

Did Chirac Say ‘Non’? Revisiting UN Diplomacy on Iraq, 2002–03

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Abstract: This article revisits the U.S. attempt in 2002-03 to secure United Nations Security Council approval for the war against Iraq. Drawing on new evidence from declassified U.S. and British documents and interviews that I conducted with senior American, British, and French officials, I argue that despite French opposition, the George W. Bush administration had a reasonable chance of securing UN approval. The evidence I marshal suggests that President Bush could plausibly have obtained UN approval, had he agreed to delay the start of military operations by several weeks and endorsed a set of demanding benchmarks for Iraqi compliance, as proposed by Britain and several nonpermanent members of the Security Council. This article therefore challenges the argument that France’s desire to “soft balance” American power made UN approval unattainable. President Bush, I argue, failed to secure UN approval, primarily because he was unwilling to make even tactical concessions to his Security Council partners and deviate from a timetable for war that he and his administration had set months in advance.

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THE STANDOFF BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES and France leading up to the 2003 Iraq War probably “led to the most serious deterioration of transatlantic relations in recent memory.”¹ According to a prominent view first advanced by American and British officials and subsequently taken up by academic analysts, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair made an all-out effort to secure United Nations (UN) approval before invading Iraq, but French president Jacques Chirac’s public veto threat on 10 March 2003 doomed that effort to failure.² Put differently, France’s determination to use the UN Security Council (henceforth SC or UNSC) as an instrument for “soft balancing” American power made UN approval unattainable.³

¹Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis over Iraq* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 2; see also Sarwar A. Kashmeri, *America and Europe after 9/11 and Iraq: The Great Divide* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 7–24; Terry H. Anderson, *Bush’s Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93–131; David M. Andrews, ed., *The Atlantic Alliance under Stress: U.S.–European Relations after Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Geir Lundestad, ed., *Just Another Major Crisis? The United States and Europe since 2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²See “France to Blame for Failure of UN, Says Straw,” *Daily Mail* (London), 18 March 2003; and “Dealing with the Foot-Draggers: Blame, Aim, Fire,” *The Economist*, 1 May 2003.

³See, for example, T.V. Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy,” *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005): 46–71, at 65–67; Michael J. Glennon, “Why the Security Council Failed,” *Foreign Affairs* 82 (May/June 2003): 16–35; Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Good Reasons for Going Around the U.N.,” *New York Times*, 18 March 2003; Judith Kelley, “Strategic Non-Cooperation as Soft Balancing: Why Iraq Was Not Just about Iraq,” *International Politics* 42 (2005): 153–173; and Ruth Wedgwood, “The Multinational Action in Iraq and International Law,” in Ramesh Thakur and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, eds., *The Iraq Crisis and World Order: Structural, Institutional and Normative Challenges* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2006), 413–425.

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This article challenges that conclusion. Chirac only threatened to veto the particular draft resolution then on the table, leaving open the possibility of a future French abstention on the use of force in case the UN weapons inspectors determined that Iraq had clearly failed to cooperate. Building on this insight, I develop a counterfactual thought experiment using new evidence from declassified documents and more than a dozen interviews that I conducted with senior American, British, and French officials. What emerges from this evidence is that the Bush administration would have stood a good chance of securing a French abstention and ultimate UN approval for the use of force—had it been willing to postpone the start of military operations by up to six weeks and endorse a set of demanding (and, we know now, virtually impossible to achieve) benchmarks for Iraqi compliance, as proposed by Britain and several nonpermanent members of the SC. In short, there are strong indications that President Bush failed to secure UN approval primarily because he was unwilling to make even tactical concessions to his SC partners and deviate from a timetable for war set months in advance.

Counterfactual arguments are notoriously controversial, especially among historians.⁴ However, scholars in political science and international relations have increasingly come to recognize that carefully constructed counterfactuals can be valuable to “probe the causes and contingency of the world we know” and “are an indispensable means of evaluating it, empirically and normatively.”⁵ For a counterfactual argument to be useful, it has to fulfill several requirements. First, it must be *well-specified*, clearly indicating in what ways, if the antecedent had been different, the outcome or consequent, too, might have been different. Second, it must be *logically and theoretically plausible*—that is, the connecting principles and enabling counterfactuals that sustain the conditional claim must be specified with reasonable precision and must be consistent with logic as well as with relevant theories. Finally, the argument must be *consistent with the available historical evidence*—it must start with the real world as it was otherwise known before asserting the counterfactual, and it must be compatible with the most up-to-date evidence as to what the circumstances allowed.⁶

⁴For a useful overview of the debate, see Niall Ferguson, introduction to *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 1–90.

⁵Richard Ned Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 6, 17; see also Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, eds., *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Jack Levy, “Counterfactuals and Case Studies,” in Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady, and David Collier, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶Tetlock and Belkin, *Counterfactual Thought Experiments*, 19–24; Levy, “Counterfactuals and Case Studies,” 627–644; and Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 44–58.

The different outcome imagined here is quite clear: the adoption of a UNSC resolution in the spring of 2003 authorizing the use of military force against Iraq. The article's primary aim is to demonstrate that the counterfactual is logically and theoretically plausible and consistent with the latest evidence as to what the other SC members—notably, France and most of the nonpermanent members—were willing to support. It should be emphasized that the argument is merely probabilistic rather than deterministic: there can be no certainty that a different approach based on a longer timeline and specific benchmarks against which to measure Iraq's compliance ultimately would have yielded UN approval for the use of force.

UN Security Council approval uniquely demonstrates compliance with international norms of legitimate behavior and helps powerful countries such as the United States signal benign intentions when they intervene militarily abroad.⁷ That can be expected to reduce international opposition and make it easier for foreign partner states to cooperate with the intervener by offering landing and basing rights or contributing troops and resources.⁸ Consequently, U.S. policymakers often seek UN approval to facilitate international coalition building, coalition cohesion, and burden sharing on both combat and postcombat stabilization.⁹ Furthermore, opinion polls indicate greater U.S. public support for multilateral than unilateral intervention; policymakers may thus also view UN approval as valuable to boost U.S. domestic support.¹⁰ At the same time, obtaining

⁷See Inis L. Claude, "Collective Legitimation as a Political Function of the United Nations," *International Organization* 20 (Summer 1966): 367–379; Erik Voeten, "The Political Origins of the UN Security Council's Ability to Legitimize the Use of Force," *International Organization* 59 (July 2005): 527–557; Alexander Thompson, "Coercion through IOs: The Security Council and the Logic of Information Transmission," *International Organization* 60 (January 2006): 1–34; and Joel H. Westra, "Cumulative Legitimation, Prudential Restraint, and the Maintenance of International Order," *International Studies Quarterly* 54 (June 2010): 513–533.

⁸Thompson, "Coercion through IOs"; see also Ruth Wedgwood, "Unilateral Action in a Multilateral World," in Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman, eds., *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy: Ambivalent Engagement* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 167–189.

⁹Sarah E. Kreps, *Coalitions of Convenience: United States Military Interventions after the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24–44; and Stefano Recchia, *Reassuring the Reluctant Warriors: U.S. Civil-Military Relations and Multilateral Intervention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), chap. 1.

¹⁰Kenneth Schultz, "Tying Hands and Washing Hands: The U.S. Congress and Multilateral Humanitarian Intervention," in Daniel Drezner, ed., *Locating the Proper Authorities: The Interaction of International and Domestic Institutions* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 105–142; Songying Fang, "The Informational Role of International Institutions and Domestic Politics," *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (April 2008): 304–321; Joseph Grieco, Christopher Gelpi, Jason Reifler, and Peter D. Feaver, "Let's Get a Second Opinion: International Institutions and American Public Support for War," *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (June 2011): 563–583; Terrence L. Chapman, *Securing Approval: Domestic Politics and Multilateral Authorization for War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Stefano Recchia, "Why Seek IO Approval Under Unipolarity? Averting Issue Linkage vs. Appeasing Congress," *International Relations*, forthcoming.

UNSC approval for the use of force can be costly. Related negotiations are often time-consuming, substantial side payments and logrolling may be required to mollify other council members, and the process entails a loss of secrecy, which typically eliminates any element of surprise.¹¹ Therefore, policymakers can be expected to make meaningful efforts to secure UN approval only when they anticipate that the payoffs will outweigh the costs.

After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, senior Bush administration officials insisted that Iraq's presumed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) constituted a serious threat to U.S. national security, requiring urgent military action. Congress and the American people largely accepted this line of reasoning. Furthermore, U.S. policymakers expected that toppling Saddam Hussein and stabilizing the country would be relatively easy. This pessimism about the threat, combined with optimism about the costs of war (and high U.S. domestic support for military action against Iraq), reduced incentives for American leaders to engage in lengthy diplomacy aimed at securing UN approval. Alexander Thompson has argued in a carefully crafted analysis of U.S. policy on Iraq that "the Bush administration chose to take action against Iraq without UNSC approval *because it deemed the costs of working through the UN too high in the end.*"¹² Implicit in this conclusion is the counterfactual that the United States plausibly could have obtained a UNSC mandate authorizing the use of force, if President Bush had assigned a higher priority to the objective. This article makes that counterfactual explicit.

Had President Bush considered UN approval for a war of regime change against Iraq a prime U.S. objective, he presumably should have accepted that building multilateral consensus for such a radical policy would require a gradual approach at the SC involving several new resolutions over a number of months. Furthermore, he should have been willing to offer significant inducements to other SC members, involving logrolling and financial side payments, rather than merely exerting diplomatic pressure. Finally, Bush and his senior advisers should have made the effort to personally travel to the capitals of reluctant council members, offering at least verbal assurances that they took seriously the concerns of foreign leaders. Instead, as this article will demonstrate, the U.S. president and most of his senior advisers were disinclined to compromise and reach out to international partners at the SC from the outset, becoming increasingly dismissive of the UN track by the end of 2002.

¹¹Seyom Brown, *Multilateral Constraints on the Use of Force: A Reassessment* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), 12–14; and Alexander Thompson, *Channels of Power: The UN Security Council and U.S. Statecraft in Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 28–30.

¹²Thompson, *Channels of Power*, 168, emphasis added.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. The first part briefly discusses America's limited interest in multilateral approval for the Iraq War; it then zooms in on the Security Council negotiations in the fall of 2002 that yielded Resolution 1441 on the resumption of UN inspections; and it explains why, although President Bush had strong reservations about the UN track, he subsequently agreed to seek another resolution explicitly authorizing the use of force. The second part reconstructs the heavy-handed effort in February and early March 2003 to politically isolate France, which opposed the use of force, and obtain a French abstention at the SC by securing a nine-member majority in favor of military action. The third part examines the last-minute British-inspired benchmarks proposal and explains in some detail why the benchmarks, with American backing, could have yielded UN approval for the use of force.

LIMITED INTEREST IN UN SUPPORT

After the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the United States and its partners imposed stringent economic sanctions on Iraq through the UNSC and established a UN inspections regime aimed at identifying and destroying Iraqi WMDs. In subsequent years, U.S. officials grew increasingly frustrated at Iraq's lack of whole-hearted cooperation. They gradually became convinced that a normalization of diplomatic relations with Iraq would be impossible so long as Saddam Hussein remained in power.¹³ By the fall of 1998, President Bill Clinton had formally endorsed the goal of regime change in Baghdad: under pressure from Congress, he adopted the Iraq Liberation Act, which elevated regime change to an official U.S. policy goal and authorized \$97 million to provide military support to the Iraqi opposition.¹⁴ However, even though the Clinton administration undertook significant bombing raids against Iraq, most notably in December 1998 (Operation Desert Fox), it never seriously considered a full military invasion, partially because of concerns about the operational cost.¹⁵

Soon after President George W. Bush took office in January 2001, some of his administration's most hawkish officials—particularly Deputy

¹³David M. Malone, *The International Struggle over Iraq: Politics in the UN Security Council, 1980–2005* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 114–121; and Thompson, *Channels of Power*, 86–114.

¹⁴Bill Clinton, "Statement on Signing the Iraq Liberation Act," 31 October 1998, accessed at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=55205>; see also Vernon Loeb, "Congress Stokes Visions of War to Oust Saddam; White House Fears Fiasco in Aid to Rebels," *Washington Post*, 20 October 1998.

¹⁵Walter Slocombe (under secretary of defense for policy, 1994–2001), interview by author, 11 March 2010. Even Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, perhaps the Clinton administration's leading hawk on Iraq, concedes that "no serious consideration was given to actually invading Iraq." See Albright, *Madam Secretary* (New York: Miramax, 2003), 277.

Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, the national security adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney—began to argue in the intramural debates that Saddam Hussein’s regime ought to be forcibly removed.¹⁶ Initially, those neoconservative hawks were unable to convince the administration that regime change in Iraq ought to be a U.S. priority, but after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, they found themselves suddenly empowered.¹⁷

Sarah Kreps argues that, two factors determine how much the United States values multilateral approval for military intervention: first, its time horizon, as determined by the overall sense of urgency, and second, the anticipated operational commitment, “which refers to the level of resources directed toward the particular intervention.”¹⁸ When time horizons are long, reflecting low urgency, and the United States anticipates a significant operational commitment, multilateralism will seem attractive “as a way to reassure other states [and] share. . . costly burdens.” Conversely, if time horizons are short, reflecting a strong sense of urgency (based on the perception that important American interests are threatened), and the United States “thinks it can win quickly or on the cheap, . . . there will be fewer incentives to aggregate resources” and a unilateral course of action is more likely.¹⁹ The sense of urgency after September 11 regarding the need to confront Iraq’s putative WMD proliferation, combined with the expectation that regime change in Iraq could be implemented at little cost to the United States, reduced incentives for U.S. officials to seek multilateral backing for the use of force.

Disarmament through Regime Change: Urgent And Easy

In a climate of deep uncertainty regarding Iraq’s illicit weapons programs (Saddam had ceased all cooperation with the UN inspectors after the 1998 Desert Fox airstrikes), U.S. officials widely believed that Iraq had resumed its WMD development.²⁰ America’s heightened sense of vulnerability after September 11 significantly lowered its threshold of tolerance for Iraq’s

¹⁶Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 21–23; Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 26–28; and Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper, 2008), 203–209.

¹⁷For useful discussions, see Ricks, *Fiasco*, 29–45; and Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 25–30.

¹⁸Kreps, *Coalitions of Convenience*, 28–33, at 31.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 35, 33.

²⁰George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown, 2010), 242; and Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Random House, 2011), 167–170; see also Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 123–155.

putative WMD proliferation.²¹ Vice President Cheney, emphasizing the possibility of a “nexus” between Iraq’s WMDs and radical Islamic terrorism, declared on 26 August 2002 that “containment is not possible when dictators obtain weapons of mass destruction, and are prepared to share them with terrorists.”²² The vice president, like several of the administration’s other hardliners, probably to some extent engaged in threat inflation to build up public support for the war. Richard Haass, who as the State Department’s head of policy planning had access to much of the intelligence on Iraq, writes that “the vice president’s speech [of 26 August] badly overstated the Iraqi threat.”²³ Yet in private conversations, too, Cheney and other hawkish officials seemed convinced that the threat stemming from Iraq’s presumed WMD proliferation was mortal and real.²⁴

The prevailing view among the administration’s chief advocates of military action—notably, Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and several of their subordinates—was that eliminating the Iraqi threat at its roots would require a preventive war aimed at forcibly changing the country’s political regime. The problem needed to be dealt with sooner rather than later, which left little room for consensus building with international partners at the United Nations.²⁵ The argument was fleshed out in August 2002 in a secret memo authored by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith: in a world where hostile states might covertly use terrorist groups to deliver WMDs “in an unattributable, and hence undeterrable, manner,” the United States should not have to wait until it is attacked before launching preventative military action in self-defense, nor should it feel constrained “by a requirement for international approval of some kind (e.g., from the UN).”²⁶ The 2002 National Security Strategy

²¹For helpful discussions, see Melvyn P. Leffler, “The Foreign Policies of the George W. Bush Administration: Memoirs, History, Legacy,” *Diplomatic History* 37 (April 2013): 190–216; and Robert Jervis, “Explaining the War in Iraq,” in Jane C. Kramer and A. Trevor Thrall, eds., *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 30–32.

²²Dick Cheney, speech delivered at the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention, Nashville, TN, 26 August 2002, accessed at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/aug/27/usa.iraq>, 10 October 2015.

²³Richard Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 218. On the Bush administration’s threat inflation and politicization of intelligence, see also Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 137–184; and Paul Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy: Iraq, 9/11, and Misguided Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 13–95.

²⁴Barton Gellman, *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 215–227; and Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 30, 175, 292, 429.

²⁵Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 423; and Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 132–133.

²⁶“Sovereignty and Anticipatory Self-Defense,” Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, 24 August 2002, accessed at <http://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/294/2002-08-24%20From%20OSD%20Policy%20re%20Sovereignty%20and%20Anticipatory%20Self-Defense.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

then elevated the possibility of unilateral “preemption” to the level of official U.S. government doctrine.²⁷

Furthermore, the administration’s most committed Iraq hawks, particularly Wolfowitz and his collaborators, believed that toppling Saddam Hussein and stabilizing the country would be relatively easy—a “cakewalk,” in the words of the neoconservative political commentator Kenneth Adelman.²⁸ The highly optimistic assumptions that came to inform U.S. policy on Iraq were that American troops would be welcomed as liberators, the country’s administrative and security apparatus would remain largely intact, and the limited postwar reconstruction that might be necessary could for the most part be financed through sales of Iraqi oil.²⁹ These beliefs, which all implied that a protracted stabilization mission would be unnecessary in Iraq, further reduced any incentive to secure UN approval as a means of legitimating the war and facilitating sustained international burden sharing. As a former senior U.S. official who played a key role in international coalition management on Iraq explains, the war advocates “didn’t have an extended stabilization period in mind, so they didn’t make the argument, we need UN approval because that’s the only way to durably hold the allies.”³⁰

Finally, the administration’s relentless insistence after September 11 that Iraq constituted a serious threat to American security prompted the U.S. Congress to adopt a joint resolution providing the president with wide-ranging authority to use military force against Iraq already in October 2002 (when the UN negotiations had just begun).³¹ Consequently, U.S. policymakers felt little need to work hard to secure UN approval as a means of bolstering domestic support for the use of force. As Marc Grossman, at the time a high-level State Department official, explains in an interview on the Iraq War, “The United Nations is not a domestic political factor here.”³² Stephen Hadley, then the deputy U.S. national security adviser, confirms

²⁷“National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” White House, September 2002, 6, 15, accessed at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>, 10 October 2015.

²⁸Kenneth Adelman, “Cakewalk in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 13 February 2002.

²⁹Nora Bensahel, “Mission Not Accomplished: What Went Wrong with Iraqi Reconstruction,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29 (June 2006): 456–458; see also Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 158–187; and Ricks, *Fiasco*, 76–79.

³⁰Kori Schake (director for defense strategy and requirements on the National Security Council staff, 2001–2005), interview by author, 21 January 2011. For a similar conclusion, see Kreps, *Coalitions of Convenience*, 130–133.

³¹See Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq, Pub. L. No. 243, 116 Stat. 1498 (2002), accessed at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-107publ243/html/PLAW-107publ243.htm>. On the broader political context, see Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 203–204; and Ricks, *Fiasco*, 61–63.

³²Marc Grossman (under secretary of state for political affairs, 2001–2005), interview by author, 13 January 2011.

that the administration “didn’t [feel that it had to] seek support from the UN instrumentally in order to deal with the domestic problem, because domestic support really was not a problem.”³³

Powell’s Lonely Call for UN Involvement

The Bush administration’s choice to nevertheless involve the UNSC over Iraq in the fall of 2002 was largely the result of Secretary of State Colin Powell’s personal insistence. Powell and his deputy, Richard Armitage, disagreed with those, such as Cheney and Rumsfeld, who viewed the Iraqi regime as an imminent threat to U.S. national security requiring urgent military action.³⁴ Furthermore, beginning in the spring of 2002, the State Department organized several policy workshops with regional experts and Iraqi exiles as part of its “Future of Iraq” project, which made the senior diplomats extremely concerned about the costs of postwar stabilization.³⁵ Consequently, Armitage remembers, in the summer of 2002, the State Department recommended that the administration build up multilateral support through the UN in order to “get friends and allies on board should [the United States] have to go to war, to help with the burden.”³⁶ Powell himself made a passionate plea to the president for seeking UN approval during a private conversation on 5 August 2002: “I told the president that when we break this we’re going to own it, and when the government falls [in Iraq] we’re going to be the government, and you may not want to be the government of this country—so let’s try to get the UN resolution.”³⁷

British prime minister Blair also repeatedly urged President Bush to seek UN approval before invading Iraq.³⁸ Blair and his advisers felt that they needed UN approval to satisfy a skeptical British Labour Party and domestic public opinion.³⁹ Among the president’s top-level advisers in Washington, however, Powell’s was a lonely voice. Cheney and Rumsfeld

³³Stephen J. Hadley (deputy assistant to the president for national security affairs, 2001–2005), interview by author, 24 January 2011.

³⁴Richard Armitage (deputy secretary of state, 2001–2005), interview by author, 31 January 2011; see also Feith, *War and Decision*, 245–246; and Karen DeYoung, *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 376, 399.

³⁵Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice*, 226–228; and Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 282–283.

³⁶Armitage, interview; see also Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice*, 225; and DeYoung, *Soldier*, 399–402.

³⁷Colin L. Powell (secretary of state, 2001–2005), interview by author, 2 February 2011; see also Bush, *Decision Points*, 238; and Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 150–151.

³⁸Tony Blair, *A Journey: My Political Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 399–404; and Bush, *Decision Points*, 232.

³⁹Jack Straw (British foreign secretary, 2001–2006), testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 2 February 2011, 27–28, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/53031/Straw%202011-02-02%20S1.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

strenuously objected to involving the United Nations, fearing that it would needlessly constrain the United States. “They fought us every inch, by every manner possible,” Armitage recalls.⁴⁰ Nevertheless the State Department, with Blair’s support, persuaded the president that he could not completely bypass the SC if he wanted to have at least the British and a few other allies on board. On 7 September 2002, Bush decided that he would seek a UN resolution to bring the weapons inspectors back into Iraq and gain international support for an ultimatum threatening war.⁴¹

THE FRANCO-AMERICAN DISAGREEMENT ON “AUTOMATICITY”
 President Bush heeded Powell’s advice to involve the United Nations in the summer of 2002, but he also seems to have agreed with Rumsfeld and Cheney that the UN process would be valuable only insofar as it could swiftly yield some support for military action at little cost to the United States.⁴² The SC negotiations on a new Iraq resolution began after Bush declared before the UN General Assembly on 12 September that he would “work with the UN Security Council for the necessary resolutions.”⁴³ Britain’s permanent representative to the SC, an experienced multilateral negotiator, cautioned in a secret cable that Washington and London were “start[ing] from a point where the other 13 members of the Council will, at best, have serious doubts about the use of force”—which would make it difficult to garner “the necessary nine votes for an explicit pre-authorization of military action.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the Bush administration decided to float a draft resolution on 26 September 2002 that presented Iraq with a set of stringent disarmament requirements and foresaw an automatic authorization of “all necessary means” in case of noncompliance. Predictably, the draft had only limited support at the SC, with France and Russia completely opposed and only 5 out of the council’s 15 members backing the proposal.⁴⁵

⁴⁰Armitage, interview; see also Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 180; Bush, *Decision Points*, 237; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 157, 176, 180; and Feith, *War and Decision*, 299–302.

⁴¹Bush, *Decision Points*, 238–239; Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 180; Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 107.

⁴²Thompson, *Channels of Power*, 139–140.

⁴³George W. Bush, “Address to the UN General Assembly,” New York, 12 September 2002, accessed at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=64069>, 10 October 2015.

⁴⁴Jeremy Greenstock, “Iraq: Handling the Security Council,” secret and personal note to Sir Michael Jay, British under secretary of state for foreign affairs, 3 September 2002, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/52504/greenstock-jay-security-council-2002-09-03.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

⁴⁵Glenn Kessler and Colum Lynch, “U.S. Woos Security Council on Iraq: France, Russia, China Resist One Resolution Allowing Use of Force,” *Washington Post*, 27 September 2002; see also Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 109; and Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2004), 76–78. On France’s opposition to the 26 September draft, see Jacques Chirac, *My Life in Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 269–270; and Jean-Marc de La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2013), 197–199.

By the end of September, it was clear that France would be the main obstacle to quick UN approval for military action. The view in Paris, shared by several of the council's nonpermanent members, was that the SC should adopt a tough resolution establishing a comprehensive new inspections regime aimed at disarming Iraq of whatever WMDs it possessed, but the resolution should not permit an "automatic" use of force in the event that Iraq failed to comply. In early October, President Chirac and Dominique de Villepin, his foreign minister, indicated in conversations with Bush and Powell that if after the adoption of such a first resolution, it came to a point where the UN inspectors reported that Iraq had blatantly failed to cooperate, France would not stand in the way of a second resolution authorizing military action.⁴⁶ However, French authorities were adamant that the first resolution to be adopted by the council should contain no automatic triggers. In case of a serious violation certified by the inspectors, the SC would have to meet again and decide on any further measures to be taken. The French called this a "two-step approach" (*approche en deux temps*).⁴⁷ As a senior French diplomat who was involved in the negotiations recalls, "To us, it was a proliferation issue, and we did not exclude the use of force. But there was a sense that it should be used only if it was clearly shown that we had collectively tried the inspections route and it had failed."⁴⁸

The Bush administration's leading advocates of military action, irked by those difficulties, argued that Washington should force a vote on the 26 September draft and rapidly bring the UN process to a conclusion. Wolfowitz, in particular, insisted during a meeting of the National Security Council on 15 October that "there are worse things than having our . . . draft defeated or vetoed by France."⁴⁹ British authorities, however, worried that a defeated UN resolution would be politically disastrous and eventually made it clear that they, too, deemed the initial U.S. draft unacceptable.⁵⁰ Hence, after mid-October 2002, the United States moved away from its request of an automatic authorization of military action. The next draft

⁴⁶Vincent Nouzille, *Dans le secret des présidents: CIA, Maison-Blanche, Élysée* (Paris: Fayard, 2010), 388–390; and Frédéric Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne* (Paris: Fayard, 2013), 163; see also Chirac, *My Life in Politics*, 265, 268, 270; and La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 201.

⁴⁷La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 198, 201.

⁴⁸Senior French Foreign Ministry official, interview by author, 22 January 2011. For a valuable analysis of France's stance, see also Jason W. Davidson, *America's Allies and War: Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 150–157.

⁴⁹Quoted in Feith, *War and Decision*, 315; see also Colum Lynch and Karen DeYoung, "U.S. Officials Meet on Bolstering U.N. Effort; Bush Advisers Seek to Hasten Passage of Resolution Requiring Iraq to Disarm," *Washington Post*, 16 October 2002.

⁵⁰Jack Straw, *Last Man Standing: Memoirs of a Political Survivor* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 378; see also Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 221.

circulated on 21 October merely contained a warning of “serious consequences” should Iraq fail to cooperate.⁵¹ Over the following two weeks, Washington, London, and Paris negotiated a compromise text, and with all three of them finally pulling in the same direction, on 8 November the SC adopted Resolution 1441 by a unanimous vote of 15–0.⁵²

Resolution 1441 offered Iraq a “final opportunity” to comply with its disarmament obligations, established a new UN weapons inspections regime, and threatened “serious consequences” in case of Iraqi noncooperation. However, it did not explicitly authorize military action. As John Negroponte, the U.S. permanent representative to the SC, declared at the time, “this resolution contains no ‘hidden triggers’ and no ‘automaticity’ with respect to the use of force.”⁵³ Michael Wood, the British Foreign Office’s legal adviser, similarly concluded in a confidential memo that Resolution 1441 “does not itself authorize the use of force, or revive the authorization of force given in SCR 678” [the 1990 Persian Gulf War resolution].⁵⁴

President Bush and his advisers nevertheless felt that with Resolution 1441, they had obtained what they needed in terms of legitimacy for military action. “We didn’t feel as though an additional resolution was necessary for a military operation,” explains a high-level State Department official who was directly involved in negotiating 1441.⁵⁵ The resolution’s text contained significant ambiguity. Paragraph 4 stated that any “failure by Iraq at any time to comply with” its disarmament obligations “will be reported to the Council for assessment,” and paragraph 12 further stated that upon receiving a report from the inspectors the SC would “convene immediately. . . in order to consider the situation.”⁵⁶ However, there was no explicit mention that another *vote* by the SC would be necessary before taking military action.⁵⁷ A former senior adviser to the British prime

⁵¹Julia Preston and Eric Schmitt, “U.S.–French Split on Iraq Deepens,” *New York Times*, 15 October 2002; and Colum Lynch, “U.S. Offers Concessions in U.N. Draft on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 22 October 2002.

⁵²Julia Preston, “Security Council Votes, 15–0, For Tough Iraq Resolution,” *New York Times*, 9 November 2002. On the final phase of the negotiations, see Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 110–112; Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 165–168; and La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 202–205.

⁵³United Nations Security Council, “Document S/PV.4644,” minutes of 4644th meeting, 8 November 2002, accessed at <http://www.globalissues.org/external/1441Speeches.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

⁵⁴Michael Wood, “Iraq: Legal Basis for the Possible Use of Force,” 6 November 2002, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/52579/wood-ps-legal-basis-2002-11-06.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

⁵⁵William B. Wood (acting assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs, 1998–December 2002), interview by author, 25 January 2011.

⁵⁶Paragraph 11, introduced upon France’s request, indicated that only the UN inspectors, rather than individual member states, would be able to determine “any failure by Iraq to comply with its disarmament obligations,” which they would “report immediately to the Council.” See La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 204; and Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 166.

⁵⁷On this point, see Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 111; and La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 205.

minister confirms that the Bush administration initially appeared to have “an absolute red line that there should be no second decision required by the UN Security Council”—the expectation in Washington was that Resolution 1441 would be sufficient “to broaden out the coalition, and to give. . . countries like the UK but also Australia and others the basis. . . to join any military action.”⁵⁸

The British government, however, subsequently insisted on a second resolution explicitly authorizing the use of force. Prime Minister Blair had promised a skeptical British public that he would join the war only with UN approval or in a situation “where there is an unreasonable veto put down.”⁵⁹ Accordingly, when in mid-January 2003 the Americans made it clear to their allies that war had become inevitable, David Manning, Blair’s principal foreign policy adviser, told National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice that the British needed, at a minimum, to make a serious effort to obtain a second UN resolution in order to be able to participate in military action.⁶⁰ On 31 January 2003, Blair personally traveled to the White House to repeat that same point.⁶¹ Ultimately, Bush gave in to Blair’s request.⁶² But U.S. support for the effort to obtain a second resolution was always limited. As Jeremy Greenstock, then the British ambassador to the SC, explains, “the [British] prime minister persuaded the president that there should be at least American condonement of that attempt. We never got real American support in it.”⁶³

SEEKING A NINE-MEMBER MAJORITY

The UN weapons inspectors, headed by Swedish diplomat Hans Blix, reentered Iraq in late November 2002 and almost immediately began their work.⁶⁴ Only weeks later, on 13 January 2003, Rice informed her

⁵⁸Matthew Rycroft (private secretary for foreign affairs to the British prime minister, 2002–2004), testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 10 September 2010, 61–62, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50560/20100910-Rycroft.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

⁵⁹Quoted in Richard W. Stevenson and David E. Sanger, “U.S. Resisting Calls for a 2nd U.N. Vote on a War with Iraq,” *New York Times*, 16 January 2002; see also John Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars* (London: Free Press, 2004), 259–275.

⁶⁰David Manning, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 24 June 2010, 84–85, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50168/manning2010-06-24-declassified.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

⁶¹Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 201.

⁶²Bush, *Decision Points*, 244; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 296–297; Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 146–147.

⁶³Jeremy Greenstock, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 26 May 2010, 28, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50162/greenstock-20100526-declassified.pdf>, 10 October 2015; confirmed by Manning, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 86; and Straw, *Last Man Standing*, 372.

⁶⁴“UN Weapons Inspectors Arrive in Iraq,” *The Guardian*, 18 November 2002; see also Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 95–97.

French counterpart, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, that President Bush was unwilling to delay military action much longer.⁶⁵ Thereupon French diplomats, including Gourdault-Montagne and Jean-David Levitte, the French ambassador to Washington, suggested that the United States refrain from coming back to the SC for a second resolution. They made it clear that Paris would then simply acquiesce in military action. Pushing for a second UN resolution, they warned, risked triggering a diplomatic showdown.⁶⁶ On 20 January, Foreign Minister de Villepin publicly hinted during a press conference that, absent clear evidence from the inspectors that Iraq had violated its disarmament obligations, Paris might indeed go as far as to veto a second resolution authorizing the use of force.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, policymakers in Washington and London expected that if at least 9 out of the council's 15 members could be persuaded to vote in favor of such a resolution, then France (as well as Russia and China, which were aligned with Paris on this issue) would ultimately abstain, allowing the measure to be adopted.⁶⁸ As a high-level U.S. official who was involved in the UN negotiations remembers, "We thought the French did not have a strategic enough reason to veto. They might threaten to veto, but at the end of the day none of us really believed they would go that far."⁶⁹ Senior French diplomats in fact worried that casting a veto might irreparably harm France's relationship with the United States, and declassified documents indicate that several of them strongly advised against such a move in private.⁷⁰ Paris had not actually vetoed a SC resolution in opposition to either Washington or London since the late 1970s.⁷¹

Out of the council's 10 nonpermanent members, however, Washington and London could initially count only on Spain's and Bulgaria's support. Spanish prime minister José Maria Aznar was firmly aligned with the United States, and Bulgaria was waiting to have its NATO accession

⁶⁵Chirac, *My Life in Politics*, 273; see also Nouzille, *Dans le secret des présidents*, 395; Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 119–120; and Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 215–219.

⁶⁶Author interview with French diplomat involved in the negotiations, 22 January 2011. See also Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 148; Nouzille, *Dans le secret des présidents*, 405; and Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 275–276.

⁶⁷Glenn Kessler and Colum Lynch, "France Vows to Block Resolution on Iraq War," *Washington Post*, 21 January 2003; See also Nouzille, *Dans le secret des présidents*, 397–398; and Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 223–224.

⁶⁸Armitage, interview; see also Bush, *Decision Points*, 246.

⁶⁹Senior State Department official, interview by author, 1 June 2011.

⁷⁰Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 159–160, 271–272; see also Chirac, *My Life in Politics*, 270; and La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 225.

⁷¹See Celine Nahory, Giji Gya, and Misaki Watanabe, "Subjects of UN Security Council Vetoes," Global Policy Forum, 2009, accessed at <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/196-membership/40069-subjects-of-un-security-council-vetoes.html>, 10 October 2015.

ratified at the time, which gave Washington significant leverage over its foreign policy. Germany and Syria, two other nonpermanent members, were firmly opposed. That put all the weight on the other six members that so far had remained uncommitted: Mexico, Chile, Pakistan, Angola, Cameroon, and Guinea. These six countries were all skeptical of military action against Iraq; yet they were also concerned about alienating the United States.⁷²

Pressure without Inducements

The United States, Britain, and Spain introduced a draft second resolution at the SC on 24 February 2003.⁷³ The draft stated that Iraq had “failed to take the final opportunity afforded it in Resolution 1441”⁷⁴—apparently following specific advice from the UK attorney general, who had earlier explained in a secret memo that such a phrase would be sufficient to authorize the use of force.⁷⁵ Jean-Marc de La Sablière, France’s permanent representative to the SC at the time, confirms that the draft was interpreted by everyone on the council as an attempt to authorize the “serious consequences” that had been threatened in Resolution 1441.⁷⁶ The draft resolution’s sponsors were aiming for a vote on or around 7 March, which left them with roughly two weeks to generate the necessary nine-member majority.⁷⁷

In an effort to persuade the “undecided six” nonpermanent members to support the draft resolution authorizing military action, between the end of February and early March 2003, Washington and London applied significant last-minute diplomatic pressure.⁷⁸ But the six remained

⁷²Felicity Barringer, “Some on Security Council Want to Avoid Taking Sides on Iraq,” *New York Times*, 20 February 2003.

⁷³Colum Lynch, “U.S., Britain, Spain Unveil New Iraq Resolution; Document Lays Groundwork for American-Led Invasion,” *Washington Post*, 25 February 2003; see also Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 196.

⁷⁴See “U.S.–British Draft Resolution Stating Position on Iraq,” *New York Times*, 25 February 2003, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/25/international/middleeast/25RTEX.html>, 10 October 2015.

⁷⁵Peter Goldsmith, “Iraq: Interpretation of Resolution 1441,” secret legal advice to the British government, 12 February 2003, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/46490/Goldsmith-draft-advice-12February2003.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

⁷⁶Jean-Marc de La Sablière, interview by author, 18 May 2011; see also Chirac, *My Life in Politics*, 279.

⁷⁷UK Embassy in Washington, “Iraq: UN Endgame,” diplomatic cable, 6 March 2003, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/52555/washington-telno-294-2003-03-06.pdf>, 10 October 2015; see also Claire Tréan, “Le Conseil de sécurité sera saisi d’une seconde résolution sur l’Iraq,” *Le Monde*, 25 February 2003.

⁷⁸Colum Lynch, “U.S. Pushed Allies on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 23 March 2008; and Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*, 275–276. For revealing accounts by, respectively, the Mexican and Chilean presidents at the time, see Vicente Fox, with Rob Allyn, *La Revolución de la Esperanza: La vida, los anhelos, y los sueños de un presidente* (Mexico City: Aguilar, 2008), 381–387; and Ricardo Lagos, *The Southern Tiger: Chile’s Fight for a Democratic and Prosperous Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 200–241.

uncommitted. Rice remembers that the Latin Americans, in particular, “were proving more difficult than we had expected.”⁷⁹ Besides the highly controversial nature of the issue, this may have reflected the fact that Washington and London had engaged in only limited preparatory diplomacy and did not combine their pressure with significant positive inducements. “Contrast the way that the Bush administration handled the second UN resolution in 2003 with [Secretary of State] Jim Baker’s effort on the 1991 Gulf War,” Negroponte suggests, and it becomes clear that in 2003, the president and his principal advisers “didn’t really focus much on diplomacy with the other Security Council members leading up to the war.”⁸⁰

In 1990–1991, the U.S. president had been deeply involved in a months-long diplomatic effort to secure UN approval, personally traveling to several foreign capitals, while Secretary Baker visited 12 countries on five continents, offering inducements amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars.⁸¹ By contrast, in early 2003, President Bush only called Vicente Fox and Ricardo Lagos, his Mexican and Chilean counterparts, respectively, on the telephone, warning them that bilateral relations were at stake and reportedly threatening trade reprisals.⁸² President Fox sought concessions from Washington to help him “sell” a possible compromise to his own domestic audience, and he thus linked Mexico’s cooperation on Iraq to progress on a new immigration agreement with the United States. Bush, however, rejected such a bargain.⁸³ In his memoirs, Fox candidly remembers that although Washington was wooing Mexico’s vote, “the United States didn’t have much to offer in the way of carrots to Mexico.”⁸⁴ Indeed, the Bush administration appears to have offered more substantial economic carrots to recruit its informal coalition of the willing after the invasion than it did to secure UN approval beforehand.⁸⁵

⁷⁹Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 202.

⁸⁰John D. Negroponte (permanent representative of the United States to the United Nations Security Council, 2001–2004), interview by author, 15 February 2011.

⁸¹James Baker III, with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace* (New York: Putnam, 1995), 305–325; and Thompson, *Channels of Power*, 61.

⁸²Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 219; see also Lynch, “U.S. Pushed Allies on Iraq.”

⁸³Tim Weiner, “Holding Swing Vote, Mexico Tells Bush It Won’t Support Iraq Resolution U.S. Favors,” *New York Times*, 28 October 2002.

⁸⁴Fox, *Revolución de la Esperanza*, 382.

⁸⁵Randall Newnham, “Coalition of the Bribed and Bullied? U.S. Economic Linkage and the Iraq War Coalition,” *International Studies Perspectives* 9 (April 2008): 183–200, at 186–188; see also Paul Richter, “U.S. Enlists More Countries in Iraq, at Taxpayers’ Expense,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 June 2003.

Anglo-American Dissension

On 7 March 2003, in an attempt to break the impasse, British foreign secretary Jack Straw floated an amended draft resolution with a final 10-day deadline for Iraq's complete disarmament.⁸⁶ The amended draft foresaw an automatic authorization of the use of force after expiration of the deadline, *unless* the council concluded on or before that date that Iraq had "demonstrated full, unconditional, immediate and active cooperation."⁸⁷ Although the proposed resolution foresaw no immediate authorization of military action, it would have established a mechanism according to which only an affirmative SC vote certifying Iraq's full cooperation could subsequently have prevented the use of force authorization from taking effect. The goal of this intricate mechanism seems to have been to take some pressure off the nonpermanent members, as it was possible to argue, disingenuously, that the council would technically decide on the use of force only after expiration of the deadline. (The uncommitted six could have simply abstained on any final vote after the deadline, thus making it impossible for a resolution certifying Iraq's full cooperation to reach the necessary nine-member majority—without considering the possibility of a British or American veto.)⁸⁸

The uncommitted six showed considerable interest in the amended draft and were willing to negotiate with Washington and London on that basis. According to senior State Department officials, initially as many as five out of the uncommitted six were leaning toward the U.S.–UK position.⁸⁹ French diplomats, declassified cables indicate, seriously worried after the revised draft was circulated that the balance at the SC might irrevocably be shifting to their disadvantage.⁹⁰ Fox and Lagos declared themselves ready to find a compromise based on the 7 March draft, provided that it would not too obviously look like a pretext for war—hence they requested that the final deadline be extended by a few weeks and the council agree on some benchmarks against which to measure Iraq's compliance.⁹¹ The three African members of the SC—Angola, Cameroon,

⁸⁶Karen DeYoung and Colum Lynch, "New U.N. Resolution to Offer Hussein Final Deadline," *Washington Post*, 7 March 2003.

⁸⁷BBC News, "Full Text: Draft UN Resolution," 7 March 2003, accessed at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2831607.stm, 10 October 2015.

⁸⁸For a useful discussion of the 7 March draft, see Marc Weller, *Iraq and the Use of Force in International Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 178.

⁸⁹Senior State Department officials involved in the negotiations, interviews by author, 3 June and 12 June 2011.

⁹⁰Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 287–289.

⁹¹Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 223–226; and Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 288; see also Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 145–152; and DeYoung, *Soldier*, 455.

and Guinea—were reportedly even more supportive. Walter Kansteiner, who in early March met with the leaders of each of those three countries as the assistant secretary of state for Africa, is confident that “if it had gone to a vote, we would have gotten all three.”⁹² On 9 March, French foreign minister de Villepin personally traveled to those same African countries, seeking to persuade their leaders to resist Washington’s entreaties, but his trip only increased the perception in Paris that the Africans were now tilting toward the U.S.–UK position.⁹³

American negotiators, including Powell, were willing to take the amended draft resolution to a vote almost immediately after 7 March. British authorities, however, were more reluctant.⁹⁴ London first wanted to obtain more concrete assurances that *all* of the uncommitted six were on board. As Greenstock explains, “the whole concept of the use of force was quite unpopular in the domestic opinion of Pakistan, Chile, and Mexico. So we were going for ten, we wanted all six of the middle ground states to be with us.”⁹⁵ The Bush administration did not feel that a second resolution was politically necessary, and perhaps as a consequence, it was willing to take greater risks. Britain’s former foreign secretary Straw recalls that, during the effort to obtain a second UN resolution, “parts of the U.S. government weren’t bothered about securing a consensus in the Security Council. If the other members of the Council supported it, fine; if they vetoed it, fine too.”⁹⁶

The window of opportunity to secure a nine-member majority supporting a second UN resolution *with an ultimatum* that essentially would have authorized the use of force closed again within a matter of two or three days, as the negotiations became bogged down around the issue of extending the final deadline. A senior U.S. diplomat who was involved in the negotiations believes that the chance had already evaporated by the time Chirac issued his veto threat on 10 March. “Frankly, by that moment we had already lost the momentum that we had.”⁹⁷ Greenstock agrees: “The fact was that they [the uncommitted six] felt that the Americans were rushing it beyond the logic of the situation. So in the end, they started to

⁹²Walter Kansteiner, interview by author, 18 January 2011.

⁹³Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 289; see also La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 219; and Chirac, *My Life in Politics*, 280.

⁹⁴Senior State Department officials involved in the negotiations, interviews by author, 1 June and 12 June 2011.

⁹⁵Jeremy Greenstock (permanent representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations Security Council, 1998–2003), interview by author, 30 March 2011.

⁹⁶Straw, *Last Man Standing*, 378.

⁹⁷Senior State Department official, interview by author, 1 June 2011.

march backwards and moved away from what they were being asked to do. The Africans, too, fell away. And that movement was accentuated when the French said they were going to veto.”⁹⁸

CHIRAC’S VETO THREAT

On 10 March 2003, President Chirac declared in an interview broadcast live on French national television that France would veto the latest draft UN resolution “whatever the circumstances” (*quelles que soient les circonstances*).⁹⁹ From Chirac’s previous statements in that interview, it is clear that the circumstances he had in mind were the precise number of non-permanent members that might vote for the draft then on the table. In other words, he threatened to veto the latest draft resolution, regardless of how many other SC members supported it. The relevant sentences from Chirac’s interview read as follows:

France will oppose that resolution. Now what does that mean? . . . The first scenario, which is today, this evening, the most probable, is that this resolution won’t get a majority of nine members. . . Then, the second scenario: what I believe this evening to be the views of a number of people change. If this happens, there may indeed be a majority of nine votes or more in favor of the new resolution, the one authorizing war, to put things simply. If that happens, France will vote “no.” . . . My position is that, regardless of the circumstances, France will vote “no.”¹⁰⁰

However, Chirac left open the possibility that France might support, or at least abstain on, a different SC resolution authorizing military action down the road. In the same interview, the French president explained that should a situation arise in which the UN inspectors informed the SC that “the progress isn’t sufficient. . . [and] we won’t be able to guarantee Iraq’s disarmament. . . in that case, of course, regrettably, the war would become inevitable.”¹⁰¹ British and American officials understood that Chirac meant he would veto the draft resolution on the table but was not necessarily closed to the idea of abstaining on, or even supporting, a different resolution without an ultimatum, based on clear benchmarks and specifying a longer time frame for Iraq’s compliance.¹⁰² Indeed, shortly after Chirac’s interview, French foreign minister de Villepin telephoned Straw,

⁹⁸Greenstock, interview; see also Greenstock, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 32.

⁹⁹Jacques Chirac, “Interview given to TF1 and France 2,” 10 March 2003, accessed at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/useur/chirac%20mar%2010.html>, 10 October 2015.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Greenstock, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 35.

his counterpart in London, to clarify that France remained open to supporting such an alternative resolution with a longer time frame of at least three weeks.¹⁰³

For Chirac, the veto threat was partially a matter of principle. The SC, a symbol of France's continuing relevance on the world political stage, should not rubber-stamp what he believed would be an illegitimate war dictated by a "Manichean logic."¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Chirac viewed the veto threat as politically expedient. The war was deeply unpopular with European publics and French Muslims in particular, and the veto threat might conceivably improve France's standing in the Global South—especially the Arab world.¹⁰⁵ Finally, there was a tactical dimension involved. Chirac and his advisers had concluded that by making the veto threat explicit, they could take some pressure off the council's nonpermanent members, thereby making it less likely that Washington and London could achieve a nine-member majority. La Sablière, then France's ambassador to the SC, recalls that at the end of February, his Chilean and Mexican counterparts had told him, "the Americans are saying that you will abstain." When he sought to reassure them that France would veto the draft resolution under discussion, they asked, "well, could you make it public?"¹⁰⁶ Chirac confirms in his memoir that he felt he "needed to reaffirm our position publicly in order to reassure the Chilean and Mexican presidents."¹⁰⁷

After 10 March, the adoption of a second resolution with an ultimatum foreseeing an automatic authorization of force in case of Iraqi noncompliance was most likely no longer feasible. The uncommitted six, with political cover from France, could now more openly resist the pressure from Washington and London to vote in favor of such a resolution. In this sense, Chirac's veto threat indeed "changed the game."¹⁰⁸ However, even after Chirac's veto threat, an alternative approach involving what became known as the "benchmarks proposal" would have stood a good chance of breaking the impasse at the SC. A two-step process would have been necessary for

¹⁰³ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Iraq: Foreign Secretary's Conversation with French Foreign Minister," diplomatic cable to UK Embassy in Paris, 13 March 2003, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/51625/13%20March%202003%20FCO%20telno%2053%20'Iraq%20-%20ForeignSecretarysconversationwithFrenchForeignMinister.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Chirac, *My Life in Politics*, 274.

¹⁰⁵ Alan Riding, "With Iraq Stance, Chirac Strives for Relevance," *New York Times*, 23 February 2003; see also David Styan, "Jacques Chirac's 'non': France, Iraq and the United Nations, 1991–2003," *Modern and Contemporary France* 12 (August 2004): 371–385.

¹⁰⁶ La Sablière, interview.

¹⁰⁷ Chirac, *My Life in Politics*, 281.

¹⁰⁸ When Greenstock was asked during the UK Iraq Inquiry whether Chirac's statement "changed the game," he nodded affirmatively. See Greenstock, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 33–34.

this approach to ultimately yield a UN mandate for the use of force. First, the SC would have had to approve a second resolution containing a list of benchmarks as well as a deadline for Iraq's compliance. Second, after the deadline expired and the weapons inspectors issued their final report, the SC would have had to adopt a further resolution, acknowledging Iraq's failure to comply with the benchmarks and thus authorizing the use of force.

THE LAST-MINUTE BENCHMARKS PROPOSAL

In the days between 8 March (thus starting before Chirac's interview) and 16 March (when Bush informed Blair that the UN process should be abandoned), Greenstock, the British ambassador to the SC, launched a final effort to find a compromise agreement with the council's uncommitted six.¹⁰⁹ Together with Blix and Juan Gabriel Valdés, Chile's UN ambassador who informally represented the six, Greenstock worked out a list of five demanding benchmarks that Iraq would have to meet and that he proposed for inclusion in the second UN resolution. The list, circulated to the entire SC on 12 March, included the following: (1) allow 30 Iraqi scientists identified by the UN inspectors to travel abroad for interviews, together with their families; (2) hand over all unaccounted stores of anthrax, nerve gas, and mustard gas or provide evidence of their destruction; (3) destroy all remaining "Al Samoud" ballistic missiles; (4) surrender all mobile production laboratories for biological and chemical weapons; and (5) account for all unmanned aerial vehicles and remotely piloted vehicles.¹¹⁰

The Bush administration, however, showed little interest in the benchmarks proposal. "By then, our minds were on other things," explains Negroponte.¹¹¹ Blair recalls in his memoirs that "it was indeed a hard sell to George [Bush]. His system was completely against it."¹¹² Ultimately, the Bush administration reluctantly allowed the British to move ahead with the proposal. But the administration made it clear that the benchmarks resolution needed to be adopted within the next few days, and Iraq should be given no more than a single week to demonstrate its compliance—hence the final deadline had to be 21 March, or 24 March at the very

¹⁰⁹On the specific dates, see Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 151–154; and La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 218–222.

¹¹⁰Jack Straw, memorandum to UK Iraq Inquiry, 21 January 2010, 17, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/43119/jackstraw-memorandum.pdf>, 10 October 2015; see also Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 245; and Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 216, 225.

¹¹¹Negroponte, interview.

¹¹²Blair, *A Journey*, 428.

latest.¹¹³ Furthermore, U.S. authorities were opposed to any resolution without an ultimatum that would have automatically authorized the use of force, after the deadline expired, unless the SC concluded by then that Iraq was fully cooperating.¹¹⁴ In short, Bush consented to add some benchmarks to the 7 March draft and extend the deadline by a few days, but he was unwilling to go further. The benchmarks proposal circulated by Greenstock on 12 March reflected those American requests, and thus still included an ultimatum authorizing the use of force in case of Iraqi noncompliance.¹¹⁵

The uncommitted six, for their part, were sympathetic to the benchmarks proposal but insisted on a longer timeline of 30 to 45 days. “The biggest point of diversion was the timetable imposed upon Iraq for compliance,” remembers Lagos, the former Chilean president.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the six now also requested that the benchmarks resolution entail no ultimatum or “automaticity.” After expiration of the deadline, the SC should assess Iraq’s implementation of the benchmarks, based on a report from the inspectors, and only in case of certified noncompliance would it then authorize military action.¹¹⁷

On Friday, 14 March Chile circulated a revised proposal that reflected those concerns. The proposal contained almost exactly the same benchmarks as Greenstock’s original list, including the requirements that 30 Iraqi scientists be allowed to travel abroad for interviews and that all alleged stores of anthrax and mustard gas be fully accounted for. But unlike the earlier British proposal, this revised text foresaw no automatic authorization of military action.¹¹⁸ Chile also suggested that the timeline for Iraq’s compliance should be extended from 7 to 30 days.¹¹⁹ Canada, which without being a member of the SC at the time was actively involved in trying to broker a compromise, had earlier suggested a deadline of 15 April, which came down to roughly the same.¹²⁰ Others among the

¹¹³ Elisabeth Bumiller and Felicity Barringer, “U.S. Still Hopeful of 9 Votes at U.N. for Iraq Measure,” *New York Times*, 13 March 2003; see also Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 245.

¹¹⁴ Senior State Department official, interview by author, 1 June 2011; see also Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 217.

¹¹⁵ Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 245–248; Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 216–217; and La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 220–221.

¹¹⁶ Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 222–225, at 215.

¹¹⁷ Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 248; and Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 217.

¹¹⁸ For the full text of Chile’s 14 March proposal, see U.S. Mission to the United Nations, “UN/Iraq: Undecided Six Initiative Dead,” diplomatic cable, 14 March 2003, accessed at <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2003/03/03USUNNEWYORK707.html>, 10 October 2015.

¹¹⁹ Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 225; see also La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 222.

¹²⁰ U.S. Mission to the United Nations, “Iraq/UNSC: Canada Still Working—At the Highest Levels—To ‘Bridge the Divide,’” diplomatic cable, 12 March 2003, accessed at <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2003/03/03OTTAWA692.html>, 10 October 2015.

undecided six requested a somewhat longer timeline of 45 days.¹²¹ Significantly, however, although the six still disagreed about the exact time frame, the 14 March draft, with the ultimate deadline left blank, was presented as *a joint initiative of all the hitherto undecided countries*.¹²² Former Chilean president Lagos confirms that he “had six votes—the entire swing vote of the SC.”¹²³

At that point, Blair pleaded with President Bush to extend the deadline,¹²⁴ and Greenstock declared that if he got “traction” on his benchmarks proposal, Britain might consider dropping the operative paragraph that foresaw an automatic authorization of force in case of Iraqi noncompliance.¹²⁵ But Washington was unwilling to compromise either on automaticity or on the one-week deadline. “What we weren’t seeing,” recalls a former senior British diplomat, “was serious American engagement in the negotiation in trying to find a formula that would work.”¹²⁶ White House spokesman Ari Fleischer dismissed proposals to push back the deadline by 30 days as “a non-starter.”¹²⁷ Greenstock himself explains the ultimate failure of the benchmarks proposal as follows:

The middle ground six, the Africans, the Pakistanis, and the Latin Americans, went along tentatively with the idea of setting benchmarks. But they wanted to stipulate a much greater length of time for Saddam to meet those benchmarks than the Americans were prepared to concede. They [the six] stipulated forty-five days to me, and we couldn’t bridge the gap between one week and forty-five days.¹²⁸

Had the United States supported a benchmarks resolution along the lines of the 14 March Chilean draft, it most likely would have been adopted by the SC. France, while skeptical, would almost certainly have gone along with the proposal. La Sablière, then France’s ambassador to the SC, explains that he “didn’t like the benchmarks approach” because he

¹²¹Ewen MacAskill, Richard Norton-Taylor, and Julian Borger, “U.S. May Go It Alone as Blair Is Caught in Diplomatic Deadlock,” *The Guardian*, 12 March 2003; see also Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 152.

¹²²U.S. Mission to the United Nations, “UN/Iraq: Undecided Six Initiative Dead.”

¹²³Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 225.

¹²⁴Tony Blair, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 21 January 2011, 91, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/50865/20110121-Blair.pdf>, 10 October 2015; confirmed by Rycroft, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 73.

¹²⁵Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 248; see also Corine Lesnes, “Londres échoue à arracher un compromis aux Nations Unies,” *Le Monde*, 14 March 2003.

¹²⁶Stephen Pattison (head of UN Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2001–2003), testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 31 January 2011, 60, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/51900/20110131-pattison-final.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

¹²⁷Quoted in MacAskill, Norton-Taylor, and Borger, “U.S. May Go It Alone.”

¹²⁸Greenstock, interview.

understood that the benchmarks would have been difficult to meet and could have generated new momentum in favor of UN approval for the use of force—consequently, when he “found out that Greenstock’s negotiations with the six had failed, [he] was relieved.”¹²⁹ If Washington had endorsed the Chilean benchmarks proposal, it would have enjoyed a 10-member majority at the council, making a French veto extremely unlikely. Indeed, on 13 March, French authorities publicly declared that while they couldn’t support Greenstock’s 12 March proposal, a compromise might be reached on benchmarks by introducing a longer timeline and removing any reference to automaticity—which is precisely what the Chilean proposal of 14 March attempted to do.¹³⁰ As a senior French diplomat who was involved in the negotiations explains, “whether we were going to accept it [the Chilean proposal] sincerely or because we had no other choice, that’s another question. But I think we would have accepted it.”¹³¹

Russia, which had earlier teamed up with the French in opposing previous draft resolutions intended to authorize the use of force, was also very unlikely to veto the 14 March benchmarks proposal, given that the Russians had been among the first to suggest a benchmarks approach to Blix back in February.¹³² Therefore, had the Bush administration accepted the Chilean proposal of 14 March (Blair was reportedly supportive),¹³³ the resolution in all likelihood could have been adopted either on that same day or by the following Monday, 17 March.

HOW LIKELY WAS A FRENCH ABSTENTION ON THE USE OF FORCE?

A benchmarks resolution along the lines of the Chilean proposal would have entailed no ultimatum—consequently, it would not in itself have authorized the use of force in case of Iraqi noncompliance. For the use of force to be authorized at the end of the 30- or 45-day period, the following conditions would have had to be met: First, after expiration of the deadline, the UN inspectors would have had to report to the SC that Iraq had failed to meet several of the benchmarks. Second, the previously uncommitted nonpermanent members would have had to support a third resolution acknowledging Iraq’s noncompliance, which (similarly to what

¹²⁹La Sablière, interview.

¹³⁰Claire Trèan, “Paris rejette les propositions de la Grande-Bretagne,” *Le Monde*, 14 March 2003; Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 246.

¹³¹Senior French diplomat involved in the negotiations, interview by author, 22 January 2011; see also La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 218, 228.

¹³²Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 181.

¹³³Lagos, *The Southern Tiger*, 226.

Britain had aimed for in its 24 February draft) would have authorized the “serious consequences” threatened in Resolution 1441. Finally, the council’s other veto-wielding permanent members, including France, would have had to support that resolution or at least abstain.

With hindsight, it would have been next to impossible for Iraq to meet several of the benchmarks. Baghdad could hardly have accounted for its outstanding anthrax and mustard gas stores, given that the relevant documentation had probably been destroyed years earlier, and even following the invasion, no usable WMDs were found inside Iraq.¹³⁴ Furthermore, Iraqi scientists interviewed abroad could have told indicting stories of Saddam’s attempts to deceive the international community about his WMD programs, which might have convinced the inspectors that Iraq was not fully cooperating as required. Former chief UN inspector Blix, reflecting on the benchmarks, declared in 2010 that “they didn’t have the anthrax. . . So I doubt very much they would have [been able to] fulfill that condition. . . The other one was the mobile biology laboratories. They didn’t exist. . . They didn’t have them, so how could they have complied with that?”¹³⁵ Already during the negotiations in the spring of 2003, Blix, who supported the benchmarks approach, had serious doubts about Iraq’s ability to comply, and his views were certainly known to the United States, Britain, and the other permanent members of the SC.¹³⁶

It appears likely that a report by the UN inspectors in mid- to late April concluding that Iraq had failed to meet several of the benchmarks finally would have tilted the balance at the SC in favor of military action. For further insights regarding the odds of such an outcome, it is worth taking a closer look at the available evidence as to what the “undecided six” were in fact willing to support. The 14 March Chilean draft resolution, supported by all of the six, listed the benchmarks and then foresaw that “upon expiry of the period [that is, either 30 or 45 days], the inspectors will present a factual and detailed report. . . The Council will then assess the situation and decide the continuation of the inspections process. . . or apply the appropriate relevant paragraph of 1441.”¹³⁷ Hence, the six were in fact willing to accept a process that, in case the inspectors certified Iraq’s failure to comply

¹³⁴See Central Intelligence Agency, *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the Director of Central Intelligence on Iraq’s WMD* (“Duelfer Report”), revised edition (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), 64–65, accessed at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GPO-DUELFERREPORT/content-detail.html>, 10 October 2015.

¹³⁵Hans Blix, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 27 July 2010, 79, accessed at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/48849/20100727pm-blix.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

¹³⁶Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 245–247.

¹³⁷Quoted in U.S. Mission to the United Nations, “UN/Iraq: Undecided Six Initiative Dead.”

with the benchmarks, all but committed them to authorizing the “serious consequences” threatened in Resolution 1441.

In short, the benchmarks approach, if supported by Washington, could have moved the council’s nonpermanent members out of France’s orbit, thereby isolating France and increasing the political cost to Chirac of continued opposition. Asked about the chances of a use of force resolution being adopted on the basis of the benchmarks approach, Matthew Rycroft, then the private secretary for foreign affairs to the British prime minister, told the UK Iraq Inquiry, “As we were going into what turned out to be the end game in terms of strategy to secure the Mexican and Chilean votes, I remember. . . We did have four in the bag, but we had at that point a reasonable chance of securing a further six *if we did all of this. . . clusters [that is, benchmarks] stuff with Mexico and Chile.*”¹³⁸

In the face of a 9- or 10-member majority at the Security Council supporting a resolution acknowledging Iraq’s failure to comply with the benchmarks, a French abstention would have been the most probable outcome. Javier Solana, who as the EU’s high representative for foreign and security policy at the time was engaged in an ongoing dialogue with heads of state on both sides of the Atlantic, is convinced that “the French were willing to get out of the mess, there’s no doubt about that. But the impression was that the Americans were very decided.”¹³⁹ Declassified French documents confirm that by early 2003, Chirac’s leading diplomatic advisers, including de Villepin, were insisting that in case of Iraqi non-compliance certified by the inspectors, Paris should not oppose the use of force.¹⁴⁰

The counterfactual presented here is compatible with the evidence that France opposed a second SC resolution (including a benchmarks resolution) with an explicit ultimatum authorizing the use of force in case of Iraqi noncompliance. Blair subsequently declared before the UK Iraq Inquiry that France “would agree to a [benchmarks] resolution that didn’t have an ultimatum in it because that would then mean a further resolution afterwards.”¹⁴¹ What Blair, who has consistently defended his own policy choices at the time, fails to acknowledge is that the adoption of a benchmarks resolution along the lines of the 14 March Chilean proposal would have changed the dynamics at the SC in a way that would have been clearly

¹³⁸Rycroft, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 69, emphasis added. For a similar conclusion, see Manning, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 86.

¹³⁹Javier Solana, interview by author, 24 March 2011. For a similar conclusion, see Davidson, *America’s Allies and War*, 230 n. 137.

¹⁴⁰See Bozo, *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne*, 203–204.

¹⁴¹Blair, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 104.

unfavorable to those who opposed the use of force. French authorities were acutely aware of this risk—the benchmarks approach, writes La Sablière, “could have engendered a real debate at the Council, putting [France] in difficulty.”¹⁴²

Although the evidence is not conclusive, then, it appears that what prevented UN support for the benchmarks and, quite likely for the use of force was not so much principled opposition from France or any of the nonpermanent members but rather the Bush administration’s unwillingness to compromise on automaticity and consider a longer time frame for Iraq’s compliance. Greenstock essentially told the UK Iraq Inquiry as much: “the benchmarks [could have offered some] sort of escape route from what Chirac had said,. . . [however,] the Americans were closed to compromise.”¹⁴³ With Greenstock unable to offer meaningful concessions to the uncommitted six, the benchmarks negotiations had collapsed by the end of Friday, 14 March.¹⁴⁴ Five days later, Bush gave the order to execute Operation Iraqi Freedom, and soon thereafter, the first U.S. special operations teams crossed into Iraq.¹⁴⁵

Paradoxically, as former UK officials now acknowledge, the French veto threat of 10 March may have had its greatest impact in London, by helping the British government overcome its domestic political difficulties. “The Chirac statement fell into our laps,” acknowledges a former senior adviser to the British prime minister.¹⁴⁶ In particular, it allowed Blair to claim that he was living up to his pledge not to go to war without UN approval unless an “unreasonable veto” made that impossible.¹⁴⁷ Greenstock wrote in a diplomatic cable at the time that he had agreed “with Negroponte. . . that we will tell the press. . . that we have concluded that there is no prospect of putting our resolution to the vote, *casting heavy blame on the French.*”¹⁴⁸ On 18 March, during a crucial House of Commons debate on Britain’s participation in the war, Blair insisted that “what is surely unreasonable is for a country. . . to say that it will veto such a resolution in all circumstances.” A majority of British members of Parliament apparently agreed, repeatedly referencing the French veto threat in their remarks and

¹⁴²La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses du monde*, 228.

¹⁴³Greenstock, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 35.

¹⁴⁴U.S. Mission to the United Nations, “UN/Iraq: Undecided Six Initiative Dead”; see also Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 248.

¹⁴⁵Patrick E. Tyler, “U.S. and British Troops Push into Iraq as Missiles Strike Baghdad Compound,” *New York Times*, 21 March 2003; see also Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 377–379.

¹⁴⁶Rycroft, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 76.

¹⁴⁷Straw, *Last Man Standing*, 389; and Greenstock, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 35.

¹⁴⁸Greenstock, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 36–37, emphasis added.

ultimately endorsing Britain's participation in the Iraq War by a 412–149 majority.¹⁴⁹

CONCLUSION: WHY BUSH WAS UNWILLING TO WAIT

The available evidence indicates that even after Chirac's veto threat, the Bush administration would have stood a good chance of securing UN approval for the Iraq War within a matter of weeks and without fundamentally changing its policy, had it been willing to postpone the start of military operations, endorse specific benchmarks for Iraq's compliance, and abandon its insistence that the second resolution ought to preauthorize military action. The American president, however, was unwilling to make even tactical concessions to his SC partners and deviate from a timetable for war set months in advance.¹⁵⁰

It appears that the decision to start the war in March 2003, as opposed to postponing the commencement of hostilities by six weeks or so to accommodate other council members, was based on a fairly straightforward cost-benefit analysis in Washington. By early March, a full 55 percent of Americans supported a U.S. invasion of Iraq, even if it was in defiance of a vote of the SC.¹⁵¹ With strong domestic support for military action and most senior administration officials expecting that toppling Saddam and stabilizing Iraq would be easy, President Bush saw little reason to engage in further taxing UN negotiations—especially because there could be no certainty about the final outcome. Furthermore, by waiting much longer, the president risked appearing indecisive vis-à-vis an opponent that he and his administration had increasingly portrayed as a vital, imminent threat to the United States. “We were so leaning forward,” Armitage explains, before adding, “The momentum that had built in the administration didn't favor waiting at all.”¹⁵²

Some analysts have suggested that the American military pushed the Bush administration to go to war by March 2003 because U.S. forces would have been incapable of fighting in the Iraqi summer heat.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹UK Parliament Hansard, “Transcript of House of Commons Debate on Iraq,” 401, no. 365, London, 18 March 2003, columns 764–766, Blair quote at 765, accessed at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/emhansrd/vo030318/debtext/30318-06.htm>, 10 October 2015; see also Matthew Templest, “Parliament Gives Blair Go-Ahead for War,” *The Guardian*, 18 March 2003.

¹⁵⁰On the timetable for war, see U.S. Central Command, “Operational Timeline/Force Flow,” PowerPoint briefing slide, 5 August 2002, accessed at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB214/Tab%20K.pdf>, 10 October 2015.

¹⁵¹Adam Nagourney and Janet Elder, “More Americans Now Faulting U.N. on Iraq, Poll Finds,” *New York Times*, 11 March 2003.

¹⁵²Armitage, interview.

¹⁵³See, for example, Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 233–234, 274; and Joel Westra, *International Law and the Use of Armed Force: The UN Charter and the Major Powers* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 137–141.

However, General John Abizaid, who by early 2003 was deputy commander of the U.S. Central Command, which was responsible for military operations in Iraq, rejects this interpretation. He and other senior military officers, he insists, made it clear to their political superiors that U.S. forces could avoid the summer heat by fighting at night. “It would have been a problem, but it was not an insurmountable problem,” Abizaid explains. “I believe it was not a military decision, it was a political decision, and then some of the political leadership came up with this idea that it couldn’t be done later. Of course it could be done. It could be done anytime. I didn’t feel any great pressure from our military commanders on the ground.”¹⁵⁴ British policymakers received similar advice from their chiefs of staff: coalition troops could stay deployed for another several months if needed before launching military operations, and fighting in the summer would be a manageable problem.¹⁵⁵

Assuming that the Bush administration had behaved differently, I have argued, it would have stood a good chance of securing UN approval for the Iraq War. Some may view the assumption as unrealistic, as it might have required a different president with less hawkish advisers. However, the counterfactual developed here is based primarily on what would have been possible in light of the available evidence about the negotiating stances of the other SC members, notably, France and the uncommitted six. At stake, ultimately, is the war’s legitimacy. Contemporary international legitimacy norms require that “in situations other than self-defense, decisions to use force must be made multilaterally”—either through the UN Security Council or through regional multilateral bodies such as NATO.¹⁵⁶ Those who argue that Chirac’s grandstanding and his veto threat were the primary, and perhaps only, reason why Washington and London failed to secure UN approval at least implicitly seek to weaken criticisms of the Iraq War as illegitimate.

Perhaps a better strategic assessment on the part of U.S. leaders, resulting in a fuller appreciation of the war’s likely costs and the damage to America’s standing from an invasion widely perceived as a unilateral act of aggression, would have been sufficient to persuade the Bush administration of the value of a more determined effort to secure UN approval. As former U.S. intelligence officer Paul Pillar has written, “Assume that the

¹⁵⁴General John P. Abizaid, interview by author, 20 January 2011.

¹⁵⁵Straw, testimony before the UK Iraq Inquiry, 75.

¹⁵⁶Christian Reus-Smit, “Liberal Hierarchy and the License to Use Force,” in David Armstrong, Theo Farrell, and Bice Maiguashca, eds., *Force and Legitimacy in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 71; see also Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 80–82.

Bush administration and the American people anticipated the costly mess that would follow a toppling of Saddam. . . Under those assumptions, it is highly unlikely that the administration would have proceeded with its plan for war and inconceivable that Congress and the American people would have gone along if it had.”¹⁵⁷ At the very least, Congress and the American people would have viewed UN support and broader international backing as all but essential before embarking on such a high-stakes mission.

After the 2003 invasion, faced with a rapidly deteriorating security situation and looming humanitarian disaster, the SC went back to cooperating on Iraq in a newfound spirit of pragmatism. Resolution 1511, adopted on 16 October 2003, authorized a “multinational force under unified command to take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability” and “urge[d] Member States to contribute assistance, including military forces, to the multinational force.”¹⁵⁸ However, because the U.S. invasion, launched without UN approval, continued to be viewed as illegitimate by large portions of the world’s population, foreign leaders, even those closely aligned with the United States on other issues, were reluctant to meaningfully share in the burden of postwar stabilization.¹⁵⁹ Many countries that did contribute troops to the initial stabilization phase had withdrawn them again by late 2004 under strong domestic political pressure.¹⁶⁰ Although full UN backing for the war might have done little to prevent the subsequent complete breakdown of public order in Iraq, it probably would have allowed the United States to form a more substantial international coalition that could have helped it share the longer-term burden as well as the blame for what went wrong.*

¹⁵⁷Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 78.

¹⁵⁸SCR 1511 (2003), § 13, 14.

¹⁵⁹Joseph A. Christoff, “Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq: Coalition Support and International Donor Commitments,” testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, 9 May 2007, 5–8, accessed at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07827t.pdf>, 10 October 2015; see also Richard Sobel, Peter Furia, and Bethany Barratt, eds., *Public Opinion and International Intervention: Lessons from the Iraq War* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012).

¹⁶⁰Malone, *International Struggle over Iraq*, 229; and Ricks, *Fiasco*, 346–348.

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