somebody else might demand that right and start military action on this basis. However, the American expectation for that right does not make it easier for any other country to use force preemptively. It will not affect the behavior of other nations. The example which is usually thrown out is India and Pakistan. We say it's all right to act preemptively. The Pakistanis use that excuse to attack India, and India for attacking Pakistan. Even if the UN does not confirm that states have the right to act preemptively in certain circumstances, it will not have any influence on India's and

Pakistan's behavior. They will do what they are going to do. It does not mean that the US should not demand the right to act preemptively to protect itself.

It would be a tremendous advance if the international community recognized that there were times when acting preemptively was justified because it would constitute a significant deterrent. Prior to September 11, countries did not fear that supporting terrorism would end up by jeopardizing their own interests. The Taliban regime seems to be a very good example. Before September 11, the United States was the single major contributor of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. The aid given to Afghanistan equaled 400 million dollars. The same regime that was receiving that assistance opened the country to a terrorist organization operating against the United States. Did not they think that they were jeopardizing this flow of aid? Did not they think we might take some action against them? The answer is: they did not. They did not not because we had never done that before.

The United Nations should recognize that there are states supporting terrorist activity on the one hand, and that there are states threatened by that terrorist activity on the other hand. The states threatened by terrorist activity should have the right to take preemptive action. A clear change in UN policy would reinforce deterrence against the states offering sanctuary and other support to terrorists. It would be a very powerful signal for them. It would be a very important and positive development.

II. The New Concept of Preemption

The experience of the Cold War obviously does not work when the threat does not originate from any identifiable place or territory, from any identifiable state, and when the perpetrators are capable of suicide. In Russia the other day, before they killed a large number of children at school, the terrorists were quoted to say: "We are going to die". They knew that they were going to die. Indeed, a cult of death has developed around us. Now we are experiencing this kind of terror in which we may reasonably expect that some of the terrorists are eager to die. How do we deter someone who is eager to die? We need new concepts to protect ourselves against terrorism in the 21st century. One of those concepts is preemption. How long you wait depends in part on how confident you are

about your intelligence. Our intelligence was pretty bad with respect to weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It should make us very conscious about waiting until the last minute. Our intelligence is not absolutely reliable and that is why it is a very big risk to wait too long.

Clearly, we want good intelligence. There is no advantage to us to act and discover afterwards that it was unnecessary to act. There is no advantage to us not to act and to discover that we should have acted. It is a kind of challenge to find the right balance. Waiting until the last minute is adequate if we are very confident about our intelligence. If we are not, we consider whether we can afford waiting until the last minute. I will give a very specific example. We know that the Iranians are trying to acquire nuclear weapons. It is pretty obvious from the shape of their policy, from what they have sent to the IAEA and what has turned out to be untrue, and from what has been discovered about their activities. Nobody wants military action against Iran. How long do we wait? If we were sure that we would have a 24-hour notice before they produce it, then we could wait until that 24-hour notice, but we are not sure.

Another example: in 1981 the Israelis destroyed a reactor in Iraq. They did it even though it was not close to producing nuclear material. It was probably 3-4 years away from producing that material, but it was about to be loaded with nuclear fuel. If once nuclear fuel had gone into Iraq's reactor, it would not have been possible to carry out a surgical military strike against that facility without spreading nuclear material in the area. It would have been very damaging. A lot of innocent Iraqis who had lived near that reactor could die. The Israelis, after an organized debate, took the decision to destroy that reactor before the fuel was loaded. Now there is a discussion on the problem when the threat is imminent. The idea of waiting until the threat is imminent entails the risk that we will wait too long while our intelligence is not perfect. We really have to get a balance. We do not walk around blind, attacking anyone who we might. We act on a case-by-case basis. There is no generalization that helps us here. On that basis, we do not want to act a moment too soon, but we also do not want to act a moment too late.

Preemption is a very broad concept. Simply, it is an idea of acting before one is attacked. The Israelis acted in 1981 before nuclear weapons could be produced for fear they might

be used to attack them. It was not imminent, but there were special circumstances. They carried out a masterful surgical strike, in which they destroyed the facility that posed a potential threat to them and they did very little damage beyond that. The United States went into Iraq preemptively, but unfortunately the situation was not the same. If a single installation had been involved and we had known its location, we probably could have taken preemptive action against it. Unfortunately, we did not have detailed knowledge of where Saddam's weapons were hidden. We believed that Saddam's weapons might have been located anywhere, therefore it was not a real option. We believed in any case that as long as Saddam was in power, he posed a threat. If he went, and his sons were in power, they also posed a threat. That particular case does not seem to be the best example of preemption. Saddam's regime posed the following threats: a possible attack on us or, what troubled us even more, handing over weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. It was clearly a very different situation from one in which there was a defined target, as in the case of North Korea or Iran. At a certain point we could define precisely that there was a critical element of their nuclear program and that it could be destroyed in a surgical strike.

Would we preempt today, based on today's knowledge? We had to come to terms with Saddam Hussein. I have never hidden the fact that I was for removing Saddam Hussein. For a very long time, I wrote letters and co-signed letters with other people, including Donald Rumsfeld, beginning from 1998. We wrote that we should take action when the inspectors were expelled, because Saddam was a threat and it was only getting worse over time and not better. That was the situation when we actually went in to keep sanctions in place, because Russia, China and France were opposed. Only the US and the UK together were holding on to the sanctions, which were widely believed to kill babies in Iraq. In fact, there was plenty of money being diverted from the needs of the Iraqi people to Saddam's palaces and pockets. Now, we are going to learn a lot more about the Oil for Food Program. There is an investigation which goes forward. We relaxed the sanctions in order to keep them. There was massive violation of the embargo across the borders with Syria, Turkey and Jordan. The prospect of Saddam as a victor of the West emerging after the invasion of Kuwait and the sanctions was pretty awful. In a broader sense, we had to

take action against Saddam Hussein. If we had known that he did not possess stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, that might have affected the way we went about it, but it was not fundamental. We are certainly learning from that experience.

III. What's After Preemption?

After the preemptive action in Iraq there was a plan which turned out to be wrong. For example, we anticipated and believed that there would be a large number of refugees and therefore we made a huge effort to prepare to feed, to house, to clothe and sustain a million refugees. The Governor-General who handled refugees in Kurdish areas was brought in for that purpose and was given a very substantial budget and a lot of authority. He prepared to handle a million refugees and it turns out: there are no refugees. A lot of resources were engaged to prepare something that never actually had to be done. Resources were not given to other things that needed to be done, like better security in the face of looting, which did a lot of damage in the early days immediately after the war. There are no handbooks describing how to build a civil society in the aftermath of military conflict. Every situation is different. It was a mistake allowing liberation to become an occupation, because we made a mistake not to trust the Iraqis enough. There was a basis for trusting them, there was an Iraqi opposition that had mostly lived in exile for a long time, but also many of them had lived in the northern part of the country, which was not under Saddam's control. If we had done this more intelligently, we would have handed responsibility over to the Iraqis more or less immediately.

Then we would hope that for example the Adenauer Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation would show up in Baghdad the next day ready to help. The German government was not ready to help. They opposed the war and when the war was over they said that they were not going to give support. The EU basically announced: "We are not going to help". There was the donor conference, at which the European Union with all its wealth came up with 250 million dollars for Iraq. It was a way of punishing the United States for having done the war, while France and Germany did not want the US to go to war. In effect, this attitude was too bad for the people of Iraq. The Europeans said: "We are not going to put money into it", and they did not.

We are not very good at using economic assistance to solve real problems. I am separating economic assistance from humanitarian aid. We can send food to people in Somalia when they are starving, and we can probably save lives by doing that. When it comes to economic assistance we, as well as the World Bank, have a tendency to give assistance through the steadiest institution that prevents the development of free markets and may do more damage. I would say that there is a division of labor in the world. Nobody quite planned it that way. We have a large military budget, but Germany has almost no military budget. Therefore, you provide aid and we provide firepower. We are generally on the same side and we are both needed.

There is a lot of criticism about how little assistance the United States gives. When we add together government and private assistance, we provide more than any other country in the world. Every dollar that goes from our official aid programs is followed by five dollars which go from the private finance of aid programs. The Americans are very generous with respect to the rest of the world. Germany should reconsider its position and actually do something in Iraq. It is hard and dangerous to be an aid worker in Iraq now, as we have seen. It will not last forever and I hope that the European Union will meet its responsibilities and do something for the 25 million people of Iraq.

A little digression: with some pride, the EU committed a lot of money to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in 1995. Sadly, it went to the corrupt Palestinian authority, especially a lot of it went into Yassir Arafat's pocket, and unfortunately that money was not used to shape Palestinian policy. If only the EU had said: "You have got the last check from us, and as long as you are bombing discothèques and school buses, there is no more money for you until you stop it", it could have helped the peace process. I wish it had been done, and I am afraid that the checks kept flowing even as the terrorism intensified. It is a real tragedy for everyone, for the Israelis and for the Palestinians. The EU missed an important opportunity here. It was appalling when Chris Patten did everything he could to prevent a serious inquiry into the corruption of these funds. Now it is pretty well understood they were not used for the benefit of the Palestinians. At least none of the money that was not nailed down was used for the benefit of the Palestinians.

Good intentions are important, but in practice a lot of that money had negative consequences.

IV. Military Power and Democracy

We should not use military power to try to create democracies. I and others are accused of believing that we can impose democracy by force. I have never said anything even remotely like that. Sometimes an entrenched dictatorship is an obstacle to democracy. There was no hope for democracy in the Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Now there is hope for democracy. The removal of Saddam Hussein does not produce democracy, it only produces an opportunity. I am certainly not an advocate of military action to impose democracy. Sometimes it is the only way to open the door to democracy.

It is quite true that democracies do not start aggressive wars. They do not start them because you can not mobilize the public for an aggressive war. Most people will not choose this option. If one is attacked, it is another matter. The world would be safer if the world could have more democracies. Dictatorships acquire enemies. The political nature of dictatorships is to justify the secret police and huge military capabilities. If we look around the world, dictatorships always have lists of enemies.

A little digression: take Iran, for example. There is a pretty nasty dictatorship, a handful of mullahs, corrupt and frustrated extremists on the one hand and, on the other hand, there is a desire for reforms among the Iranians. I do not recommend that we go to war with Iran, but certainly we could support those Iranians who want to change their regime. It is a situation not so different from those early days of Solidarity, when some very brave Poles wanted the support of the outside world. They got it from German foundations and from the United States. Where are German foundations now, supporting freedom in Iran? They are not to be seen. They are supporting a commercial opportunity in Iran.

Afghanistan has not gone from the Middle Ages to a mature democracy overnight. The first free election in Afghanistan was very impressive. There were ten and a half million people registered in the poll in Afghanistan in spite of intimidation. Women counted votes in Afghanistan (women under the Taliban were not permitted to get education). People all over the country risked their lives in order to vote for the first time without the

tradition of a democratic institution. It became fashionable in cynical Europe to believe and sometimes even to say: "Not everybody is capable of democracy, there are people without any experience of democracy, that is why it is crazy idea to try to bring democracy to some places in the world". Who would have thought that we could get such a response in Afghanistan? It is the beginning. There are ten and a half million people registered to vote for the first time, what will it be in ten-twenty years' time from now?

We have been very hasty in judging the results in Iraq. It has been 19 months, after 35 years of a sadistic, brutal dictatorship. People are intimidated by the behavior of that regime. I underestimated the traumatizing effect of Saddam Hussein's regime on the people in Iraq. Even after the statue was pulled down in Baghdad, people were still fearful. We saw a change after Uday and Qusay were killed, which made it clear that people feared that Uday and Qusay might one day be back in Baghdad. Suddenly, when they were killed, we started getting more cooperation from the people who had been afraid so far to cooperate. It was the same when Saddam was captured. With the trauma after Saddam's regime, 19 months is too soon to judge Iraq.

V. Euro-Atlantic Relationships

There are significant differences across the Atlantic in attitudes about how to deal with global terrorism. The Europeans tend to think of terrorism as something which can be combated by police departments and the criminal justice system, but not by the use of military force against states supporting terrorism. We have a different point of view across the Atlantic. Hopefully, the matter will eventually be reconciled and resolved by discussion and debate.

We will gain some points, some sympathetic hearing in Europe for the situation the United States faces. I am very far from saying that the terrorist threat is just against the United States. It is against all of us, against all standard civilized behavior. There is a sense in which this is true, but also the United States is the principal target for the people who are planning and organizing terrorism. The reason is that they regard the United States as the principal obstacle to the realization of their ambitions. Maybe we are overreacting. The ease with which the relative relaxation of security is accepted is what

we find in Europe; it is entirely different in the US. It is not surprising that in Stockholm or Bruges people do not wake up in the morning wondering if today is the day when there is going to be a terrorist attack. An American sees it a little bit differently. As time goes on, we can discuss the problem, we can tone down the disagreement across the Atlantic.

There are two models for the future relationship between the United States and Europe. There is an Atlantic model in which, as was true in the century of the Cold War, the United States and Europe are closely linked together, recognizing that we share fundamental values and interests. There is the second model, the Continental model. It reflects the belief that Europe should be a counterweight to the United States, an opponent of the United States, a competitor of the United States. In such a case, the pattern of cooperation which was characteristic during the Cold War is no longer relevant to Europe's interest. This is a view that is held with some passion among the French Gaullists. It is Le Pen's and Chirac's view, from time to time Schroeder is due to bow in that direction. It is a very shortsighted perspective for Europe, and I hope that when choices have to be made, Europe will choose the Atlantic model.

The Americans are not interested in a weak Europe, as well as the Europeans have no interest to have a weak America. It makes no sense. We are, in the global population, a small number of people who have developed liberal democratic societies with free markets and individual freedoms. We are surrounded, in much of the world, by people who do not share these values, and have not achieved what we were able to achieve, even in the material sense. It seems that we have many common interests. We should ask Europe to make a choice between the Atlantic model and the Continental model. We do not want to divide Europe, because we want to see Europe more or less behind the Atlantic model. We certainly do not think it is a good idea for Europe to rally around the Continental model. The United States is not looking for an argument. We are looking for cohesion. Chris Patten and Dominique de Vilpain argue that we should be balanced in the world. The Continental perspective means in practice conceding to the German Chancellor and German national policy for all of Europe. That would be a very shortsighted choice for some part of Europeans. That sounds divisive.

There are some mistakes in American policy towards Europe. For example, it was a mistake to waste an offer made in 2001 by the European allies from NATO. That mistake was made for a practical reason, but it was politically insensitive; for the practical reason that there was not a lot that NATO could do in the circumstances. It is the function of the weakness of military forces. It took six weeks for NATO to get itself into position and to do something in Kosovo. We had to deal with Afghanistan quickly. Nevertheless, we should have accepted the offer, even though the assistance was not significant militarily. There was a little background in it, too: the frustration caused by the experience in Kosovo, even in the first Gulf War. Then the allies, as they have the right to do when their forces are engaged, insisted on a role in decision-making. For example, the French were quite eager to decide which targets could be struck in Kosovo. It caused a lot of difficulties, especially after the war, when some of them were politically motivated, with quite a separate political agenda. There was a great deal of skepticism particularly caused by the military authorities who had been responsible for contacts and for those operations. Nevertheless, it was a mistake.

VI. The Role of Russia in Euro-Atlantic Relationships

The Americans and the Europeans have a problem with Russia because it is far from clear where Russia is going. The idea of Europe according to Russia is for it to counterbalance the United States; it is very inadequate. It is unbelievable that any European government could actually think in those terms. The recent developments in Russia are very troubling. Businesspeople being thrown in jail for their politics, sustained attacks on the free press, the situation where former KGB officials dominate and overreach the official government. Russian engagement in destabilization and subversion in places where they want to dominate presents a source of real concern in London, in Washington and in Warsaw, too. Obviously, we want a decent relationship with Russia. However, we need to be much more feared than we have been so far, talking with Russia about these troubling developments.

VII. The Arab World: a Missed Opportunity

We are more popular in countries where we do not get along with the regimes. In Iran we are more popular than in Saudi Arabia. We have to do something with the problem of supporting the government in Saudi Arabia and opposing the mullahs in Iran.

We made a serious mistake on whom to support in Afghanistan during the war against the Soviet Union. There were different factions. They were not all crazy radicals, and I think we made some very bad choices. Ironically, Islamist extremists managed to persuade themselves that they had defeated the Soviet Union. Now, most people know how instrumental the help from the United States to the Afghans was. The Soviets could be still in Afghanistan if there had not been a lot of external help. We certainly missed an opportunity to go to the Muslim world. They are all dictatorships, a handful of people at the top rake off all the wealth, particularly oil wealth. They have got a miserable population under them; this is one of the reasons why we have the problem.

VIII. The Differences Among the US Administration

A good decision on foreign policy taken in Washington is preceded by "quarrels" between the State Department and the Defense Department. That is inevitable, not because the Defense Department is more intelligent or more principled. The mission of diplomatic services is basically to find a way to improve relationship between sovereign states. Their natural tendency is to look for compromise and for accommodation. This is deep in the institution. The Defense Department has another attitude about its role and mission. It is understandable that there will be differences. Whether they are paralyzing or counterproductive depends on who the President is, and whether he takes advantage of a clash of opinions. The President listens to the arguments of both sides and makes subjective decisions suggested by the best argument of each side.

I cannot think of a period in which we did not argue with one another. There were arguments with one another, as many as today and sometimes even more, during Reagan's administration. The battles during Reagan's administration were about Poland. They were very important for Poland, but Poland did not realize it at that time. These battles were about whether we had to expect the permanence of the Soviet Union, or

whether the task of American policy was to figure out how to make a relationship work in a positive sense. The Defense Department's view, inspired by Ronald Reagan, was: "The Soviet Union is an Evil Empire headed for the trashbin, and we are here to speed up the process". Our job is not to find a way to go along with them, but to find a way to make them go away. It was about the most fundamental division you could find. Happily, the President came down on the right side in that debate. The differences: they are today about Iraq, and they were before the war in respect of Iraq.

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