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# Program Brief

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## **"U.S. and Europe: Terrorism and the Middle East"** **A Nixon Center Panel Discussion**

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“The ability of the United States to reach a consensus with its European allies on a course of action in the Middle East will likely determine the degree to which the American-led war on terrorism succeeds in the region,” stated Geoffrey Kemp, Director of Regional Strategic Programs at the Nixon Center at a panel discussion on April 16 on U.S. and European policy in the Middle East. Kemp moderated the discussion that included the Hon. Ruprecht Polenz, a member of the conservative CDU party in the German Bundestag and member of the Bundestag’s Foreign Affairs Committee, Dr. Phillip Gordon, Director of the Center for the United States and France at the Brookings Institution, and Dr. Rosemary Hollis, Director of Middle East Programmes at the Royal Institute for International Affairs.

### **Geoffrey Kemp**

“The President faces a serious crisis, in some respects more serious than September 11<sup>th</sup>. [At that time] the country and world was united. Now, the international community is divided, and there are emerging divisions within the Republican Party on how to handle the Bush Doctrine and at the same time deal with Yasser Arafat,” asserted Kemp on the challenges facing the U.S.-European relationship in the midst of escalated violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the desire to make Iraq the next target in the war on terrorism.

Kemp noted that “a great debate remains as to whether the key to our problems is solved by the Baghdad first or Jerusalem first strategy.” While some experts argue

that priority should be given to reaching an Israeli-Palestinian settlement over invading Iraq, others believe that inducing regime transformation in Baghdad is necessary to bring stability to the region. Support for the latter policy, favored by hardliners in the Bush Administration, as well as that for a broader expansion of the war on terrorism, has waned in recent months, noted Kemp.

The war on terrorism has reached a critical juncture, argued Kemp. Europe has played a vital role in Afghanistan, both in helping U.S. forces to maintain peace and in assisting President Karzai to establish a viable central government. But Kemp predicted that while the United States would appreciate broad support for an invasion of Iraq, British acquiescence is a key requirement for any U.S. move. Dissension by Tony Blair would pose an “enormous dilemma” for America. On Iran, Kemp noted that there are “great differences in opinion between the Europeans and [the Bush] Administration, particularly in the use of the term ‘axis of evil’ and on the wisdom of tying Iran and Iraq together.” Amidst the many ambiguities, what is clear, Kemp maintained, is that Europe’s reception of President Bush’s proposed strategy of preemption may prove decisive and, as a result, transatlantic dialogue is essential.

### **Ruprecht Polenz**

Ruprecht Polenz outlined European and American misperceptions of each other that have arisen since September 11th, and presented European concerns

regarding future action in the Middle East. Europeans, Polenz observed, accuse the United States of considering only military options to combat terrorism. Further, Europeans argue that the use of force in Iraq would jeopardize allies' interests and would violate international law. In turn, Polenz noted that many Americans see the Europeans as "wimps and know-it-alls," while some Americans claim that European governments shy away from action to protect their countries' economic interests. In the eyes of some Americans, European officials present no "serious" policy alternatives to armed incursions. Echoing Kemp's recommendation, Polenz stated that Europe and America "must work together to ensure that unforeseen consequences of our actions do not undermine the consensus which our efforts have achieved."

Addressing the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, Polenz stated that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's perceived lack of a vision for peace has increased European criticism of the Israeli government, "We [Europeans] don't see what is behind Sharon's actions." Polenz praised the recent efforts of U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell to bring about a withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank, and argued that a cease-fire would be critical for the success of future negotiations.

Polenz conceded that Europeans may underestimate the threat of Iraqi missiles to their cities. He also stated that all allies have an interest in protecting themselves from weapons of mass destruction. Despite these shared interests with America, however, most Europeans do not view a regime change in Baghdad as the best way to decrease Iraq's ability to harm the West. Instead, Europeans argue that the allies have no legitimate right to infringe on the sovereignty of any state, including Iraq. Regarding Iran, Polenz made clear that any attempt to change the regime from the outside would require massive numbers of both American and international troops stationed in the country for years, maybe decades. It would be a smarter policy, Polenz argued, for the allies to use the contradictions that exist within Iran's government and throughout its society to assist moderate dissenters who seek to reform the country's fundamentalist regime.

### **Phillip Gordon**

Phillip Gordon discussed the evolution of European attitudes toward the war on terrorism and he proposed a plan of action to deal with Iraq. Immediately after September 11, transatlantic dialogue increased considerably, and a strong consensus was built on a policy toward Afghanistan. Gordon recounted that the Europeans greatly appreciated the Bush

Administration's cautious response to the attacks. In response, many governments actually offered to send more troops to Afghanistan than Americans were willing to accommodate. However, this support changed with President Bush's State of the Union address. Bush's "axis of evil" characterization of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea was too "black and white" for the Europeans. Later U.S. actions, including America's embrace of Pakistan and the Bush Administration's proposed \$48 billion military budget increase, only played to European's negative stereotypes of America's overmilitarization. Gordon argued however, that Europe's "cliched response to Bush's cliched approach" also contributed to the downward spiraling of transatlantic relations.

Gordon agreed with Kemp and Polenz that differences of opinion between the Americans and the Europeans must be resolved if future operations are to succeed. Compromises and political risks must be taken on both sides to ensure progress. "This is especially true in regard to the Arab-Israeli crisis, where domestic constituencies have constrained European governments and the Bush Administration," Gordon further asserted. On Iraq, Gordon argued that the United States should only opt for renewed inspections if the European governments agree to support the use of military force in the event that inspections fail. As Gordon stated, "If we don't put force on the table, there is zero percent chance that Saddam will accept serious inspections." If force is used, Gordon continued, it should be for the sole purpose of changing Iraq's regime.

### **Rosemary Hollis**

Rosemary Hollis commented on three issues: the evolution of the Bush Administration's definition of and policy toward terrorism; the challenge for Britain and Europe to deal with the American "mega power"; and the debate over counterterrorism doctrine. According to Hollis, the United States accepted the responsibility of defining terrorism when it set itself on the warpath late last year. Since that time, the American definition has been a "moving target," making it more difficult for the Europeans to decide how much to cooperate. Initially, the war was focused on rooting out Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda terrorists. Soon after, it expanded to include regimes harboring terrorists. Next, according to Hollis, non-Muslim entities such as the Basque separatists "were thrown in for good measure to prove that this is not a war against Islam." With the Axis of Evil speech, the definition reached its broadest level as the U.S. conflated those who attacked America with rogue states and states that pursue weapons of mass destruction. In Hollis' view, "Europe has not kept up

with the evolution of this definition, nor with the evolution of the solution to the problem.”

Compounding their inability to keep pace with America’s changing definition of terrorism has been the challenge for European governments, especially Britain’s, to define their roles vis-a-vis the United States. Thus far, Tony Blair has maintained that the most effective way to influence the United States is for the British government to work closely with America. Hollis believes this approach paid dividends during the war in Afghanistan. Yet near the end of 2001, Blair’s strategy unraveled, as President Bush and the Pentagon increasingly shifted their sights from Kabul to Baghdad. Since then the danger in offering stalwart support for all U.S. policies in the face of growing European dissension and anti-Americanism has grown. Hollis argued that Blair’s policy has sapped Britain of its clout as an independent global player, and transformed its image into that of America’s messenger.

Hollis concluded with the suggestion that the current U.S. counterterrorism doctrine is misguided. She alluded specifically to the lessons learned by British forces in Northern Ireland during the 1960s. In her own meetings with former British military personnel they said the doctrine of trying to smash terrorists with military force is flawed policy. Hollis further argued that in using force there is high likelihood that it will create new terrorists who could inflict exponential damage. Instead, Hollis advocated a counterterrorism doctrine of minimal force and maximum diplomacy.

*This Program Brief was prepared by Nixon Center Intern Jeremy Schlosser and Program Assistant Greg Fedor.*

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