

THE BREAK IN RUSSIAN–AMERICAN RELATIONS: ANALYZING THE DIPLOMATIC TRAIL TO THE IRAQ WAR

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to analyze the diplomatic course to the Iraq War and the divergence in Russian-American relations with a focus on diplomatic activities in January, February and March 2003. To this end, the article discussed Russia's opposition to the use of military force with reference to its evolving foreign policy doctrine and, more specifically, its long-standing and complex relations with the Baath regime in Iraq. Following this discussion, the article argued that this opposition originated from realistic concerns, domestic pressure and doctrinal differences. In this way, it was argued that Kremlin's diplomatic gestures tilted towards multilateralism, non-intervention and the UN Security Council as mechanisms that could secure its interests. However, the review of statements from the Russian president and diplomats suggested that they were careful not to harm Russian-American relations. Therefore, Russia benefited from the anti-war consensus at the UN because it increased the cost of unilateral military action and prevented a direct diplomatic confrontation with Washington. Following these arguments, it was also concluded that the outcome of this diplomatic prelude was an early sign of multipolarity in the 21st century.

Keywords

Russian foreign policy, Iraq War, UN Security Council, diplomacy, Russian-American relations.

Resumo

Este estudo é uma tentativa de analisar o processo diplomático que conduziu à Guerra do Iraque e a divergência nas relações entre a Rússia e os Estados Unidos, com foco nas atividades diplomáticas em Janeiro, Fevereiro e Março de 2003. Para tal, o artigo discute a oposição da Rússia ao uso da força militar, com referência à evolução da sua doutrina de política externa e, mais especificamente, às suas relações complexas e de longa data com o regime Baath no Iraque. Após essa discussão, o artigo argumentou que essa oposição teve origem em preocupações realistas, pressão interna e diferenças doutrinárias. Dessa forma, argumentou-se que os gestos diplomáticos do Kremlin se inclinaram para o multilateralismo, a não intervenção e o Conselho de Segurança da ONU como mecanismos que poderiam garantir os seus interesses. No entanto, a análise das declarações do presidente russo e dos diplomatas sugeriu que estes foram cuidadosos para não prejudicar as relações entre a Rússia e os Estados Unidos. Portanto, a Rússia tirou partido do consenso antiguerra na ONU, pois aumentou o custo da ação militar unilateral e impediu um confronto diplomático direto com Washington. Seguindo esses argumentos, concluiu-se também que o resultado desse prelúdio diplomático foi um sinal precoce da multipolaridade no século XXI.



Palavras-chave

Política externa russa, Guerra do Iraque, Conselho de Segurança da ONU, diplomacia, relações russo-americanas.

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Introduction

The present study is an attempt to reassess the US campaign for the 2003 invasion of Iraq from a Russian perspective. In this regard, the study will examine the reactions of key Russian officials to this military invasion in the period leading up to the invasion. A discussion of these reactions can provide a context which shows the diplomatic course to the Invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The following discussions argue that Russia's opposition can be explained, on the one hand, in the context of Russian foreign policy doctrine at that time and, more specifically, in the context of Russia's long-standing and complex relations with Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. Accordingly, the article argues that Russia's opposition to the imminent military action was rooted in Moscow's Middle East policy and doctrinal differences with the United States regarding the use of force and military intervention to reach international goals.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks which led to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by a US-led military coalition, reinforced an international political paradigm in which the use of military force and regime change were more likely in the future. Thus, the dawn of the twenty-first century presented a bleak outlook for the world and set a controversial precedent for the invasion of sovereign states by major powers. In this regard, a great deal of research has been written on the Iraq War in recent years, assessing its causes and circumstances from conflicting perspectives. On March 22, 2003, in his radio address, President George W. Bush attempted to clarify the overall structure behind the US massive military campaign by saying that the goal of this mission was "to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction [WMDs], to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people" (White House Archives, 2003). This was despite the fact that, prior to the invasion, the UN inspection team had failed to find convincing evidence of the existence of such weapons in Iraq (see, UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2003). Given the history of tensions with Iraq, the emphasis on the risk of Iraqi WMD program, including chemical and possibly nuclear weapons, had become an integral part of the American "containment" policy against the Saddam regime since 1991 (Zilinskas, 1995; Black, 1999). After February 28, 1991, when a coalition of 42 countries ended the occupation of Kuwait, some criticized the administration of George H. W. Bush for failing to continue the campaign and possibly overthrow Saddam. When the Gulf War began, Bush made it clear that the goal was to liberate Kuwait and not to occupy Iraq, but he also stated that his administration was determined to destroy Saddam Hussein's nuclear bomb potential and his chemical weapons facilities (Rosenthal, 1991). Later, Bush and his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, argued that the continuation of attacks after the liberation of Kuwait would certainly undermine the alliance and cause severe



casualties for the coalition forces (see, Bush & Scowcroft, 1998). Indeed, the idea of toppling Saddam's regime seemed risky and impractical at the time.

However, the conclusion remained among the Americans that the Iraqi regime was still a problem. While regime change was temporarily removed from Washington's agenda, to ensure this containment, the British and American governments launched a series of punitive measures and military campaigns against Iraq in the 1990s. These measures included economic sanctions through the UN Security Council, the enforcement of no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq and the regular inspections of targets inside Iraq by the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM). Hence, the tension between Britain and, in particular, the United States with the Baath regime of Iraq escalated throughout the 1990s. The peak of these tensions appeared in December 1998 when the UK and the US launched Operation Desert Fox with airstrikes on targets deemed suspicious by UNSCOM. These airstrikes were supported by another major development regarding Iraq that occurred on October 31, 1998 when President Bill Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Act. The act that had been approved by a majority vote at the US Congress and Senate explicitly stated that the US government should "support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq" (Iraq Liberation Act, 1998). Until then, the US government had been regularly trying to weaken or even overthrow Saddam Hussein by conducting covert operations and supporting insurgencies in Iraq. In fact, CIA assessments indicated that Iraq still posed a threat to American interests after the 1991 ceasefire (see, Ignatius, 2003). But the signing of the Liberation Act made regime change an official policy of the United States. Therefore, the Clinton administration removed the main obstacle to the possibility of a military attack on Iraq. In this vein, the September 11 attacks and the start of the so-called "War on Terror" brought this possibility to the fore. Interestingly, in October 2002, the Bush administration capitalized on this act, among other things, to justify the invasion and successfully passed the Iraq Resolution.

Thus, by the time George W. Bush took office in 2000, regime change had become the official policy of the United States towards Iraq. At that time, the general expectation was that the Republican administration would take measures that were more aggressive in dealing with Iraq, not least because some advisers who were close to the president were obsessed with the concept of military action to remove Saddam from power. A notable case was the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who was responsible for directing George Bush's War on Terror. During the first emergency meeting of the National Security Council on September 11, he had famously asked, "why the United States should not go against Iraq and not just al-Qaeda" (Kampfner, 2003, p. 156). Thus, from the very beginning, military plans for an invasion of Iraq had been prepared in the Pentagon even though there was no proven connection between Al-Qaeda and the Iraqi regime. However, the leading members of the administration tried to convince the outsiders of this connection. For example, on September 14, 2003, Vice President Dick Cheney said to a conservative think tank that "he (Saddam) had long established ties with Al-Qaeda" (NBC News, 2003). Following the first stages of the American campaign in Afghanistan and the fall of the Taliban regime, the Bush administration made extensive efforts to galvanize American public opinion, justify the invasion of Iraq and garner support from allies with the aim of organizing a political-military coalition. In a well-known example, on February 5, 2003, the US Secretary of State Collin Powell appeared at the UN Security Council to describe evidence based on "solid intelligence" about Iraqi



WMDs which failed to convince the members and was later proved to be false and misguided (see, White House News Release, 2003).

As noted above, Russia along with some major countries such as France, Germany and China opposed the campaign and warned of its consequences for the region and the world. Thus, as the invasion began, President Vladimir Putin said in a Kremlin statement that the campaign would cause widespread humanitarian and environmental disasters and his foreign minister, Igor Ivanov, called it unjustified. To be clear, Russia's objection to the use of military force against Iraq must be considered within the Russian Middle Eastern policy and Moscow's complex interaction with the Iraqi government from 1991 to 2003.

Iraq: A bone of contention in Russian foreign policy in the Middle East

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the new Russian Federation attempted under President Boris Yeltsin to maintain the former ties that had been developed during the Soviet times. This became more evident in the second half of Yeltsin's presidency and particularly in 1996 when he chose Yevgeny Primakov to lead the Russian foreign policy (see, for instance, Simha, 2015). Primakov was a substitute for Andrei Kozyrev whose friendly gesture towards the West and especially the United States was a matter of concern for Russian nationalists. Kozyrev's nationalist critics such as the conservative members of the Russian State Duma claimed that his Atlanticist approach had failed to adequately address their concerns about NATO expansion and developments in Iraq (Lynch, 2001). Therefore, the new foreign minister gave priority to further strategic autonomy and multilateralism with special emphasis on India and China as emerging powers in the post-Cold War era. This turn in strategy was later called the 'Primakov Doctrine' (see, Delong, 2020; Rumer, 2019). As a diplomat, Primakov was also famous for his pragmatism and his close knowledge of the Arab World as he had previously served in key diplomatic positions across the Middle East. With respect to the Middle Eastern conflicts and particularly the case of Iraq, Russian foreign policy showed a strong opposition to military intervention. Hence, despite Yeltsin's early efforts to maintain security and economic cooperation with the United States, Russia's emphasis on non-intervention gradually drew the country away from the American foreign policy in the Balkans and the Middle East.

Historically, the Arab World was a theater for Soviet-American rivalries and, in this theater, Iraq was geographically and politically closer to the USSR. In this case, Russia's close relations with the Iraqi regime, which was a legacy from the Cold War, became a bone of contention in Russian-American diplomatic gestures throughout the 1990s. In fact, these confrontations captivated many international scholars in that decade (see, for instance, Freedman, 2001; Nizamedden 1999; Rumer, 2000; Shaffer, 2001; Vassiliev, 1993). These scholars often emphasized that the revival of relations with Iraq was ultimately inevitable in the post-Cold War era. However, a review of records suggests that Soviet-Iraqi relations were always interesting to Western political scientists. For instance, in 1980, Francis Fukuyama analyzed the depth of these relations since 1968 and concluded that Iraq was really "an ideal location for the expansion of Soviet influence" (Fukuyama, 1980, p. 5). In his analysis, Fukuyama stressed factors such as oil resources, the firm position of the Baath Party, Iraq's overall political and military



influence and the country's need for Soviet military hardware. However, he also indicated the 'considerable weakness' in Soviet influence in Iraq. In fact, Primakov's observations from the same historical period may corroborate Fukuyama's theory (see, Primakov, 2009, pp. 301-324). This being said, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union maintained close military and economic ties with the Iraqi regime and, despite criticisms from Washington, this support continued even after the occupation of Kuwait in 1990. However, one should note that the Soviet Union ultimately supported the UN Security Council Resolutions 660 and 665 which condemned the invasion of Kuwait and authorized a naval blockade against Iraq. This indicated that ideology was then a less significant factor in the Soviet Union's foreign policy towards the end of the Cold War and multilateralism and the application of UN mechanisms were becoming more relevant. Replacing the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Federation maintained this approach especially in the case of Iraqi crisis.

Naturally, with its economic potential and vast energy resources, Iraq remained a key piece of the Russian foreign policy puzzle in the post-Soviet era. In hindsight, therefore, one might see that Kremlin's support for Baghdad put this tendency in direct opposition to the more aggressive stance that the Anglo-American front promoted. In this political climate, Yeltsin's position on Iraq was sometimes coupled with his opposition to Washington's policies which often appeared in the form of unilateral sanctions and military escalations. Nevertheless, as some scholars have shown, the Russian foreign policy followed a complex logic. In one case, in 1996, Primakov raised the question of Iraq's seven-billion-dollar debt to the Soviet Union. Likewise, in his analysis of post-Soviet foreign policy, Nikolai Zlobin has argued that Moscow regarded this massive debt as an instrument to exert influence on Saddam Hussein (Zlobin, 2004, p. 91). In fact, the urgent need to restore Russian economy, in a situation where Western financial support was visibly insufficient, prompted Primakov to salvage relations with the former Cold War allies. But the question of Iraq and its delusional leader remained problematic. In "Russia and the Arabs", a memoir that documents his diplomatic experience in the Middle East, Primakov wrote extensively about "the Phenomenon that was Saddam Hussein". During his long career, he had met with Hussein on several occasions and therefore could offer an analysis of his personality. Recalling Russia's fractured influence in Iraq, Primakov had this to say:

"But without meaning to belittle the influence that Russia had, it has to be said that Saddam continued to believe in his lucky star, in his own foresight, and ultimately in Allah, who would save him from harm. What sustained his belief was not blind hope, but his realpolitik certainty that, given the prevailing sentiment in the Arab world—and indeed the Americans' own interests—the United States had nothing to gain from bringing about his downfall" (Primakov, 2009, p. 318).

According to Primakov, Russia made several attempts in the 1990s to prevent air strikes on Iraq. But, as mentioned earlier, the reemergence of hawkish Republicans in 2000 (mainly figures such as Cheney and Rumsfeld) and the 9/11 terrorist attacks created an immediate crisis in the Middle East. Moreover, in a general sense, Yeltsin's Russia had already become increasingly aware of its fundamental differences with the West and its potential to exert more influence globally. This awareness along with later developments promoted a new course for Russia's foreign posture in the new century. On March 26, 2000, Vladimir Putin became president of Russia and, with his leadership, the foreign



policy discourse became more assertive while still showing some pragmatism. Initially, Putin supported George Bush's War on Terror and provided support for the United States during the occupation of Afghanistan. However, the relations took a turn for the worse when, in December 2001, Washington informed Moscow that the United States would soon withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The withdrawal from the treaty could jeopardize the Russian strategic parity in terms of ballistic missile arsenal. To make matters worse, the following year, the NATO 17th summit was held in Prague during which the organization reaffirmed its post-Cold War Open Door Policy. During a NATO press conference in Prague, Bush supported the admission of new countries to the organization and also indicated that the United States would "lead a coalition of the willing to disarm Saddam Hussein" (see, NATO Press Conference, 2002). Following these developments, Russia did not support the Iraq War and, as some Pentagon documents later suggested, even provided the Iraqis with intelligence about the coalition's plans and troop movements (Burns, 2006). Therefore, since 2003, Russian foreign policy became evidently more divergent. In what follows, this study will revisit some statements from Russian and American officials to discuss their positions in the weeks leading to the war.

The Iraq War and Putin's break with the US

As noted earlier, speculations and informal statements about the Bush administration's intention to go to war with Iraq had been circulating since the September 11 attacks. But the US government had not yet made an official attempt to publicize the idea before Bush's address to the UN General Assembly on September 12, 2002. In his address, while praising his administration's performance in the Afghanistan campaign, Bush referred to the dangers that he believed threatened the world and, then, linked these threats to Iraq:

"In one place -- in one regime -- we find all these dangers, in their most lethal and aggressive forms, exactly the kind of aggressive threat the United Nations was born to confront". (The White House Press Release, 2002).

After months of diplomatic struggle and lengthy media debates, the invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003, and lasted until May 1 of that year when Bush gave his famous "Mission Accomplished" speech. Nevertheless, in the months and weeks leading up to this massive operation, many high-profile figures took explicit and sometimes alarmist positions on the war ahead. Here, the study will focus on the official position of the Russian government including statements from President Putin and his Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov that appeared in the press within a short period before the war. Discussing these reactions can provide a context for understanding the diplomatic background to the Invasion of Iraq.

In 1998, Igor Ivanov succeeded Primakov as foreign minister. He took the helm of Russian foreign policy when it had become more assertive and independent from American and Western world policy. For instance, during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, Ivanov expressed Russia's opposition to these developments which were described as a breach of international law (Averre, 2009). In a similar vein, he had also criticized the 1998 bombing of Iraq which were carried out despite Russia's opposition. But, in January 2003, amid the Anglo-American propaganda campaign against the Iraqi regime that coincided with the dispatch of more British and American troops to the



Persian Gulf, there were speculations in the media that Russia was actually negotiating with Saddam Hussein to step down and avert the war. The speculations led Ivanov to deny these reports in an interview with the Russian newspaper *Trud*. According to the foreign minister, the goal of these reports was to undermine Russian diplomacy at that time, but he also emphasized that Russia maintained diplomatic relations with Iraq in order to “know more about the mood and thoughts of the Iraqi leadership” (Oliver, 2003). At this point, three points were clear in the Russian Foreign Minister’s statements. First, Russia believed that Iraq, contrary to the claims of the United States and Britain, had begun to cooperate with the UN weapons inspectors. Second, contrary to the claims of the Bush administration, there was no substantial evidence that the country was rearming. Third, sanctions against Iraq were counterproductive and had to be lifted. Therefore, regarding the possibility of war, he told reporters that there is “still political and diplomatic leeway to resolve the Iraq issue” (Oliver, 2003).

To understand the relevance of these statements, one must regard the positions of some other European governments. In this regard, Germany and France also supported Russia’s position which brought forward criticisms from Secretary of State Colin Powell. On January 23, during a joint press conference, French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder questioned the wisdom of starting another war in the Middle East. In this connection, Chirac stated that Germany and France had a common position on the Iraqi crisis and believed that “everything must be done to avoid war” (Oliver, 2003). In other words, the Franco-German proposal tilted in favor of more negotiations and UN inspections. Their reluctance to participate in the use of military force prompted the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to downplay their role and refer to them as “Old Europe” (Rumsfeld, 2011, pp. 444-445). This was a term that conservative analysts used to attach more importance to the role of Central and Eastern Europe in contrast to that of Western European countries in the post-Communist era especially when it served a United States-led campaign or coalition. Nevertheless, the Franco-German proposal was generally in line with the position of Russia. In this sense, the month of January was crucial in shaping international politics as the US government tried to provide convincing evidence of Iraq’s support for Al-Qaeda terrorists. In one specific case, given that Russia was still fighting Chechen separatists at that time, Washington tried to convince Russia that Iraq was supporting some of the terrorists operating in the North Caucasus (Wines, 2003). Then, the American discourse in formulating the threats from Iraq was based on two arguments, namely the WMD program and support for terrorism. In this way, the Americans had concluded that the argument highlighting the threat of Islamic terrorism was more relevant to Russia than with the WMD argument. At that time, there was some evidence of a softening in Russia’s position, partly due to statements from Sergey Yastrzhembsky who was the Kremlin Press Secretary. Among a group of foreign policy experts in Washington, Yastrzhembsky had mentioned that Kremlin “did not need a smoking gun, merely a gun” to be convinced, meaning that the Russians expected Washington to provide further evidence before they could consider another solution to the crisis (Wines, 2003).

In sum, the main assumption of American policymakers in January 2003 was that Russia would not seriously oppose the United States on the issue of Iraq. In the analyses that the American media echoed, two reasons were given for this assumption. First, during the previous two years, the United States had withdrawn from the Anti-Ballistic Missile



Treaty and then had supported the expansion of NATO. Despite opposition to these policies, Vladimir Putin had ultimately decided not to react strongly and eventually acquiesced to these policy changes. Following this trend, he had balanced a mix of pragmatism and principle. Therefore, these policymakers were convinced that Putin would not act very differently with respect to Iraq. The second reason was that, in late January, Putin had not ruled out the possibility of using force if Iraq did not cooperate with UN inspectors. In this regard, the assumption was that Russia would act pragmatically to save its close energy relations with Iraq (Slevin, 2003). However, the fall of Saddam's regime could disrupt Moscow's business dealings in this country and could also create an unclear perspective in the post-war processes. As stated previously, the question of Iraq's debt to Russia was still relevant. Moreover, if the future Iraqi regime were to quickly pump large quantities of oil into the global energy market to rebuild its war-torn economy, the price of oil could fall below \$18 a barrel, which the Russians needed to remain solvent (Slevin, 2003). Simply put, the Iraq War could seriously reduce oil revenues for Russia. It was clear to the Russians that, with Saddam's fall, Washington would dominate the decision-making in the country for a long time. For this reason, there were reports that Russian officials were actively seeking assurances from the United States that their interests would be respected in the future. In fact, some analysts stressed this aspect of Russian diplomacy at the time. A case in point was Fiona Hill, a Russia expert at the Brookings Institution who later served as an intelligence analyst in the Bush and Obama administrations. With regard to this argument, she argued that the Russians simply wanted "an advantageous position" in which Russia would not be excluded from the equations in Iraq and the United States would not "dominate the postwar Iraqi oil industry" (Slevin, 2003). On this account, the Bush administration assumed that Russia would not use its veto right to block the American initiative in the Security Council. They also assumed that, under certain conditions, Russia would not seriously oppose the Iraq War. Therefore, Washington officials were lobbying to create those favorable conditions. But, in hindsight, these assumptions were perhaps not entirely accurate. In fact, one may argue that the Washington lobbyists had underestimated the roots of Russian-Iraqi relations and the role that they had played in the nature of Russian foreign policy.

However, the Bush administration's simplistic view that their resolution could move forward smoothly in the Security Council soon evaporated. This was due to the opposition from France and Russia against an unreasonable attack on Iraq. In this regard, France and Germany had put forward a proposal to remove the crisis, the backbone of which was strengthening the UN weapons inspections. Historically, the French diplomatic initiative was crucial in preventing the United States from obtaining the nine votes for the passage of its long-planned resolution. Speaking on France's TF1 television, while supporting the French plan, Vladimir Putin called unilateral military action without UN approval a "grave error" and warned that "if today a proposition was made that we felt would lead to an unreasonable use of force, we would act with France or alone" (Associated Press, 2003). Of course, this involved the use of veto right by Russia. Nonetheless, the Russian president was cautious and stated that the aim of these diplomatic efforts was not creating a bloc against the United States, but finding a peaceful solution to end the Iraqi crisis. In fact, as Bush had said earlier, the United States could (and later did) go to war with "a coalition of the willing" which mainly included Britain, Australia and Poland. However, by formulating this opposition, it seemed that Russia,



Germany and France had deprived Washington of the UN authorization and had also challenged the post-Cold War order. These developments boosted the possibility of military action without the UN consent. This was evident given the diplomatic gestures between the governments supporting and opposing this military action and Washington's refusal to give Iraq sufficient time to expand its cooperation with the UN weapons inspectors. Thus, although Russia had managed to increase the international costs of this unilateral action for Washington, the fate of Moscow's economic interests in the post-war Iraq was in jeopardy. In fact, since 2000, the Bush administration had taken steps that directly targeted Russian interests. These steps included withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, establishing military bases and building greater influence in the former Soviet republics, and supporting the expansion of NATO along Russia's western borders. In all of these cases, Russia had strongly expressed its objections but had eventually acquiesced to these developments. In this sense, joining the Franco-German initiative and threatening to block the US-sponsored resolution at the UN surprised many in Washington who believed in Putin's pragmatism.

But aside from these reasons for opposition, which were rooted in Kremlin's deep economic ties with Baghdad, some international observers considered another aspect in Vladimir Putin's disagreement with his American counterpart concerning the question of Iraq. For instance, Vladimir Lukin, the former Russian ambassador to Washington in the Yeltsin era, stated that the Russian president had become "tired of one-sided deals" with Washington because Russia had not received any practical assurances to protect its interests before (LaFraniere, 2003). The background to this was the previous disagreements over questions such as NATO enlargement, IMF support, economic cooperation and the ballistic missile treaty. Additionally, analysts such as Viktor Kremenyuk of the U.S.A.-Canada Institute and Alexander Pikayev from Carnegie's Moscow Center, argued that Kremlin did not want to create a perception among Russians that their government had compromised their interests by following the failed pro-Western practices of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin (LeFraniere, 2003). In other words, they highlighted the role of Russian sentiments to analyze this drift. One can also note that, at that time, Russia had close interactions with France and Germany and alignment with these European states could put Russia in a more powerful position. In fact, Russia had a significant historical advantage in Europe at that time. In Germany, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, had friendly relations with Russia. In 2002, while rejecting the American way of handling international politics, Schröder had instead emphasized "the German Way" and had described his country as a "peace power". In France, President Jacques Chirac, who also had warm relations with Moscow, displayed an independent foreign policy by insisting that Iraq was not an immediate threat. With respect to the question of Iraq, both governments were in agreement with Moscow. It was for this reason that, to support its military campaign, the United States had turned to the New Europe which consisted of some Eastern and Central European countries that had joined NATO in the post-Cold War period.

With respect to the above discussions, Igor Ivanov's short note in the Washington Post illustrates Russia's calculated stance towards the developments of the previous weeks. Ivanov's notes came out on March 15 only a few days before the US invasion. As Foreign Minister, he had the serious responsibility of both advancing an independent foreign policy on the Iraqi crisis and ensuring that Moscow's stance did not irreparably damage



Russian-American relations. Therefore, he indicated his policy within the UN framework, claiming that the Russian government had supported the US to pass Resolution 1441 unanimously. According to Ivanov, this resolution that provided the grounds for more inspections was not necessary from Moscow's perspective. Yet, as a concession, Russia worked with the US to secure its unanimous passage (Ivanov, 2003). Above all, he put emphasis on the role of the UN Security Council to address the Iraqi crisis, since Russia could probably exert influence within that framework. The foreign minister's note suggested that, from a Russian perspective, the international pressure on Iraq was sufficient and the disarmament was proceeding as planned. Thus, in the context of these developments, he repeated that the argument for the imminent use of military force was not valid. According to Ivanov, their goal was "the establishment of a reliable mechanism of inspections that would be able to help disarm Iraq" and, as he argued, this 'political solution' equally served the interests of Russia and the United States (Ivanov, 2003). Finally, he expressed his hope that regardless of the outcome, the two sides would be able to maintain the spirit of cooperation in the future. As stated previously, this expression of hope in Russian-American relations despite the mounting conflict of interest was a commonality in the statements from Vladimir Putin and Igor Ivanov.

However, along this diplomatic course, the members of the coalition were making military preparations. In the end, the coalition began the invasion of Iraq on March 20. On the same day, the Russian President released a statement at a Kremlin meeting. In this statement, while referring to the humanitarian crisis caused by the attacks, he called the military action "contrary to world public opinion, contrary to the principles and norms of international law and the Charter of the UN" and added that nothing could justify it (Kremlin Statement, 2003). At least in terms of narrative, these claims seemed accurate and resonated not only with the world's public opinion but also with the views of many governments and independent observers. Like Ivanov, Putin emphasized the effectiveness of Resolution 1441 that had ruled out the use of force but had provided a mechanism for international inspectors to disarm Iraq peacefully. While calling the military action a mistake, he expressed hope that its humanitarian and security consequences could be prevented by reaching out to the UN mechanisms. In fact, this statement reflected the tradition that Russia had advocated in addressing the previous crises with Iraq. This approach emphasized the role of the UN Security Council as a place where Russian diplomacy could be effective in negotiating with different partners.

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to revisit the diplomatic path to the Iraq War and the break in Russian-American relations with a focus on diplomatic initiatives. The above discussions can be significant because they provide a context for current situations and the broader Russian-American relations.

The invasion of Iraq is largely remembered today for mismanagement and deception. This is because no evidence was found of Iraqi WMD program and the country ultimately fell victim to political unrest and Islamic terrorism. In this regard, the above discussions highlight the argument that Russia's opposition to the American military campaign can be seen in the context of the assertive Russian foreign policy that evolved during the 1990s and the entanglement of Kremlin-Baghdad relations. In particular, Russia's foreign



policy on developments in the Middle East demonstrates a strong aspect of this doctrine. As noted, Moscow relied on the mechanisms of the UN Security Council to protect its long-term interests in Iraq. This approach gave prominence to multilateralism and non-intervention and showed that Russia sought a mechanism to influence international equations and receive assurances that its interests would be respected. Given that the collapse of the Soviet Union had deprived Moscow of the advantage of a wide network of allies, the UN could be an instrument to exert influence and exploit the rift between Europe and the United States. Then, with respect to the above discussions, several conclusions can be drawn from the diplomatic prelude to the Iraq War. First, although Russia was forced to oppose the United States for reasons including energy security, domestic pressure from Russian nationalists and doctrinal differences, Putin and Ivanov's statements also suggest that they did not want this opposition to seriously hurt Russian-American relations. Hence, Russia stood behind the initiative that France and Germany proposed to address the crisis. For Russia, the advantage of this consensus was that it could, on the one hand, increase the cost of unilateral military action for the United States by denying a UN authorization and, on the other hand, save Russia from a direct diplomatic confrontation with Washington. This being said, on a larger scale, the diplomatic maneuvers between Russia, the Old Europe and the United States and its allies could indicate a different process. In other words, the unilateralism that the UN Security Council imposed on the United States could be an early sign of multipolarity at the beginning of this century. In this sense, the Bush administration assumed that it could use the momentum created by the September 11 attacks to rally the international community in the invasion of Iraq. In particular, they also assumed that, following tradition, Vladimir Putin would choose pragmatism over principle in the Iraqi crisis. But the prospects of what Russia could lose eventually caused Kremlin to resist diplomatic pressure and form an alliance with European partners.

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