
Current debates on an ‘exit strategy’ from Iraq seem to have occluded the alleged ‘tectonic rifts’ in transatlantic relations and the even deeper fissures in intra-European interactions that accompanied the 2003 US invasion. In this setting, the so-called ‘Iraq crisis’ tends to be interpreted as an indication of the increasing willingness and (to a lesser extent) capability of the European Union (EU) to act as a global actor and, at the same time, the waning of the US strategic focus on Europe under a stringently ideological administration in the White House. Apart from such generalizations, however, there are very few commentaries that engage in a contextual assessment of the repercussions of the Iraq occupation on the discourses and practices of European security. It is therefore to the benefit of the volume edited by Norrie MacQueen and Trine Flockhart that its exploration engages in a much-needed and in-depth analysis of these queries; yet, without imposing some sort of a grand narrative or a homogenized reading of this complex experience. In fact, thanks to the editors’ prescience, the individual submissions to this collection engage in an interdisciplinary parallel examination of different theoretical frameworks, which only enhances the relevance of the volume’s insights.

The nine chapters collected by MacQueen and Flockhart discuss the symbolic, structural, policy, and popular dimensions of the occupation of Iraq from distinctly European points of view. In this setting, the resilience of the transatlantic ‘security community’ — a notion and a pattern of international relations that has all but disappeared in the fog of the ‘war on terror’ — gains particular prominence in some of the contributions. For instance, the storm of the 2003 Iraq crisis has led some to perceive the undermining of ‘the essential “glue” of the community: shared identities, values, and trust’ (p. 13). While broadly concurring with this observation, other commentators insist that the conflict between the ‘transatlantic partners’ merely confirms the ‘historical malleability of the post-war western security community’ (p. 136). Thus, the alleged conflict between the US and the EU seems to confirm a dominant force behind European integration — a trend (if not a desire) for ‘the management of American power’ (p. 187).
The complexity of these dynamics is particularly conspicuous when one looks at NATO – traditionally perceived as the hub of the Euro-Atlantic security community. The intra-Alliance debates on Iraq seemed to usher in an environment of ‘fear and loathing’ between different proponents (p. 38). Such divisiveness revealed a number of ‘unresolved fundamental issues’ ranging from ‘NATO’s role “out of area”’ and ‘Europe’s role in the common defense’ to ‘the US role in Europe’ (pp. 39–46). In this respect, the ‘Iraq crisis’ merely heightened the confrontation with the reality of those problems. Thus, it was only to be expected that the lack of institutionalized tools that would allow the US and its European partners to ‘agree to disagree’ (as NATO has been doing in Europe during the Cold War) would produce some sort of tension in the Alliance. At the same time, the recruitment of the East European members and partners of NATO through their numerical weight behind one of the positions in order to enhance their respective legitimacy seemed to thwart any attempts at reaching a negotiated consensual resolution on the transatlantic division. Hence, the bandwagoning of the post-communist countries in the US ‘coalition of the willing’ tended only to deepen already existing fissures (p. 167).

This ability of MacQueen and Flockhart’s volume to bring together diverse interpretative perspectives allows it to make well grounded analytical observations on the broader implications of the 2003 Iraq crisis. On the one hand, it seems to confirm that in ‘a disagreement such as Iraq, high politics take precedence over other concerns… [it] showed that some of [the long-term strategic] objectives are truly core to the nature of a state’s political culture; they are not transient or subject to the whims of the moment’ (p. 83). On the other hand, the Iraq imbroglio confirms the ability of international actors to construct new capacities in conflicting environments. For instance, Turkey’s discovery (although some would argue ‘recovery’ would be a better term) of its Middle Eastern vocation, agency, and identity has led some to acknowledge the contingency as well as the ‘speculative nature’ of foreign policy analysis (p. 112).

In this respect, MacQueen and Flockhart’s volume offers a compelling perspective on the European debates on the state of the transatlantic relationship and the effects of the Iraq crisis on the perception and practices of European security. Therefore, the collection would be of immense interest to those in European international relations and security studies. The