

September 11, 2003

WORLD OPINION

Foreign Views of U.S. Darken Since Sept. 11

By RICHARD BERNSTEIN

BERLIN, Sept. 10 — In the two years since Sept. 11, 2001, the view of the United States as a victim of terrorism that deserved the world's sympathy and support has given way to a widespread vision of America as an imperial power that has defied world opinion through unjustified and unilateral use of military force.

"A lot of people had sympathy for Americans around the time of 9/11, but that's changed," said Cathy Hearn, 31, a flight attendant from South Africa, expressing a view commonly heard in many countries. "They act like the big guy riding roughshod over everyone else."

In interviews by Times correspondents from Africa to Europe to Southeast Asia, one point emerged clearly: The war in Iraq has had a major impact on public opinion, which has moved generally from post-9/11 sympathy to post-Iraq antipathy, or at least to disappointment over what is seen as the sole superpower's inclination to act pre-emptively, without either persuasive reasons or United Nations approval.

To some degree, the resentment is centered on the person of President Bush, who is seen by many of those interviewed, at best, as an ineffective spokesman for American interests and, at worst, as a gunslinging cowboy knocking over international treaties and bent on controlling the world's oil, if not the entire world.

Foreign policy experts point to slowly developing fissures, born at the end of the cold war, that exploded into view in the debate leading up to the Iraq war. "I think the turnaround was last summer, when American policy moved ever more decisively toward war against Iraq," said Josef Joffe, co-editor of the German weekly Die Zeit. "That's what triggered the counteralliance of France and Germany and the enormous wave of hatred against the United States."

The subject of America in the world is of course complicated, and the nation's battered international image could improve quickly in response to events. The Bush administration's recent turn to the United Nations for help in postwar Iraq may represent such an event.

Even at this low point, millions of people still see the United States as a beacon and support its policies, including the war in Iraq, and would, given the chance, be happy to become Americans themselves.

Some regions, especially Europe, are split in their view of America's role: The governments and, to a lesser extent, the public in former Soviet-bloc countries are much more favorably disposed to American power than the governments and the public in Western Europe, notably France and Germany.

In Japan, a strong American ally that feels insecure in the face of a hostile, nuclear-armed North Korea, there may be doubts about the wisdom of the American war on Iraq. But there seem to be far fewer doubts about the importance of American power generally to global stability.

In China, while many ordinary people express doubts about the war in Iraq, anti-American feeling has diminished since Sept. 11, 2001, and there seems to be greater understanding and less instinctive criticism of the United States by government officials and intellectuals. The Chinese leadership has largely embraced America's "war on terror."

Still, a widespread and fashionable view is that the United States is a classically imperialist power bent on controlling global oil supplies and on military domination.

That mood has been expressed in different ways by different people, from the hockey fans in Montreal who boo the American national anthem to the high school students in Switzerland who do not want to go to the United States as exchange students because America is not "in." Even among young people, it is not difficult to hear strong denunciations of American policy and sharp questioning of American motives.

"America has taken power over the world," said Dmitri Ostalsky, 25, a literary critic and writer in Moscow. "It's a wonderful country, but it seized power. It's ruling the world. America's attempts to rebuild all the world in the image of liberalism and capitalism are fraught with the same dangers as the Nazis taking over the world."

A Frenchman, Jean-Charles Pogram, 45, a computer technician, said: "Everyone agrees on the principles of democracy and freedom, but the problem is that we don't agree with the means to achieve those ends. The United States can't see beyond the axiom that force can solve everything, but Europe, because of two world wars, knows the price of blood."

Lydia Adhiamba, a 20-year-old student at the Institute of Advanced Technology in Nairobi, Kenya, said the United States "wants to rule the whole world, and that's why there's so much animosity to the U.S."

The major English language daily newspaper in Indonesia, The Jakarta Post, recently ran a prominent article titled, "Why moderate Muslims are annoyed with America," by Sayidiman Suryohadiprojo, a prominent figure during the Suharto years.

"If America wants to become a hegemonic power, it is rather difficult for other nations to prevent that," he wrote. "However, if America wants to be a hegemonic power that has the respect and trust of other nations, it must be a benign one, and not one that causes a reaction of hate or fear among other nations."

Bush as Salesman

Crucial to global opinion has been the failure of the Bush administration to persuade large segments of the public of its justification for going to war in Iraq.

In striking contrast to opinion in the United States, where polls show a majority believe there was a connection between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda terrorists, the rest of the world remains skeptical.

That explains the enormous difference in international opinion toward American military action in Afghanistan in the months after Sept. 11, which seemed to have tacit approval as legitimate self-defense, and toward American military action in Iraq, which is seen as the arbitrary act of an

overbearing power.

Perhaps the strongest effect on public opinion has been in Arab and Muslim countries. Even in relatively moderate Muslim countries like Indonesia and Turkey, or countries with large Muslim populations, like Nigeria, both polls and interviews show sharp drops in approval of the United States.

In unabashedly pro-American countries like Poland, perhaps the staunchest American ally on Iraq after Britain, polls show 60 percent of the people oppose the government's decision to send 2,500 troops to Iraq.

For many people, the issue is not so much the United States as it is the Bush administration, and what is seen as its arrogance. In this view, a different set of policies and a different set of public statements from Washington could have resulted in a different set of attitudes.

"The point I would make is that with the best will in the world, President Bush is a very poor salesman for the United States, and I say that as someone who has no animus against him or the United States," said Philip Gawaith, a financial communications consultant in London. "Whether it's Al Qaeda or Afghanistan, people have just felt that he's a silly man, and therefore they are not obliged to think any harder about his position."

Trying to Define 'Threat'

But while the public statements of the Bush administration have not played well in much of the world, many analysts see deeper causes for the rift that has opened. In their view, the Iraq war has not so much caused a new divergence as it has highlighted and widened one that existed since the end of the cold war. Put bluntly, Europe needs America less now that it feels less threatened.

Indeed, while the United States probably feels more threatened now than in 1989, when the cold war ended, Europe is broadly unconvinced of any imminent threat.

"There were deep structural forces before 9/11 that were pushing us apart," said John J. Mearsheimer, professor of political science at the University of Chicago and the author of "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics." "In the absence of the Soviet threat or of an equivalent threat, there was no way that ties between us and Europe wouldn't be loosened.

"So, when the Bush Administration came to power, the question was whether it would make things better or worse, and I'd argue that it made them worse."

"In the cold war you could argue that American unilateralism had no cost," Professor Mearsheimer continued. "But as we're finding out with regard to Iraq, Iran and North Korea, we need the Europeans and we need institutions like the U.N. The fact is that the United States can't run the world by itself, and the problem is, we've done a lot of damage in our relations with allies, and people are not terribly enthusiastic about helping us now."

Recent findings of international surveys illustrate those divergences.

A poll of 8,000 people in Europe and the United States conducted by the German Marshall Fund of the United States and Compagnia di São Paolo of Italy found Americans and Europeans agreeing on the nature of global threats but disagreeing sharply on how they should be dealt with.

Most striking was a difference over the use of military force, with 84 percent of Americans but only 48 percent of Europeans supporting force as a means of imposing international justice.

In Europe overall, the proportion of people who want the United States to maintain a strong global presence fell 19 points since a similar poll last year, from 64 percent to 45 percent, while 50 percent of respondents in Germany, France and Italy express opposition to American leadership.

Many of the difficulties predated Sept. 11, of course. Eberhard Sandschneider, director of the German Council on Foreign Relations, listed some in a recent paper: "Economic disputes relating to steel and farm subsidies; limits on legal cooperation because of the death penalty in the United States; repeated charges of U.S. 'unilateralism' over actions in Afghanistan; and the U.S. decisions on the ABM Treaty, the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court and the Biological Weapons Protocol."

"One could conclude that there is today a serious question as to whether Europe and the United States are parting ways," Mr. Sandschneider writes.

From this point of view, as he and others have said, the divergence will not be a temporary phenomenon but permanent.

A recent survey by the Pew Global Attitudes Project showed a growth of anti-American sentiment in many non-European parts of the world. It found, for example, that only 15 percent of Indonesians have a favorable impression of the United States, down from 61 percent a year ago.

Indonesia may be especially troubling to American policy makers, who have hoped that, as a country with an easy-going attitude toward religion, it would emerge as a kind of pro-American Islamic model.

But since Sept. 11, a virulent group of extremists known as Jemaah Islamiyah has gained strength, attacking in Bali and Jakarta and making the country so insecure that President Bush may skip it during an Asian trip planned for next month.

One well-known mainstream Indonesian Muslim leader, Din Syamsuddin, an American-educated vice president of a Islamic organization that claims 30 million members, calls the United States the "king of the terrorists" and refers to President Bush as a "drunken horse."

This turn for the worse has occurred despite a \$10 million program by the State Department in which speakers and short films showing Muslim life in the United States were sent last fall to Muslim countries, including Indonesia.

A Residue of Good Will

Still, broad sympathy for the United States exists in many areas. Students from around the world clamor to be educated in America. The United States as a land of opportunity remains magnetic.

Some analysts point out that the German Marshall Fund study actually showed a great deal of common ground across the Atlantic.

"Americans and Europeans still basically like each other, although such warmth has slipped in the wake of the Iraq war," Ronald Asmus, Philip P. Everts and Pierangelo Isernia, analysts from the United States, the Netherlands and Italy, respectively, wrote in an article explaining the findings. "Americans and Europeans do not live on different planets when it comes to viewing the threats around them."

But there is little doubt that the planets have moved apart. Gone are the days, two years ago, when 200,000 Germans marched in Berlin to show solidarity with their American allies, or when *Le Monde*, the most prestigious French newspaper, could publish a large headline, "We Are All Americans."

More recently, Jean Daniel, the editor of the weekly *Nouvel Observateur*, published an editorial entitled, "We Are Not All Americans."

For governments in Eastern Europe, Sept. 11 has forced a kind of test of loyalties. Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Poland have felt themselves caught between the United States and the European Union, which they will soon be joining.

Here, too, the war in Iraq seems to have been the defining event, the division of Europe into "new" and "old" halves, defined by their willingness to support the American-led war.

Most Eastern European countries side with the European Union majority on such questions as the International Criminal Court, which is opposed by the Bush administration, while helping in various ways with the Iraq war. Poland and Romania have sent troops and Hungary has permitted training of Iraqis at a military base there.

But even if the overall mood in the former Soviet Bloc remains largely pro-American, recent polls have shown some slippage in feelings of admiration.

"We would love to see America as a self-limiting superpower," said Janusz Onyszkiewicz, a former Polish defense minister.

Perhaps the administration's decision to turn to the United Nations to seek a mandate for an international force in Iraq reflects a new readiness to exercise such restraint. The administration appears to have learned that using its power in isolation can get very expensive very quickly.

But the road to recovering global support is likely to be a long one for a country whose very power — political, economic, cultural, military — makes it a natural target of criticism and envy.

Even in Japan, where support for America remains strong, the view of the United States as a bully has entered the popular culture. A recent cartoon showed a character looking like President Bush in a Stars and Stripes vest pushing Japanese fishermen away from a favorite spot, saying, "I can fish better."

Contributing to this report were James Brooke, Frank Bruni, Alan Cowell, Ian Fisher, Joseph Kahn, Clifford Krauss, Marc Lacey, Jane Perlez, Craig S. Smith and Michael Wines.