



INTERNATIONAL: Iraq takes toll on US global influence

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An Oxford Analytica In-depth Analysis

SUBJECT: The recent rise in anti-Americanism in Europe and around the world.

SIGNIFICANCE: Anti-Americanism has risen to levels not seen since the 1980s, and remains high among US traditional allies in both the EU and the Muslim world -- Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan. The phenomenon has grown during George Bush's presidency, and especially since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

ANALYSIS: European and world views of the United States and President George Bush have dramatically worsened since 2000; the trend has intensified since the US-led invasion of Iraq. There has been a decline in perceptions of the United States throughout the EU, including in such traditional US allies as the United Kingdom and Poland, and in Muslim and Latin American countries, according to annual polls undertaken by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the Pew Research Center and the BBC World Service:

- In a March 2007 survey of 28,000 people in 27 countries conducted for the BBC World Service by GlobeScan and the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), only Israel, Iran and North Korea were perceived as having a more negative influence than the United States on world affairs.

Views of countries' influence		
Average of 27 countries, per cent		
	Mainly positive	Mainly negative
Canada	54	14
Japan	54	20
EU	53	19
France	50	21
United Kingdom	45	28
China	42	32
India	37	26
Venezuela	27	27
Russia	28	40
United States	30	51
North Korea	19	48
Iran	18	54
Israel	17	56

Source: www.worldpublicopinion.org

Key insights

- Whereas most people in the world have a positive view of the EU, US influence is in noticeable decline, even among formerly staunch allies.
- Divergent views within the EU on US policy have their roots in the 1980s East-West split in Europe on the respective threat from Soviet and US military power.
- Contemporary anti-Americanism derives largely -- but not entirely -- from President George Bush's Iraq policy.
- It has waxed and waned before and is likely to subside again, in parallel with changes in the Washington administration and its foreign policy.

- During 2002-06, European views of the desirability of US leadership in world affairs has declined from 64% to 37%, while its undesirability has risen from 31% to 57%. Former US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski gives Bush an 'F' for his "catastrophic leadership" in world affairs in his new book, 'Second Chance'.

Bush's standing. Particularly dramatic are EU and world perceptions of Bush. Confidence in the US president has declined in all countries, mirroring similar declines in the United States itself:

INTERNATIONAL: Iraq takes toll on US global influence - p. 2 of 4

- Bush's standing is as low as 8-20% in the US Muslim allies Pakistan, Egypt and Indonesia. In the United Kingdom, a long-standing US ally and supporter of the Iraqi invasion, only 30% have confidence in Bush. In Germany and France, this figure is 25% and 15% respectively. In Spain, it is as low as 7%, a consequence of the 2004 Madrid train bombing.
- Only in India does Bush's rating exceed 50%. In China, confidence in Bush (34%) is higher than in most West European EU members; Russia is similar (21%).
- The most dramatic decline is in long-time US ally and NATO member Turkey, where only 3% have confidence in Bush. However, Turkish views of the EU have also declined, in response to what is seen as EU stalling over Turkey's membership. This mirrors declining support for NATO, now at 44%.
- Another US ally, South Korea, also shows strong anti-Americanism, with 60% having negative views of the United States as a 'colonial power'. Anti-Americanism has become fashionable among young South Koreans.

Declining US influence. In the March BBC poll, 51% believe that the United States is playing a mainly negative role in the world:

- In the EU, this negative view is highest in Greece and Germany (78% and 74% respectively), France (69%) and in the United Kingdom (57%). Canadian opinion is similar (56%). Negative views are widespread in 'old' Europe and Muslim countries (see [US/INTERNATIONAL: Hostile Muslim views are entrenched - January 22, 2007](#)).
- The only countries with overall positive views are in Africa (Nigeria, Kenya), and the Philippines.
- The largest registered declines in views of US influence were in Poland (from 62% to 38%), followed by the Philippines and Indonesia. Turkey registers the lowest positive view of the United States (7%) alongside a high negative view (69%). In most EU member and aspiring member countries, favourable opinions of the United States have roughly halved since 2000, in Germany (from 78% to 37%), France (from 62% to 39%), the United Kingdom (from 83% to 56%), Spain (from 50% to 23%) and Turkey (from 52% to 12%).

Views of US influence			
Average of 18 countries, per cent			
	2005	2006	2007
Mainly negative	46	47	52
Mainly positive	40	36	29

Source: www.worldpublicopinion.org

US ignorance. Many US citizens have been reluctant to address the rise of anti-Americanism because of their staunch faith in the superiority of the US way of life and values. A majority view their government's actions in the world as beneficial.

One factor inhibiting US understanding is lack of information. US electronic and printed media outlets focus heavily on domestic news while relegating international news to a small proportion of the coverage, usually now concentrated on Iraq and the Middle East. CNN International is unavailable in North America, where it is replaced by another CNN station broadcasting primarily domestic news.

Support ebbs for 'war on terror'. Since September 11, most countries have moved away from support for a US-led war on terror:

- Large majorities believe the United States is acting in its own interests while ignoring the interests of its allies. Such views reflect widespread opposition to US unilateralism in world affairs. The Bush administration is perceived as over-reliant on hard power while ignoring soft power, whereas the EU is perceived as good at using soft power (see [UNITED STATES: 'Soft power' is crucial to US security - July 24, 2007](#)).
- The US Council on Foreign Relations' Task Force on Public Diplomacy has pointed to a perceived lack of US empathy for other people's pain and hardship (for example, US reluctance to intervene in Liberia's civil war), arrogance and self-indulgence. The EU is the world's largest bilateral aid donor, providing twice as much aid to poor countries as the United States.

INTERNATIONAL: Iraq takes toll on US global influence - p. 3 of 4

- In Turkey, which itself has undergone a long terrorist campaign waged by the nationalist Kurdistan Workers Party, a striking 77% now oppose US leadership on this issue, up from 56% in 2004. In other US allies, such as Canada, there is public opposition to NATO's intervention in Afghanistan and the country's part in it. Canada opposed the invasion of Iraq. In Spain, support is as low as 19%.
- Only two countries have supported the war on terror -- India and Russia. Russia initially strongly backed the United States, seeking an alliance based on a common struggle against terrorism, with President Vladimir Putin describing the Chechen conflict in such terms. US relations with Russia have deteriorated since, because of Russian opposition to the Iraqi invasion, Washington's unhappiness with what it regards as the deterioration of Russian democratic standards, and Moscow's concern over US bases in Central Asia.

Iraqi damage. Iraq has played a major role in mobilising anti-Americanism. In one survey, there were majorities in ten out of 14 countries supporting the view that Iraq had made the world a more dangerous place. Even in the United Kingdom, which has the second-largest military contingent in Iraq, 60% agree with that proposition.

Abuse of prisoners both in Iraq and at Guantanamo Bay has damaged the image of the United States. More European than US citizens have heard about incidents there, shaping their views. Brzezinski observes that the most powerful image of the United States is no longer the Statue of Liberty, but Guantanamo.

Terror tactics. Brzezinski criticises the semi-religious manner in which the war on terror has been portrayed by the Bush administration. This has ignored the political dimension behind all terrorist activity. Middle Eastern terrorism, he believes, is shaped by US support for Israel, treatment of Palestinians and the injection of US military power into the region.

A war on terror has two goals: military destruction of the terrorists and political efforts to remove the conditions that brought them about, Brzezinski argues. The Bush administration, polls show, is perceived as focusing too much on the former goal while ignoring the latter.

NATO's image. Support for NATO has declined in parallel with the fall in the US image -- dramatically so in Poland and Turkey, to below 50%. Poland supported the invasion of Iraq and headed one of its four military zones. Turkey opposed the invasion, fearing it would lead to an independent Kurdish state in Iraq's north.

Many countries see NATO as a US-dominated organisation. Like the anti-nuclear campaigners of the 1980s, they conflate NATO with US military power. In Ukraine, one of only two CIS countries that seeks NATO membership (the other being Georgia), support for this step has declined from 33% in the 1990s to below 20%. A large majority of Ukrainians believed that the invasion of Iraq was a NATO military operation.

EU-US common attitudes. Although EU members remain critical of Bush and US policies, their attitudes on key international questions are not dissimilar to those of the US public:

- US and European residents hold similar views on the importance of the threat from terrorism (79% and 66% respectively) and Islamic fundamentalism (58% and 52%).
- The election of Hamas in Palestine is seen negatively by 50% of US citizens, 71% of Germans and 69% of French people -- these countries have large Muslim populations. However, Muslim countries regard Hamas positively.
- Only 38% of European and 35% of US citizens would accept a nuclear Iran; 37% and 45% respectively would use force to stop it acquiring nuclear weapons. Large majorities in the EU, United States and Russia oppose a nuclear Iran, whereas equally large majorities in Muslim countries support it.
- Only on China and the environment, do US and European publics diverge: Europeans see the threat from China as economic; US citizens see it as military.

The United States and China, the world's two largest producers of greenhouse gases, do not see global warming as a threat; Europeans do. World opinion perceives the United States as undermining such international agreements as Kyoto, and such institutions as the International Criminal Court.

Historical and contemporary roots. The revival of widespread anti-Americanism is reminiscent of its last appearance in the 1980s. The different European views of the United States on the eve of the invasion of Iraq have their roots in the political turmoil of the late 1960s, the anti-Americanism of West European protestors and the anti-Sovietism (and pro-Americanism) of East Europeans:

INTERNATIONAL: Iraq takes toll on US global influence - p. 4 of 4

- In Western Europe, anti-nuclear protestors mobilised against the deployment of new nuclear weapons.
- East Europeans saw the United States as a force for good and now give it greater credit for their liberation from communism than they award the EU or Western Europe.

The EU has nothing to compare with the many US pro-democracy foundations, such as the National Endowment for Democracy opened in 1983 by President Ronald Reagan. Such campaigning institutions as the US-funded Radio Free Europe are still remembered. Warsaw has a statue to Reagan.

Odd alliances. As in the 1980s, contemporary anti-Americanism unites strange bedfellows -- from the old-style left, campaigners against globalisation and anti-war and disarmament movements, to far-right populist nationalists and Islamists. Anti-Americanism has moved from being a marginal phenomenon, as it had become in the 1990s, to the mainstream, acquiring access to the media.

The Stop the War Coalition in the United Kingdom was founded by the fringe Socialist Workers Party and the Muslim Association of Britain, an organisation with extremist affiliations (see [UK/INTERNATIONAL: Terrorism needs community response - March 13, 2007](#)). It has been able to mobilise large protest demonstrations.

The left's alliance with Muslim organisations, which are commonplace in the United Kingdom, has been criticised by dissident Marxists and Muslims as ignoring Islam's treatment of homosexuals and women. Similar criticism emerged in the 1980s of the left's willingness to focus on the United States and ignore the Soviet Union's human rights record.

Likely repercussions. The latest wave of anti-Americanism has a number of likely consequences:

- **Turkey.** It may reorient this US ally away from the United States, NATO and the EU, and towards Iran and the Middle East.
- **Middle East.** The already widespread perception is increasing that the United States is biased and far too pro-Israeli.
- **EU foreign and security policy.** Support is likely to rise within the EU for a foreign policy and a military that are independent of the United States and NATO (see [EUROPEAN UNION: Key body shapes foreign agenda - August 10, 2007](#)).
- **NATO.** Public support for NATO is ebbing as it transforms itself from a military to a security organisation. Leftist members of ruling coalitions, such as Romano Prodi's administration in Italy, have blocked plans for the expansion of US bases and opposed Italy's participation in Afghanistan. Bush's goal of bringing Ukraine into NATO has been undermined by the US-led invasion of Iraq.
- **Democracy promotion.** The invasion of Iraq has undermined the credibility of US democracy promotion programmes. After the failure to find weapons of mass destruction, the United States and United Kingdom described the invasion as bringing democracy to Iraq, in turn having a domino effect of democratisation in the wider Middle East.

CONCLUSION: Anti-Americanism has ebbed and flowed in the past. The current wave has arisen in reaction to the perceived and actual policies of the Bush administration and the invasion of Iraq. In the 1980s and again today, anti-Americanism became mainstream. In the 1990s, anti-Americanism was marginalised, and this is likely to happen again, with the arrival in office of a new US president and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq.

Keywords: INT, EU, Iraq, Middle East, NATO, United States, Afghanistan, Africa, Canada, China, France, Germany, Iran, Israel, Palestinians, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, international relations, politics, foreign policy, invasion, military, nuclear weapons, security, terrorism, war, economy, industry, aid, environment, human rights, integration, international law, media, religion

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