

EUROPEAN FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS REVIEW

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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Bernardo Pires de Lima, *A Cimeira das Lajes: Portugal, Espanha e a Guerra do Iraque* (Lisbon: Tinta da China), 2013, ISBN 9789896711528, pp. 199.

The invasion of Iraq in March 2003 is one of the most relevant and most analysed international events of the twenty-first century. It challenged not only international law but also many facets of international politics, including the way the United States (US) relates with international organizations such as the UN, or with external partners and allies such as the EU. Not least, it also produced political changes in Iraq whose repercussions continue to be felt to this day which is way beyond the moment the war was declared finished. As one of the most dramatic consequences of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the war in Iraq is a symbol of post-9/11 world politics. It is therefore apparent that an understanding of the context that led to the outbreak of war is particularly relevant to gaining an understanding of contemporary international politics.

As became increasingly clear in the aftermath of the conflict, this military action was based on arguments that have subsequently been subject to considerable criticism: the existence of weapons of mass destruction by the Saddam Hussein regime, the imminence of the threat they posed to the US – and to the West more broadly –, and the connections between the regime in Baghdad and terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda. This obviously raises critical questions: how did all this affect the credibility of the US as an international actor? Which bruises did it leave in the transatlantic relationship? Which role did smaller states play in the run-up to the conflict? What is the value of trust in international relations?

The book here under review addresses some of these questions and provides new elements for understanding the 2003 war in Iraq. Written in Portuguese, its importance stretches beyond the lusophone readership due the focus of the inquiry: the context and the details of the summit that took place in 16 March 2003 at the Lajes Air Base in the Portuguese islands of the Azores, where the invasion was announced by Bush et al. and the guidelines for a post-Saddam Iraq were set. The US-led force, which also included British, Polish and Australian contingents, invaded Iraq three days later, on 19 March. What had originally been meant to be a bilateral US-UK summit, held at the highest level between George W. Bush and Tony Blair, eventually became expanded by including Aznar's Spain and also Portugal, who came into the scene when the Lajes Air Base became the

chosen venue. The book covers in detail the diplomatic ventures of the centre-right government in Lisbon headed by José Manuel Durão Barroso, whose actions before and after the summit impacted decisively on his future nomination as President of the European Commission in 2004.

This summit took place when the tensions within the EU were peaking. While the Convention on the Future of Europe was drafting what eventually became the Constitutional Treaty, the diplomatic manoeuvres leading up to the Iraq war opened up fierce discussions about EU's foreign policy and its international aspirations. In 15 February 2003 many thousands of Europeans demonstrated in several EU capitals against the increasingly likely war in Iraq, in what many intellectuals – including Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida – interpreted as a manifestation of a somewhat *distinctive* European identity in foreign affairs. By sidelining three EU heads of state with George Bush, the Lajes Summit brought a nuance to this understanding which should be kept in mind when analysing the way the EU reacted to US' post-9/11 political milestones.

The book opens up with a chapter addressing the international context that enabled the war in Iraq in 2003. It looks into the way Iraq emerged as a central issue in US foreign policy after the end of the Cold War and analyses how it became dominant in the official discourses of the White House in the aftermath of 9/11. Bernardo Pires de Lima, a researcher at the Portuguese Institute of International Relations (IPRI-UNL) and a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, argues that the first great turn after 9/11 was the cut of the line separating terrorists from sponsors of terrorism (p. 27). Yet, he traces some of the dominant doctrines of the Bush-Rumsfeld-Cheney era back to developments occurred during the Clinton mandate. For example, the author mentions how the concept of 'preventive defense', introduced by the Pentagon during the last period of the Clinton Administration (p. 23) was important to understand how we moved from 'preventive defense' (passive) to 'preventive action' (active). He also outlines a number of aspects of the 2002 National Security Strategy against the background of the National Security Council Report from 1950 (p. 36), highlighting traces of continuity in US foreign policy that are often neglected in analyses of Washington's responses to international terrorism after 9/11.

Based on media analysis, academic sources, official documents, and interviews with key stakeholders in Lisbon and with undisclosed diplomatic sources, the author proceeds to contextualize the rift in Europe which occurred at the end of 2002 and beginning of 2003 by focusing mainly on Portugal and Spain. From an

early stage, these two countries aligned with London and Washington, while a relevant percentage of the remaining EU Member States, including France and Germany, opposed an invasion of Iraq without a mandate of the UN Security Council. In concrete, the book reveals political dynamics that are not restricted to the Portuguese case and that tell us something about the dynamics of EU foreign policy formulation: for example, the way that different political forces within the country adopted different stances, the importance of US-based intelligence for the definition of national foreign policies, the sometimes critical interplay between European capitals and the EU, the way public support is paid back (as illustrated with the case of the maintenance of the NATO Joint Command Force in Oeiras), and the way the different strategic traditions of EU Member States and candidate countries have prevented the EU to come up with crystal clear positions on very sensitive international affairs. It is precisely the broadening up of this case study that makes this book's inquiry interesting from an EU foreign affairs perspective

There are aspects of the work that could have been enhanced. For example, more might have been said about the history of the Lajes Air Base, an important airfield for both the British Royal Air Force and the US Air Force during the Second World War, to the US military aid to Israel in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, and during the Gulf War of 1990–1991. The airfield has also been a relevant contribution from Portugal to NATO and an important strategic vector in the transatlantic relations. This context would be important to understand better the choice for this venue in 2003. Additionally, although the book is clear about having the run-up to the summit as its main object of inquiry, it would have been interesting to explore more systematically its implications. Were there any winners or losers out of this summit? How did it impact on the workings of the Convention on the Future of Europe, namely in its workings groups dedicated to EU's foreign policy and to EU's defence? Did it affect the way the EU coordinates its foreign policy with the ones of its Member States? More than ten years since the summit took place, is there any visible legacy of it in the transatlantic relations?

In a writing style that makes the book appealing to a broad readership, Bernardo Pires de Lima narrates in detail the context and the backstage of the Lajes summit, the venue where one of the most controversial decisions of the twenty-first century was announced by Bush, Blair, Aznar and, to a certain extent, also Barroso.

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