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This is a brilliant piece of history. It is also a very important book. The stand-off between the U.S. and France over the 2002-2003 Iraq crisis was the most dramatic incident since Suez in relations between these two ‘oldest allies.’ It was also, as Jeffrey Engel so persuasively argues in his review, given the stakes at the time, and subsequent developments in the Middle East, by far the most consequential confrontation. International opinion largely agrees that the U.S. got it wrong and France got it right. France’s dissidence undoubtedly increased the cost to Washington, but it was, at the end of the day, George W. Bush’s decision to go to war that precipitated the debacle. As the Trump administration contemplates escalating the U.S. involvement in Iraq and Syria, it is not clear that the current occupants of the White House have learned the lessons of the crisis. They would do well to read Bozo, who has emerged as the most thorough and the most insightful historian of Franco-American relations throughout the post-War era. The book also benefits from a superbly fluid translation by Susan Emanuel.

Bozo’s book is four books in one. It is undoubtedly the most meticulous and subtle analytical narrative of the complex relations between France, the U.S. and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq over a twenty-five-year period. It is also an object lesson in sophisticated historiography. As John Keiger notes in his review, historians in most countries do not get access to the kind of classified archives that Bozo has examined -- until thirty or forty years after the event. Third, the book is a superb, almost blow-by-blow deconstruction of extraordinarily complex foreign-policy decision-making, not only in Paris and Washington, but also, to a lesser extent, in London, Berlin, and Baghdad. Bozo brings out in masterly detail the shifting, sometimes symbiotic and sometimes dialectical, fortunes of the different options pursued by different players around the world. Finally, it is a necessary corrective to some of the more emotional and misguided verdicts on France’s behavior during these events that have appeared in the U.S. -- both at the time and subsequently¹. As Bozo shows convincingly, France did not adopt its policy preferences out of ‘anti-Americanism,’ nor for narrow mercantilist calculations, still less from fear of provoking the Muslim world, either inside France or beyond. France’s leaders, in particular President Jacques Chirac, simply believed that the invasion was a terrible mistake, with potentially disastrous consequences for international order. One of the immensely valuable aspects of the book, an important *leitmotif* that runs throughout, is that France actually tried hard to avoid a direct confrontation with the U.S. and went to extraordinary lengths, in spring 2003, to try to persuade the Bush administration not to present to the United Nations Security Council a second resolution authorizing war, a course of action that Paris feared might not only force France to veto its principal ally, but would also likely undermine the United Nations and tarnish its reputation.

The four reviews that follow all give appropriate credit to Bozo for the quality of his scholarship and for the significance of his findings, although Engel, Keiger and David Styan are fulsome in their plaudits while Joseph Sassoon is more ambivalent. Each reviewer adds original insights. Keiger rightly notes that one of the major strengths of Bozo’s work is his framing of the crisis in the *longue durée*. Indeed, a major takeaway from the book is that we can really only appreciate the crisis of 2002-2003 in the context of U.S. interactions with Iraq in general and Saddam Hussein in particular since the 1980s. Over the decades, Washington tried every instrument in the foreign policy toolbox. Nothing seemed to work. At the end of the day, regime change by

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force was the only option left untried. Keiger’s comparison with the treatment of post-World War One Germany is both fascinating and instructive. It nevertheless underplays the fundamental differences between the two situations: the scale of the problem, the type of ‘post-war settlement,’ the geo-strategic stakes involved, the relative weight of the players, their very different personalities, and the historical-cultural dimensions.

Styan’s plea for “manic emotion, the smells of tepid coffee and stale sweat in the corridors of power across Paris and New York” is well-taken. But Bozo is in the business of charting the cognitive, of recording the rational in France’s handling of the crisis. At the end of the day, Chirac’s historical legacy is likely to confirm his cool, cerebral, circumspect, and consistent reaction to these events, notwithstanding the panache of his foreign minister, as brilliantly encapsulated in the Quai d’Orsay bande dessinée and movie that Styan references.2 Sassoon, on the other hand, stresses Chirac’s “impulsiveness,” which largely boils down in Bozo’s book to the single incident when, infuriated by the declaration of the ‘Vilnius Ten’ in support of George W. Bush, the French President quipped that the Central and Eastern Europeans had “missed a good opportunity to keep quiet” (225). This is the impulsive exception that proves the rule of Chirac’s cool-headedness.

Engel is judicious in highlighting the fact that while Bozo offers a superbly forensic deconstruction of the sequencing of the Franco-U.S. stand-off, he does so “without nationalistic joy or any sense of schadenfreude,” with “no whiff of ‘we told you so’.” Coming from an American scholar, this is an important assessment when one recalls the hysterical wave of Francophobia that swept across the U.S. at the time. Engel also correctly frames the crisis in the much broader and centuries-old context of relations between these “oldest allies,” for whom, at the end of the day, “what they shared mattered more than their differences.” France and the U.S. are, after all, the only two countries in history to have offered to the entire world a universalizing vision with which any individual, anywhere, is invited to associate himself or herself. Therein lies one key element of their intense cooperation and rivalry.

Sassoon, bouncing off his own scholarly work, draws our attention to the blindness of Saddam Hussein to Iraq’s true situation in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War and especially after 9/11. He correctly notes that Saddam totally miscalculated both his own resources and American resolve—an interpretation that is now very widely acknowledged—and he highlights France’s efforts in Baghdad to make that miscalculation clear. However, his suggestion that Saddam, after 9/11, instead of continuing his recalcitrance, might profitably have joined in Bush’s war on Wahhabism, is surely fanciful. Sassoon also makes great play of the fact that France was explicitly favored by Saddam Hussein over Oil-for-Food contracts and appears to imply that this was the main factor driving French policy on sanctions relief. Keiger also raises this issue, which is indeed critical. Yet, despite a wealth of innuendo and some outright accusations (which Bozo openly acknowledges) that France’s actions were essentially driven by narrow commercial interest, the solid evidence of the book is that this was not the case. Bozo makes, to my mind, a convincing case that Chirac, in this one instance (perhaps the only one of his somewhat shady career), was driven by a genuine concern for international law and order, by a conviction that war in the Middle East would open a Pandora’s Box of destabilization across the wider region—including Europe—and that France had a heavy responsibility to try to prevent such an outcome. And he does this, not, as Sassoon suggests, by using “secondary sources,” but by accessing virtually every primary document available to date. France did indeed try everything in its power to defuse the Iraq crisis. Was that wrong? It is interesting to note that a recent doctoral dissertation, defended at Sciences-Po in

2 Christopher Blain and Abel Lanzac, Quai d’Orsay: Chroniques diplomatiques (Paris: Dargaud, 2011).
Paris, offered a diametrically opposite thesis to that of “Chirac the mercantile opportunist.” Delphine Lagrange, in 527 densely argued pages covering the period September 2002 to March 2003, posits that Chirac could have actually prevented the war by overtly mobilizing international opinion, but did not do so out of slavish devotion to the Franco-U.S. partnership\(^3\). The historiography of the Iraq crisis has clearly not run its course. But Bozo’s book will remain a fundamental reference for decades to come.

**Participants:**


**Jolyon Howorth** is Jean Monnet Professor ad personam and Professor Emeritus of European Politics at the University of Bath. He has been full-time Visiting Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at Yale University since 2002. He has published extensively in the field of European politics and history, especially security and defense policy and transatlantic relations. Recent books include: *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*, Palgrave 2014; *Defending Europe: the EU, NATO and the Quest for European Autonomy*, Palgrave, 2003 (with John Keeler); *European Integration and Defence: the Ultimate Challenge?* Paris, WEU-ISS, 2000. He is currently writing a book on why the “Iraq Experiment” has repeatedly failed to work since the 1920s. This contribution was written while the author was Research Professor at the Free University of Berlin (Kolleg Forschergruppe).

**Jeffrey A. Engel** is founding director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University. Having previously taught at Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Texas A&M University

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where he was the Kruse ’52 Professor, Engel is author or editor of ten books on American foreign policy, including his latest, *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War*.


**Joseph Sassoon**, Associate Professor and al-Sabah Chair in Politics and Political Economy of the Arab World at Georgetown University. Among his publications are: *Anatomy of Authoritarianism in the Arab Republics* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), and *Saddam Hussein Ba’th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) which won the 2013 prestigious British-Kuwait Prize for the best book on the Middle East.

**David Styan** teaches politics in Birkbeck College, University of London; his publications include *France and Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).
Nearly a generation removed from September 11, 2001, those “days of fire” in President George W. Bush’s apt and foreboding description, the world continues to reverberate from its aftershocks.¹ War continues in Afghanistan, home to the Osama Bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda training camps where the initial attacks were conceived, even as Al-Qaeda itself has been replaced in the hierarchy of international jihadist threats by the Islamic State. Refugees from this self-proclaimed caliphate flooded Europe in the years that followed and in turn broke the dike holding back the rabid nationalism and xenophobia the European Union was designed to contain and curtail. Europe, both as an idea and a political entity, falters. A civil war rages in Syria with no apparent end in sight. In Egypt, Turkey, and across the region, a short-lived era of democratic optimism has given way to authoritarian repression. East-West tensions, indeed Cold War tensions between Moscow and Washington, once more run the gamut of international hotspots from the Balkans to the Persian Gulf and across the Bering Straits.

Of all the decisions made in the wake of September 11th none was as portentous, or disastrous, as Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in the spring of 2003. From this ill-conceived decision grew, or at the least metastasized, many if not all of the aforementioned calamities. Initiated to at once secure Iraq’s supposed program to develop and distribute weapons of mass destruction (WMD), solve the long-standing strategic problem posed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s recalcitrant regime, and, in the most optimistic reading of the day, inspire a democratic wave across the region capable of snuffing out anti-Western jihadist sentiment, the American-led invasion began full of promise. “A new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region,” Bush asserted on the eve of battle. “We trust in the power of human freedom to change lives and nations,” and by extension in the United States’ ordained power to control its fate, and others, he explained, adding that “by the resolve and purpose of America….we will make this an age of progress and liberty” (245).

Others had their doubts. As Frédéric Bozo cogently, thoroughly, and persuasively demonstrates in his *A History of the Iraq Crisis: France, the United States, and Iraq, 1991-2003*, the American-led effort to redraw the strategic landscape of the Middle East (and what was fashionably known in Washington at the time as the “Global War on Terror”) was also a crisis in transatlantic relations. It was also a crisis for the United Nations, for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, for European relations, in particular within the Franco-German-British triumvirate at the continent’s head, and, finally, for the entire question of stability versus security in the rapidly changing twenty-first century. Bozo shows, with remarkable restraint and judicious writing alongside an equally remarkable command of new documents and the available memoir literature, that France led the opposition, not so much on Iraq’s side but instead in the hope of tempering Washington’s aforementioned fire. The American-led effort would be “a triple error,” French President Jacques Chirac predicted as the storm of war was about to break: “moral, political, and strategic” (269).

Bozo demonstrates, without nationalistic joy or any sense of *schadenfreude*, just how right Chirac and the war’s skeptics proved to be. The United States quickly lost the moral high ground attained over decades as the leading (not perfect, but leading) champion for democracy and internationalism based on collective consent and the rule of law, losing even the summit of goodwill attained at such great cost from the rubble of 9/11.

Victory proved both easy and elusive in Iraq. The country was easy to conquer, but nearly impossible thereafter to control. Thousands of American deaths and tens of thousands of casualties ensued as the occupation generated first a counter-insurgency and then a civil war. The material costs will be borne by generations of ensuing Americans. The human costs for Iraq and the broader region are nearly incalculable. Gone too is American standing, both as the century’s potential hegemon, and as its leading moral authority.

“It seems hard to dispute in hindsight that the choices made after 9/11, largely imputable to the hubris of power combined with a new feeling of vulnerability, accelerated the relative decline of the United States,” Bozo writes. “A dozen years after the Iraq war, one thing seems clear: the twenty-first century will not be another American century” (312). Neither would it be a period of American pride. “Some assholes have just lost the war for us,” he quotes a young marine remarking when images of the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal filled global airwaves (291). Those who ordered the troops to Iraq and those who committed such crimes—not the majority of Americans to be sure, but enough—are to blame for something more troubling: the entire disruption of the region, and of American pride, which fueled not only the instability internationally but a nationalistic backlash during the 2016 presidential election as well.

Bozo’s work is the single-best available source in English for understanding the intersection of American decision-making in the lead-up to war in 2003 and French-led opposition. It is here that his book truly shines, taking the reader deep into European and in particular Parisian decision-making circles to argue that French leaders feared the very outcomes to an American-led military endeavor in Iraq that came to pass. They had little affection for Saddam Hussein’s regime, but were unpersuaded by American evidence for Iraq’s continued weapons-development program (which, if true, would have violated Security Council resolutions and the will of the international community as expressed by the United Nations), and more importantly feared the consequences of his removal. Bozo eloquently and cogently unpacks both elements of their opposition, subtly debunking an oft-told canard of Bush Administration apologists that ‘every Western intelligence agency’ shared Washington’s belief that Hussein possessed WMD’s. Bozo shows that the French, at least, while suspicious of Iraqi actions and motives, found Washington’s proof unconvincing. More important, and told in this book with particular attention to detail and the judicious hand of a scholar equally comfortable in the documentary records and strategic traditions found on both sides of the Atlantic, is Bozo’s highlighting the fact that French predictions of the ultimate outcome of the American crusade in Iraq diverged dramatically from the optimistic tale told in Washington. “Once you are there,” French President Jacque Chirac warned Bush, “you are going to have to stay there for years, and you run the risk of creating battalions of little Bin Ladens.” As the French leader put it, “we are not afraid of war because we are pacifists, but we fear a war because its consequences would be very serious” (159). Saddam Hussein was a problem but was also in Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s infamous parlance, “a known known.” Invasion removed him from power, but also unleashed the “unknown unknowns” Rumsfeld typically feared, and Chirac predicted.2 There was also principle at stake, the French argued internally and publicly. Once international opinion was forsaken at a hyperpower’s whim, and the entire post-1945 edifice of multilateralism would weaken.

The strength of Bozo’s book lies in his thorough retelling of the ensuing Franco-American split over Iraq, but also in his assiduous avoidance of any self-congratulatory flailing of American ineptitude and corresponding

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French prescience. There is no whiff of ‘we told you so’ in this book, which instead reads in 2017 as more tragedy than farce. Both Washington and Paris moved largely to put the break behind them once the invasion took place. Bitter feelings remain, but with occupation a fact and not a question, the broader needs of their alliance—that is, what they shared—mattered more than their differences. Put bluntly, those same anti-Western jihadists that loathe Washington in the wake of 2003 hate the French as well. Franco-American relations rebounded, because the values and enemies each shared proved more resilient than the wounds caused by the Iraq debate. “ Barely a dozen years after their worst crisis in decades, it is no overstatement to say that these relations have never been so close,” Bozo notes in his conclusion (314). Indeed, he notes too that the French were not always right or prescient. “ Over the past decade or so, the world has indeed become more ‘multipolar’ due to the relative decline of the United States and the emergence of new powers,” he writes. “But this multipolar system is not the one that French leaders imagined, remote as it is from the ideals of multilateralism and collective security built around the United States” (313). It is instead built on what he calls “ the paradox of Franco-American relations,” that two peoples can share so much including so much vitriol (314). For anyone interested in understanding the diplomacy and politics of the critical run-up to the Iraq War begun in 2003, and in particular its transatlantic flavor, no better book, and certainly none composed with greater access to new archival resources, Frederik Bozo’s. One only fears this will not be the last moment of transatlantic tension over the increasingly chaotic and nationalistic twenty-first century to come, and that the history he so aptly details is but a chapter of a longer story of declension of their mutual power, purpose, and partnership.
What is immediately striking about Frédéric Bozo’s comprehensive and compelling analysis of France’s opposition to the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 are the sources on which the study is based. A History of the Iraq Crisis. France, the United States, and Iraq, 1991-2003 is a translation from the French of Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne, la France, les Etats-Unis et l’Irak, 1990-2003, first published by Editions Perrin in 2013. The original title is the more revealing for this is indeed a ‘secret history’ of the build-up to the 2003 conflict. Under normal circumstances the French law of 2010 states that documents relating to the “deliberations of the government and responsible authorities emanating from the executive,” or those relating to “the conduct of foreign relations” are inaccessible for twenty-five years, and when “national defence” and ‘the security of the state’ are concerned, fifty years.1 Bozo’s volume, published a mere 10 years after the conflict, is all these things. He has extensively used the Archives of the Presidency of the Republic for Jacques Chirac’s papers, those of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris and La Courneuve, as well as those of the French Embassy to the United States in Washington D.C. It is a remarkable feat to be granted such access, with in addition 72 personal interviews with some of the most senior civil servants, ambassadors, intelligence officials and military staff in office at the time. In Britain, such a volume written by a prominent academic at the forefront of his field and with access to these kind of sources, might be considered an ‘official’ history,2 something that I believe is completely new to France.

Bozo puts this privileged documentation to work most effectively in order to deliver a shrewd, subtle, and sophisticated analysis of not only the nature and motives of French opposition to the invasion of Iraq, but also those of the clearly more bellicose Americans and British, that culminated in the showdown at the United Nations (UN) from January 2003 over the question of a second UN resolution to justify invasion of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. He downplays the stereotypes of a French foreign policy history obsessed with grandeur, national interest (the survival of long-standing economic interests in Iraq) or anti-Americanism. Instead he convincingly ascribes less Gaullist motives to a France searching through multilateralism to create a ‘Europe-puissance’ capable of countering American ‘hyper-power’ and at the domestic level fearful of provoking a large internal population of Arabs and Muslims. On the American side he is equally subtle in refusing to ascribe only conspiratorial motives to President George W. Bush’s push for war, such as finishing his father’s work. Instead, he explains it as a consequence of the trauma of the attacks of 9/11 and of a new-found mission in the ‘war on terror.’

A further strength is Bozo’s detailed and balanced explanation of the long-term origins of the conflict following Saddam’s defeat in 1991 by an American-led UN coalition (including France) authorised to eject Iraq from recently invaded Kuwait. He outlines the extent of Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programmes and facilities as was revealed by United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors in the spring and summer of 1991, such as chemical weapons used against the Kurds of northern Iraq and


2 See for example Lawrence Freedman, The Official History of the Falklands Campaign, vols. 1 and 2 (London: Routledge, 2005, 2007). As well as being a leader in his field as Professor of War Studies at King’s College, London, Freedman was of course a member of the 2009 “Chilcot Inquiry,” convened to investigate the role of the British government in the 2003 Iraq invasion; or Christopher Andrew, Professor of Modern and Contemporary History at the University of Cambridge, author of The Defence of the Realm. The Authorised History of MI5 (London: Allen Lane, 2009).
ballistic missiles used against Iran in 1988. Although Iraq eventually told the UN inspectors that it had unilaterally destroyed those weapons in the summer of 1991, the regime provided no proof of this. Those inspectors spent the next eight years searching for and dismantling remnants of the WMD arsenal in the face of Saddam’s determined policy of obstruction, denying access to sites, refusing to present documentation and rejecting publicly any pretence of the moral disarmament sought by Washington and London. In the meantime, American, French, and British aircraft patrolled a UN-sanctioned no-fly zone over northern and southern Iraq to protect vulnerable civilian populations. Bozo tells us that from 1993 to 1997 Paris and Washington began to diverge: France began in 1995 to reestablish bilateral diplomatic relations with the Iraq regime to the irritation of Washington and London. They were convinced that France was motivated by commercial advantage; while France urged that Iraq should be gradually reintegrated to the international system. But with the 11 September 2001 al-Qaeda attacks, the United States’ suspicion of Saddam and Iraq moved to a new level.

Through much of the account of the long gestation of the second Iraq war this reviewer was struck by the historical similarities mutatis mutandis with 1920s post-war Germany and how disputes among victors undermine long term post-war peace settlements. Like post-1991 Iraq, defeat had not been fully brought home to post 1919 Germany. Berlin was bound by the Versailles Treaties to open the country to international weapons inspectors tasked with ensuring that Germany neither held nor developed chemical, biological or technologically advanced war machinery (aircraft, tanks, submarines—which we now know Germany was developing in the Soviet Union). The Germans played a sophisticated cat-and-mouse game with the Interallied Military Control Commission (IMCC) inspectors for several years, obstructing access to sites, refusing to produce documentation and rejecting any ‘moral disarmament.’

UNSCOM’s problems in Iraq in the 1990s replicated much of what had hamstrung the IMCC in Germany in the 1920s. Whereas the French in the 1920s were most insistent in international bodies that Germany must be dealt with firmly to ensure compliance, the Americans and the British indulged Berlin and called for Germany to be allowed to reintegrate the international community. The French in the 1920s put this down to the British and Americans thinking solely of their own commercial interests rather than France’s security interests, the mirror opposite of the 1990s. By 1923, frustrated on reparations payments, banned weapons compliance, and Anglo-American support in international bodies, a French-led coalition comprising Belgian and Italian troops invaded and occupied the Ruhr, to Anglo-American-led international opprobrium.3 Far from solving the problem, it made matters worse, albeit not on the scale of post-2003 Iraq. The French at least learnt a lesson. Their diplomacy and security policy shifted from failed traditional alliance diplomacy against Germany to greater faith in multilateralism to enmesh it via the League of Nations and European integration. Such historical musings do, however, raise the question of how much the foreign offices of at least the major powers should look to historical precedent for lesson-learning. The current British Foreign and Commonwealth Office is embarked on just such a campaign. The question of course is to select the right historical precedents and to draw the correct lessons from them. A sober note of caution rings out from the

build-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 when both Prime Minister Tony Blair and Bush’s choice of historical precedent was that of the 1930s and refused to appease dictators.

There is little doubt, as we now know from numerous official Iraq inquiries—including Hutton⁴ (on the suicide of Dr David Kelly, British WMD inspector, which surprisingly is not mentioned in the book), Butler⁵ on the use (and abuse) of British intelligence, Chilcot on the role of the British government in the Iraq war,⁶ and at least as many in the United States—that in this tragic story the French have a powerful claim to say to the Anglo-Americans ‘I told you so.’ But it is one of the strengths of Bozo’s work that he also demonstrates how the French decision to oppose intervention was not always that clear-cut. Thus we learn that in the absence of incontrovertible French intelligence to the contrary, some organs of the French state feared that Iraq might still possess residual WMD, while others feared the consequences of a clash with the United States. In the end it was the President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, who wavered the least and set the policy. Chirac refused to accept that Iraq represented a threat justifying war and believed strongly that conflict would destabilise the entire Middle East and worsen relations between the West and the Arab and Muslim worlds. Such decisions involve judgement and not a little risk. Events have proved France right and the Americans and British woefully wrong.

Bozo’s book is primarily about the 2003 Iraq War and its impact on Franco-American relations. But it is even more an object lesson in how wars originate, the decision-making processes at play and the impact on the international system. Here we see that states are not monoliths of single-track thought; rather are they composed of complex and competing organs divided by institutional and contingent bias. Thus prior to the outbreak of conflict we learn much about the interplay of power and the bureaucratic politics within the centres of government in Washington, New York (the UN), Paris and partly London, with some elements in the governmental machines evincing greater bellicosity than others. Some instances are better known, or more predictable, than others, such as Pentagon hawks, under Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, hustling the more cautious State Department, under Secretary of State Colin Powell, for intervention against Iraq, or the French defence staff countenancing French military involvement alongside the U.S. more enthusiastically than Quai d’Orsay officials. But more revealing and interesting are the positions adopted within government departments. Thus we learn that within the French foreign ministry the Middle East desk was more circumspect about a potential conflict than their colleagues on the American desk and that French intelligence staff in the DGSE (Direction générale de la Sécurité extérieure), though sceptical about Iraq’s possession of WMD, were far less dismissive of this danger than the Elysée.

Thus important questions of structural agency are brought to the fore to help us understand the decision-making processes in foreign policy, raising the question of why any one ministry or its department gains ascendancy at a particular moment. Here the question of human agency makes a strong entrance in Bozo’s

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volume. This is not desiccated international relations with the human element sacrificed to impersonal forces, for, as Bozo says “Personalities do count in international politics” (12). In this Bozo is writing traditional international history, or diplomatic history, as it used to be called before the 1960s. He builds strongly into his narrative the roles of individuals: not only Bush, Chirac and Blair or Rumsfeld, Powell and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, but also less eminent figures such as Hans Blix (Head of the UN inspections team) or Maurice Gourdault-Montagne (Chirac’s foreign policy advisor). Here one would have liked more of the ‘new international history,’ or at least something about the ‘unspoken assumptions,’ (as James Joll taught us in 1968) of the various actors.7

For all its overall strengths and fair-minded analysis, Bozo’s book does leave one aspect of France’s role in a state of ambiguity. He states that “As for the accusations of mercantilism in French policy towards Iraq, they were a caricature” (43). Claiming that the Elysée and the Quai d’Orsay were “very prudent” (43) on this issue, he does nevertheless cite pressure from large French commercial companies such as Alcatel, Elf, and Total for French authorities to renew contacts with the Iraqi regime and lift sanctions. But, says Bozo, these were “reined in.” (43). However the 2004 Duelfer report on the UN ‘Oil-for-food’ scandal was more critical. ‘Oil-for-food’ was the UN programme begun in 1996 whereby certain sanctions on Iraq, such as food and medicine, were lifted in exchange for oil. Duelfer was highly critical of widespread abuse by Iraq and western states in the operation of the programme. Based on documents discovered in Iraq, the report, which Bozo refers to, criticised France on the grounds of Baghdad’s drive to influence French policy towards Iraq through the systematic privileging of French businesses for contracts and making payments to senior French individuals with close ties to French decision-makers. France had a commanding position in the Oil-for-food programme. One of its major banks, BNP Paribas, was the official financial intermediary for the programme with control of the escrow account for the ‘bartered’ oil. France had the second biggest share of oil deals under the programme. The former Dutch ambassador to the UN and Chair of the Iraq Sanctions Committee from 1999 to 2000 Peter van Walsum also suggested that Iraq deliberately divided the Security Council by awarding contracts to France, Russia, and China, but not to the United States and Britain.8 As Bozo informs us, a 2005 Security Council report by former U.S. Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul Volcker into corruption in the Oil-for-food programme underlined the role of French intermediaries, including two former ambassadors and a minister (307). Since then, in February 2016, after lengthy legal battles, the French Court of Appeal found Total guilty of corruption in the Oil-for-Food case and fined it 750,000€. But the jury is still out as to whether or how much any of this influenced French foreign policy decisions.

On the American and British side, it would have been useful to see something on their use of intelligence agencies from January 2003 to eavesdrop on Security Council members in the run-up to a possible key second UN resolution authorising intervention in Iraq. At the time, Washington and London were particularly

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worried about how the non-permanent members might vote with a view to influencing the outcome.9 A leaked memo of 31 January 2003 from a senior National Security Agency official detailed the high intensity surveillance campaign Washington was initiating, with Britain’s Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), to learn more of the mood of wavering Council members.10 However, at a more general level, Bozo produces a very sophisticated and balanced account of the intelligence on Iraq’s WMD from the manipulated Anglo-American side to the more sober and realistic view from France.

Frédéric Bozo is to be congratulated for producing a case-study of some of the fundamental elements of international relations, including how post-war peace settlements wither and die and wars begin, how coalitions are formed and break down, how intelligence is manipulated, and how individuals can still determine events. Its core strength lies in its access to as yet restricted French archives. To complete the picture, the American and British archives should be made available in the same way.

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The number of books dealing with the period prior to the invasion of Iraq and analyses of its aftermath must be in the hundreds as politicians, generals, intelligence analysts, journalists, and academics have written about every aspect of Iraq from 2001 until today. Frédéric Bozo, however, fills an important vacuum: the role of the French prior to the invasion, during the war, and during the occupation of Iraq. By using archives from the French presidency (in the Élysée Palace) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and supplementing them with interviews, Bozo succeeds in telling an interesting story about the relationship between the United States and France through the prism of the events in Iraq. Indeed, the book brings insight of what takes place in bilateral relations between two allies during a crisis and how efforts to avoid a falling-out or rapprochement develop in those circumstances. The book, similar to many others, underlines the importance of personalities such as President Jacques Chirac and President George W. Bush in the development of these bilateral relations. Bozo enriches the book by dealing with all the main personalities on both sides of the Atlantic during the good and bad times.

Bozo begins his story in the 1990s, arguing that “Chirac had ceased contact with [Iraq’s President] Saddam Hussein after the invasion of Iraq” (43). The Iraqi archives do not discuss the relationship between the French and Iraqi leaders but point to the strong and warm relations between the two countries during the 1990s until almost the fall of Saddam Hussein. After the Oil-for-Food Deal was signed in the mid-1990s allowing Iraq to use some of its oil revenues, there is no doubt that the Iraqis wanted as many contracts as possible to go to the French. Tariq Aziz, Iraq’s Foreign Minister and a member of the inner cabinet, the Revolutionary Command Council, was personally told by Saddam Hussein that French interests should take precedent over other “friends.” The Iraqi leadership followed closely the beginning of the chasm between France and its major ally, the United States, and wanted to encourage countries such as France to distance itself even more from the U.S. by offering incentives to encourage that trend. As the Iraqi archives inform us, Saddam, whether with European public opinion or with countries such as Russia and France, manipulated the situation time and again to create a discord among those supporting a war and those advocating other means of resolving the crisis. Already, in late 1998, post operation Desert Fox, we witness the delicate balance as France attempted to tiptoe between its interests in Iraq and its relationship with the U.S.

Even after the attacks of 9 September 2001 on the U.S., and in spite of the strong French support for the American people, Chirac was worried about the results of “lumping together Islam and terrorism” (79), and suggested putting pressure on the Israelis and Palestinians in the hope that a peace agreement would resolve

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2 See for example the audiotape of the Revolutionary Council discussing the sanctions and its aftermath: Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC), National Defense University, SH-SHTP-A-000-734.

3 Currently, there are more than twelve million documents of Iraqi archives consisting of the records of the Ba’th Party, Iraqi Intelligence and security services reports, and documents of the Presidential Office (diwan) based at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. In addition, the National Defense University has other archives and almost 1200 hours of audiotapes of the Iraqi leadership. For more details about the Iraqi regime, see: Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party: Inside an Authoritarians Regime* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012).
the main challenges that erupted after 9/11. The French misread the situation and believed that Iraq was not a target of the White House in 2001. However, they disliked the term “axis of evil” that Bush used in early 2002 as they considered it “messianic” placing Iraq, Iran and North Korea in the same category (109). The French could not comprehend the philosophy guiding Bush that if the U.S. waited for threats to fully materialize, it would have waited too long (117). Chirac and the French repeatedly counseled against war in Iraq given its devastating implications. Bozo, in chapter three, adds his voice to show how the decision-making process was developing in Washington about going to war in Iraq, and although many of the facts mentioned are taken from secondary sources, he manages to weave them within his overall account of the U.S.-French relations.

Iraq was not reacting to France’s pleas that the situation after 9/11 had changed and that Iraq had to alter its policy toward weapons of mass destruction (WMD), chemical weapons, and its overall relations with the world community, in particular the United States. In fact, this is one of the most intriguing questions that Bozo does not delve into: why did the Iraqis ignore these pleas. The answer lies in Saddam’s misreading of the international scene, his hubris after the First Gulf War, where he truly believed that he overcame 34 armies, at least politically, and last but not least, his deep faith that the U.S. would not tolerate risking major casualties in a war in Iraq given its Vietnam past. Saddam strongly believed that the policy of the President’s father, George H. Bush, during the First Gulf War of not occupying Baghdad, would prevail again. Indeed, Saddam totally misread the events of 9/11 and instead of taking advantage of the attack by declaring that he and the U.S. were fighting the same enemy, radical Islamists, and that he was the only force standing up to Iran, Saddam announced that America had got what it deserved. No doubt, the leadership in Iraq could have utilized its fight against Wahhabism and Islamic extremism to its advantage, but unfortunately for Iraq, Saddam was blinded by his own arrogance and the sycophants surrounding him who rarely dared to give him true counsel or inform him of the real state of the Iraqi army and its ability to defend the country.4

Bozo’s book brings interesting details about how French intelligence saw the developments in Iraq on one hand, and on the other hand, the view of France’s military command, which sought to be part of the action against Iraq, and “to participate in the planning alongside the Americans” (161). The book explores in detail the different stages of the rupture in relations between France and the U.S. The French, who were supported by Germany, could not, in the final analysis, hinder U.S. plans to invade Iraq. A number of important points are raised: first, that at no point did French intelligence fully exonerate the Iraqis from having or developing weapons of mass destruction or chemical weapons; the rift was due to how to deal with the issue. A second point that complicated matters and increased the tension between the ‘old’ Europeans (Germany, France, and Belgium) and the U.S. was the fact that the Iraqis “did not seem to have fully understood the need to demonstrate the ‘active’ cooperation demanded of them” (217). The French, particularly Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin (who later became Prime Minister in the years 2005-2007) were furious as they believed that the U.S. was trying to split ‘old’ Europe from ‘the new Europe’ consisting of countries such as Spain, Poland, and Hungary which were supporting the Americans and the British in their aggressive stance toward Iraq. As Bozo shows, at certain junctures Chirac’s impulsiveness added fuel to the fire even when both sides were making efforts to calm down the confrontation between the U.S. and France (225). There is no doubt that “the Gaullist paradigm was indeed a determining factor in France’s stance in the Iraq dossier” (240). Bozo explains that the propensity to clash with the U.S. on matters of foreign affairs can be traced back

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4 For details on fighting Islamic extremism and the regime’s policies toward religion, see: Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein Ba’th Party*, 259-268.
to the days of General Charles de Gaulle. What is also clear is that Chirac tried to take advantage of the crisis between the two countries to benefit France in the Arab world and show that the French were standing up to American plans to invade an Arab country.

Once the invasion of Iraq began in March 2003, the French shunned exacerbating the deterioration in the relations with the U.S. by avoiding publicly criticizing or condemning the war, although by the end of March 2003, after meeting with the Russian leader Vladimir Putin, Chirac labeled the war as “a triple error: moral, political, and strategic” (269). The last part of the book zooms in on efforts to improve and patch up relations between the two countries, but as Bozo illustrates, that did not mean that each side understood the other well. However, a decade after the invasion relations became even stronger between the two counties in comparison with the pre-2003 period and Bozo posits that France is today one of the strongest allies of the United States.

The book emphasizes points that are now well known: the war was a fiasco that led to horrendous casualties on the Iraqi side, and cost the Americans a high number of soldiers killed and maimed, in addition to more than a trillion dollars. The situation in Iraq today, without Saddam Hussein, is unstable and the country is facing the increasing power of the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIL), while corruption has seeped into the fabric of society together with sectarianism and violence. No doubt the collapse of the Iraqi army in Mosul in June 2014 was due in large part to the corruption and sectarian policies of the new Iraqi leadership that replaced the Americans. The French enjoyed their ‘hour of glory’ by opposing the war and the results fourteen years later justify their opposition. The Iraqi people paid a heavy price for the folly and arrogance of their leadership, in particular given the fact that they did not possess weapons of mass destruction. This is indeed a tragic history and Bozo’s book adds to our understanding from a different and important dimension.
If it is journalists who write a first, rushed draft of history, it falls to scholars of international relations to understand how and why decisions of war and peace are actually made. Frédéric Bozo’s evaluation of French presidential and foreign ministry policy-making draws on extensive interviews and privileged access to French diplomatic papers in order to analyse how and why French diplomats resisted the U.S. drive to war in Iraq in 2003.

Academic studies of international relations all too often rest upon abstract theorizing or the repackaging of available facts. Yet to accurately dissect and reconstruct actual decision-making, scholars face three challenges. First they must talk to the key actors; secure access and then gain their confidence via informed questioning. Such interviews must critically scrutinize how the actors recall and justify their actions in retrospect, while cautiously discounting the benefits of hindsight. Second, academics have to locate and analyse every last diplomatic cable and scrawled note, while digesting all the public and private utterances and interviews made at the time. Thence sift through the resulting morass of diplomatic cables, emails and statements with the aim of distilling the noise of contradictory notes and transcripts into a readable narrative; in effect transforming a frenetic pinball game of diplomatic deadlines and re-drafts into a plausible story. Third and finally, any embryonic new account which is spun from the sources has to be tested and contrasted against existing secondary publications.

This is precisely what Frédéric Bozo attempts, ambitiously and tenaciously, in *A History of the Iraq Crisis; France, the United States, and Iraq, 1991-2003*. The author’s aim is to generate new insights into the trajectory and dynamics of the clash between the two states—hitherto invariably allies in both NATO and the United Nations (UN) Security Council—in the run-up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Viewed from Paris, what exactly led to such a monumental failure of international diplomacy: entailing paralysis within the UN, rupture with London, and the fragmentation of Europe into putative ‘old’ and ‘new’ camps? More indelibly, the resulting war killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis while sowing the seeds of subsequent, broader carnage.

Bozo achieves his aims by focussing largely on two aspects which together shaped French diplomacy; the principles which guided strategy, thence the actual mechanisms of decision-making. Both are viewed within the wider prism of Franco-American relations. At the heart of the book is a fairly meticulous reconstruction of the logic and layers of French diplomacy between September 2001 and the Anglo-American triggering of war in March 2003. A final chapter surveys how the transatlantic rupture of 2003 was progressively resolved by 2007.

The book is the English language translation of a study which appeared in French as the *Histoire secrète de la crise irakienne, la France, les Etats-Unis et l'Irak, 1990-2003* (Paris: Perrin, 2013). This English version is published under the auspices of the Woodrow Wilson Centre, where Bozo conducted much of his original research in 2011.

Overall Bozo’s account provides a mostly successful template for how foreign policy analysis should be pursued. The outcome is an original and useful addition to the growing mountain of literature on diplomacy and the U.S.-Iraqi war. The translated work also acts as a useful summary of invariably neglected secondary French language sources. The English version is particularly timely, coming just months after the long
overdue publication of the UK government’s official Iraq Inquiry by Sir John Chilcot’s panel;¹ I return to its
damning conclusions below.

Bozo opens his account by acknowledging that in terms of the Iraq war, the “French attitude presents fewer
unknowns regarding both its policy toward Iraq and its motivations regarding the United States, as well as the
internal determinants of its attitude” (10). Nevertheless, he goes on to pursue what I will schematically
summarize as four analytical threads.

First he examines the degree to which French leaders’ deep familiarity with the reality of Baathist Iraq, both
before and after war and sanctions in 1990-1991, informed their assessment of the actual threat posed by
Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and President Saddam Hussein’s likely responses to UN
pressure. Bozo argues that it was not the case that France was either complacent towards Baghdad, or indeed
that those in Paris always correctly assessed Iraq. Their view was rather “less removed from reality than that of
the Americans” (11) in large part due to their greater familiarity with the Iraqi leader and state. ²

Second, the account that emerges from Bozo’s reconstruction of French decision making in the key months of
2002 and early 2003 argues that President Jacques Chirac and French diplomats were not motivated by a
strategic vision which was either anti-American or aimed primarily to bolster Europe as an alternative source
of power in a multipolar world.

Indeed the evidence produced here often indicates that it was frequently precisely the opposite—a deep
reluctance to alienate the U.S.—which created the biggest dilemma for lead French diplomats at successive
stages of the deepening crisis. On the one hand it was vital to France’s strategic interests to maintain the
centrality of a close alliance with the U.S. and NATO in the post-Cold War world. Yet on the other hand
France’s conception of world order and international legitimacy was credible only when underpinned by the
United Nations. It is clear that Chirac was deeply sceptical about either the necessity or likely success of
military action in Iraq. But above all he was only willing to contemplate war after all other options for
disarmament were completely exhausted. Even then, military action had to be recognised as being necessary,
and formally legitimised as such, by the UN. Indeed what emerges from Bozo’s account is the degree to
which, once they anticipated the inevitability of U.S. military action, French officials redoubled efforts to
warn the U.S. off forcing a second resolution through the UN (242). This, they argue, would have allowed
France to distance itself from the attack, while containing longer-term damage to Paris-Washington ties.

The third thread relates to the UK’s position While the bitter London-Paris chemistry of early 2003 is not his
primary focus, nevertheless Bozo provides insights which may in time inform a detailed critique of what he
terms “the Franco-British psychodrama” (257), not least in the light of evidence from Chilcot’s official UK
Iraq Inquiry. Bozo highlights the degree to which there was an explicit decision by Prime Minister Tony
Blair’s government to ‘blame France’ for London’s failure to secure a second resolution, in the wake of
Chirac’s March 10 statement to journalists that “whatever the circumstances France will vote no”. The riposte
from London was in effect a smokescreen, masking Blair’s untenable position of being locked into a U.S

¹ The Iraq Inquiry, http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/.

² Chirac and some of those in his entourage had been dealing directly with Saddam Hussein since the mid-
military timetable with the wording and timing of a second Security Council resolution still undecided. The assessment of Gerard Errera, France’s ambassador to London at the time (260), was prescient in assuming that London would react via an orchestrated anti-French media blame-game. Bozo cites the testimony of Stephen Wall, then European advisor in the UK Cabinet Office, to the Chilcot Inquiry, that ministers knowingly distorted the actual French position in Paris and New York in an attempt to save face (261).

As he notes in his revised, English introduction [fn 3, 309], Bozo was able to use testimonials such as Wall’s as they were published on-line as Chilcot’s Iraq Inquiry slowly progressed. However, the final report was still under wraps when the English language version of his book went to press. After seven years in the making, Sir John Chilcot’s twelve volume, 2.5 million word Inquiry report was finally published on 6 July 2016 (the catalogue of UK foreign policy errors was thus overshadowed by the fateful ‘Brexit’ vote a fortnight earlier.) While I cannot here cross-refer Chilcot’s evidence with Bozo’s it is likely that the Inquiry’s overall damning assessment, and both the volume and minutiae of the documentation released, will buttress Bozo’s case that London failed to accurately gauge France’s motivations and tactics during early 2003.3

A fourth and final point is that—unlike that of the UK in the same context of crisis—France’s foreign policy machinery operated both efficiently and constitutionally in the run-up to war.4 Clearly there was considerable media attention paid at that time to Chirac’s flamboyant and literary Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin. Similarly, the French press echoed frequent rumblings of divisions and dissent among key French players during the crisis – some of which are alluded to by Bozo’s interviewees. However, the core tenet of Fifth-Republic foreign policy, that of ultimate Presidential authority was respected. Chirac decided and directed, and his own inner diplomatic and military staff worked efficiently with those of the Quai d’Orsay under Dominque Villepin.

Evidently Bozo’s work is not without flaws; I will flag just two here. The first is essentially stylistic; that in his forensic reconstruction the fury, tone and texture has largely been leached-out of his research, which allowed him, in his own words, to “enter into the heart of decision making” (6). Yet in the real world hearts beat to emotions; only very rarely does the author reflect the personal tenor of the exchanges and emotions behind the events he relates. The reader learns fairly precisely how the French foreign policy machine worked; who said what and how they justified it. What we do not really get is the sense of frenetic urgency, the anxiety and fatigue of endless redrafting as aides scrabbled through the early hours casting the prefect verb for de Villepin’s voice to hammer home. The manic emotion, the smells of tepid coffee and stale sweat in the corridors of power across Paris and New York during those torrid months of February and March 2003 are – perhaps inescapably – absent from this account.

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4 Chilcot’s Iraq Inquiry Report provides considerable additional evidence as to the dysfunctionality of Tony Blair’s decision-making apparatus, and in particular the misuse of intelligence. The 2004 official “Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction,” known as the Butler Report, had already highlighted such shortcomings, castigating Blair’s ‘sofa government’ style of decision-making among close advisors rather than Cabinet. A copy of the report is available at: http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Politics/documents/2004/07/14/butler.pdf.
Bozo has talked to most of the French actors at length, and, in a meticulously scholarly manner he reconstructs their decisions. However, rarely do we see or feel the real anxieties, strains, emotions, or doubts. No doubt those interviewed did relate such aspects. Yet asides on the tenor of what it was like to be there rarely reach the text; an all too rare human glimpse comes with Chirac exasperatedly rolling his eyes while on the phone to a recalcitrant Bush in February 2003 (234). Given that one of Bozo’s core assertions is that “personalities count,” (12) occasional insights into what it felt like at the time to the actors would have further bolstered the text.

This is a minor and perhaps idiosyncratic gripe. Doubly so in that the public does have such an account of France’s foreign ministry in the run-up to the war. Somewhat improbably this comes in the form of a best-selling bande dessinée, a cartoon book, co-authored by someone who was in the thick of the French delegation. Quai d’Orsay; Chroniques diplomatiques was written under a pseudonym by Antonin Baudry, Domenique de Villepin’s young speech-writer at the time of the Iraq crisis. He and the artist Christophe Blain provide a wonderfully plausible pen portrait of the manic and egotistical “Alexandre Taillard de Vorms” as Dominique de Villepin.  

5 Text and image beautifully combine to convey some of the furious, insomniac mechanics of foreign policy crises: the juggling of incessant phone calls; the deadlines stretched across time zones; and the collateral havoc wreaked on family lives. They also brilliantly capture the near herculean literary and stylistic energies invested into forging De Villepin’s speeches, including his celebrated oratory before the UN Security Council on 14 February 2003.  

Quai d’Orsay; Chroniques diplomatiques was an unexpected bestseller. Commercial success prompted a second volume and in 2013 a full-length feature film directed by Bertrand Tavernier, partially filmed inside the Quai d’Orsay itself. As Frédéric Bozo stated after viewing the movie; “the film captures the whirlwind within the ministerial office; staff with their nose constantly to the grindstone, caught between the need to make instant decisions and to theorise and structure their decisions”. 7 I mention the cartoons not as a criticism of Bozo, but rather in the hope they might inspire those using academic work and H-Diplo; both the BD and film might be usefully used as adjuncts to teaching foreign policy.

A second, more succinct, shortcoming is that the English-language version insufficiently brings together the threads of the evidence and analysis from the body of the book into a full conclusion. Instead we have a four page “Afterword” written as the English edition went to press in March 2016. This provides some retrospective observations on the legacy of the U.S.-French diplomatic clash and subsequent, relatively swift reconciliation. The author also briefly touches on French policy towards the Arab Spring that commenced in 2010. This is somewhat of a disservice to the book itself. An explicit restatement of the main findings of the

5 Christopher Blain and Abel Lanzac, Quai d’Orsay: Chroniques diplomatiques (Paris: Dargaud, 2011).  

6 English translations of all of de Villepin’s Iraq speeches, as well as those of largely French language commentaries published at the time can be found in Dominique de Villepin, Toward a New World: Speeches, Essays and Interviews on the War in Iraq (New Jersey: Melville House Publishing, 2004). The volume includes an essay by Régis Debray, who neatly characterises De Villepin as “the anachronism of a lyric sensibility in power” (259).  

research, and an evaluation of the degree to which the questions and objectives outlined in the introduction have been answered might have served future scholars of French foreign policy better.

Overall Bozo’s work considerably extends outsiders’ understandings of the French dimension of the path to war. Hitherto this has largely been shaped by either (mostly self-serving) autobiographical accounts (including those of Chirac, Bruno Le Maire and De Villepin) or journalists’ books such as those Eric Aeschimann and Christophe Boltanski’s *Chirac d’Arabie* or Verne and Cantaloube’s *Chirac contre Bush*.  

As the author points out, even before the publication of the voluminous evidence and findings of the UK’s Chilcot Inquiry, the scale of primary and secondary publications on the 2003 Iraq war makes it the “best documented international episode since the end of the Cold War” (4). His own work nevertheless considerably adds to our understanding of the radically divergent world views prevailing in Paris and Washington at the heart of the diplomatic crisis.

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I am most grateful to the editors of H-Diplo and to the members of this roundtable for this great opportunity to make my book known among English-speaking academics at a time when the once uninterrupted flurry of Iraq post mortems in the public debate seems to be ebbing, making it more difficult for works such as mine to gain visibility. While the events under consideration are barely a decade and a half old, I am indeed struck by the fact that the Iraq crisis has, to a much larger extent than was the case when I was researching and then writing the book a few years ago, become history. To be sure, as Jeffrey Engel rightly notes, we live in a world that is still very much the product of these events—alas, for the worse. Yet the 2016 election of Donald Trump has introduced an important element of discontinuity (which would arguably not have existed had Hillary Clinton been elected). We now have a president who stands for ‘America first’ and therefore supposedly rejects the very logic of foreign interventions of the kind that had prevailed under the banner of America’s ‘mission’ under many presidents up to Barack Obama (who himself yielded to that logic in Libya in 2011). A repeat of the Iraq saga therefore seems unlikely. Unless, that is, the new President, whose hallmark seems to be unpredictability and a propensity for quick reversals, decides that any one of the many and daunting challenges that he faces from Syria to North Korea—which, as Engel suggests, can to a large extent be traced back to 2003—deserve a full-scale military intervention, followed by post war occupation and nation building.

I was very interested to read the individual reviews, which, coming from prominent scholars whose expertise is directly relevant to the subject matter, all bring very valuable insights from complementary angles, as Jolyon Howorth notes. Though I am of course heartened by the very positive tonality of the reviews, it would not be appropriate for me to dwell on the compliments. Let me only stress that I was especially pleased to read that the reviewers seemed to concur that my book is “forensic,” as Howorth writes, in that the historical analysis avoids parti pris, as I believe should indeed be the case for any historian’s work, all the more so when the matter is contentious. I will therefore limit myself to a few observations in response to some of the points raised by the reviewers. They deal, respectively, with sources and methods, substance and issues, and writing and style.

On sources and methods, I would like to clarify John Keiger’s point on accessibility of archival documents and his characterization of my work as “official history.” Though I certainly consider myself privileged to have been able to gain access to such recent material (sometimes being able to see documents not more than five years old), it should be clear that (except for personal papers kept and made available to scholars by former decision makers on an informal basis, as is of course done in other countries as well) this was the result of an entirely legal process: as Keiger writes, the French legislation on public archives is based on a twenty-five year rule of access (extended to fifty years for matters of national security), but scholars can ask for an exemption (“dérogation”) on an individual basis, as I did. To be sure, this whole process is different from the freedom of information acts that prevail in the U.S. and the U.K. in particular because, in the French case, exemptions are granted by the authorities on an individual basis. Still, it should be noted that according to the practice of both the Archives nationales and the Archives diplomatiques, any scholar requesting to see documents that have been seen previously by another scholar through a “dérogation” is routinely given the same access. Hence if “official history” entails both a mandate to investigate certain events as well as ad hoc access to the relevant documents being given to a historian by the powers that be (who usually reserve the right to review the work before its publication), such characterization is not applicable in this case. In fact, I have worked as any historian, choosing my own topic freely, and determined to obtain as large a corpus as possible without having to submit my findings to anyone.
On substance and issues, I would like to respond to the points made by Joseph Sassoon and Keiger on possible French ulterior motives and, in particular, possible mercantilist interests in defining the country’s stance on Iraq throughout the 1990s and 2000s. This is of course a well-known accusation, which has been used (in particular on the American side) throughout the post 1991 Iraqi saga to discredit French policy. It is also an accusation—prominent, of course, in the innumerable conspiracy theories associated with the post 9/11 events—that has been used in reverse: many Europeans have assigned mercantilist intentions to the Americans, who are often depicted as motivated by oil-grabbing in both their invasions of Iraq. Yet while Donald Trump has recently seemed ex post facto to condone the thinking behind this accusation when he suggested during the presidential campaign that the U.S. should ‘take the oil’ in Iraq to compensate for the cost of the 2003 invasion, serious scholars know as a general rule that although oil is always an important factor when Middle East policy is concerned, it has not been a decisive consideration in either of the two U.S. decisions to invade Iraq. Conversely, the notion that French opposition to the 2003 war was determined by oil interests does not withstand scrutiny, whether as a matter of analysis (knowing that the U.S. would likely invade Iraq and dominate the country for years, the French, had they been motivated by oil interests, should have been careful not to antagonize the Americans in the hope of obtaining post-war contracts) or evidence (there is simply no trace of such thinking having played a decisive role in the decision making process). Quite the contrary: because they knew they were under close scrutiny in Washington and because they had premised their Iraq policy on the need for all players involved to respect United Nations (UN) resolutions throughout, French authorities were particularly determined to impose on French economic actors a strict observance of the letter and the spirit of sanctions, such as preventing firms from signing agreements pertaining to possible post-sanctions deals with the Iraqis.

Of course, as Sassoon observes, Iraqi sources do give credence to the notion that the Iraqis tried all along to use possible oil contracts and other rewards to influence French (as well as Russian or Chinese) decision making. However, given the nature of the regime, such behavior is hardly surprising. Indeed, it could only have been expected. But while the French certainly welcomed doing whatever business with Baghdad was legal under the sanctions regime (and that business was very limited, accounting for much less than one percent of France’s foreign trade) and were eager to preserve a possible relaunch of economic relations in an undetermined, post-sanctions future, French authorities knew full well that the Iraqis were adept at playing this game and were careful to avoid falling into the trap—and, by the end of the 1990s, they observed the constant erosion of France’s economic advantage in Iraq as Baghdad was increasingly inclined to favor other countries while circumventing the sanctions regime. The fact that Iraqi archives mirror Iraqi hopes to influence France in this way and, more generally, Iraq’s attempts to keep as close a contact as possible with Paris based on the past privileged relationship between the two countries, is therefore not a surprise, especially considering, as Sassoon notes, that Saddam Hussein, in addition to being surrounded by “sycophants” who hid the truth from him, was prone to “hubris” and to “misreading” the international scene: surely the same flaws that made him underestimate the U.S. determination to go to war made him overestimate his ability to manipulate those who opposed the war.

The allegations of possible French wrongdoings that surfaced after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in various U.S. reports, such as the CIA-commissioned Duelfer report, must also be handled very carefully: not only were they based on Iraqi sources confiscated by the occupiers, but there is little doubt that the latter, against the

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backdrop of an increasingly difficult post-invasion situation and rising questions at home as to the 2003
decision to go to war, had every reason to ‘spin’ any information that could damage the reputation of the
French and others. This is not to say that some individuals or companies, including two former high ranking
French diplomats, were not involved in immoral and perhaps illegal dealings with the Iraqis, as I mention in
the book (353-4); but there is no reason to believe that such wrongdoings were significantly more widespread
in the case of France than other Western countries, including the United States, and most of all there is no
evidence that they had a direct impact on the country’s policy. As always, historians must remain attentive to
potential source effects (the situation was not very different when, after the end of the Cold War, the archives
of communist countries were used, sometimes carelessly, as evidence that some in the West had been
compromised by Eastern agents, whereas they had only been the targets of such efforts.)

Finally, one remark on writing and style. David Sryan is right when he notes that my recounting of these
events is somewhat devoid of the personal emotions that inescapably characterized this saga. Sources, here
also, provide an explanation: whoever has seen and compared French and British protocols of diplomatic
conversations knows that French documents tend to be quite clinical and to contain only the gist of
conversations where British ones are often more elaborate, including to some extent the rendering of
emotions. This was clear, for instance, in a completely different set of circumstances, those surrounding
Germany’s unification in 1989-1990, leading to interesting controversies, such as the extent to which the
British at the time (Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her diplomatic adviser Charles Powell to begin
with) may have—intentionally or not—over interpreted the reactions of their French interlocutors, including
President François Mitterrand, whom Thatcher believed shared her visceral hostility to German unity.²

So, yes, personal factors do matter, but they are often hard to pin down. Historians must be humble, and
accept that they will never be able to compete with fiction in that sphere. I agree, though, that for pedagogical
or even heuristic purposes, in the confines of the classroom, it is interesting to use works such as the best-
selling bande dessinée (and later movie) Quai d’Orsay. When I interviewed a former prominent French
decision maker who had been a key participant in the Iraq drama, I was intrigued to see, on top of piles of
books of art and arts sales catalogues lying on the coffee table in his fancy Paris office, a copy of Quai d’Orsay.
As we sat down, I asked permission to use the book as a hard surface to take notes on, adding jokingly that I
considered it to be a reliable source—and was greeted with a large smile from the reputedly bombastic former
official.³ I found him to be quite true to his bande dessinée persona.

² See e.g. Frédéric Bozo, “Thatcher’s European Delusions”, Prospect Magazine, 30 November 2009,
https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/thatchers-european-delusions

³ Personal interview, Paris, 26 July 2012.