

Europe and the world after 9/11

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The European countries expressed their solidarity with the United States as a result of terrorist acts caused in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 but the manner in which Washington is dealing with the issues of Iraq, Palestine and North Korea tend to create a wedge between Europe and America." This is what Dr Armand Classe, Director, Luxembourg Center for European and International Studies said at a seminar on January 10 under the Programme on Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi. Dr Armand who is on a research visit to Pakistan in his presentation severely criticised the manner in which the United States has undermined the European criticism to the policies pursued by the Bush administration in forcing the regimes of North Korea and Iraq to quit and the unequivocal support given by America to Israel in dealing with the Palestinian uprising.

Europe's main predicament, according to Dr Armand, is how to stop Washington in imposing its policies on the world which is heavily polarised and complicated since the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1991. If the European Union has emerged as a major economic giant, its security and political power to provide an alternate to the America led unipolar world is quite limited. It is true that Germany, France, Italy and to some extent Britain oppose the Bush administration's rhetoric of regime change in Iraq and North Korea yet they are unable to use their influence on America to stop pursuing policies which can cause more instability and insecurity in the world today. In most cases, the European response to the events after September 11 is incoherent and lacks clarity.

According to January 4 issue of London *Economist*, three separate studies conducted by the German Marshall Fund, Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and Pew Research Center showed recent undercurrents in Euro-US relations on issues ranging from the level of support present in Europe for American policies, the wave of anti-Americanism and Washington's stance on regime change. According to these studies, in 2002, 61% of Germans, 63% of the French and 75% of Britons said they have a favourable view of the United States. However, in the recent past, the image of America in Europe has seen a downward trend because the pro-American share of the population has fallen since the year 2000 by between four and 17 points in every West European country. According to the Pew study, between two-thirds and three quarters of Europeans support the US-led war on terror and between two-thirds and four-fifths called Iraq a serious threat. Interestingly, majority of Europeans still admire American science, technology and popular culture but at the same time they dislike the arrogance of American power particularly the policies pursued by the Bush administration in critical areas of the world.

The paradoxical nature of US-European relations could be gauged from the fact that since the terrorist event of September 11 the level of solidarity which existed is gradually being replaced by doubt, suspicion and frustration. That is the reason why Robert Kagan of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said, "It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common



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view of the world Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus." If Kagan's observation is true then the oddness in US-Euro relations should affect transatlantic alliance particularly the one related to NATO. But, despite the ostensible rift in US-Europe relations on dealing with various critical issues, there is no sign of an open rupture in their alliance. The reason why such an alliance is still intact is two fold. First, both need each other for strategic reasons. For long, Washington has been involved as a buffer in Europe and France and Germany, who oppose America's policy of regime change, cannot follow an open anti-American approach because of structural contradictions within Europe. American role, despite being criticised by many European countries, has been accepted as a *fait accompli* because if the United States withdraws its security role from Europe, the vacuum created will unleash a new security challenge. Because of this reason, NATO is still intact and has not been disbanded despite the termination of the Warsaw Pact. Second, Europeans are aware of the fact that till the time the United States is a pre-eminent global power they don't have any scope. Same was the situation during the colonial age when European imperialist powers were shaping global trends and the United States as a nascent power had no effective role.

After the expansion of European Union, it has been argued that an alliance between Europe, Russia, China and Japan can provide an alternate to the US led global order. But, one is also aware of the fact that all the four are also mindful of the threat which exists particularly after 9/11 in the shape of rogue states and terrorist groups. The manner in which the world has witnessed the rise of unwarranted use of force in the shape of terrorism proves the need to have better cooperation and interaction between America on the one hand and Russia, Europe, Japan and China on the other. After all, Washington despite its arrogance and unilateralism is a strong ally against those forces who want to challenge the Western way of life and assert Islamic forces against the status quo. Even China and Russia will prefer Washington over extremist religious groups.

Four major contradictions in US-Euro perceptions exist on various critical issues. First, on the question of Iraq and the Bush administration's obsession to use force to change the regime of Saddam Hussain there exists a clear wedge between Washington and its European allies. Even the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was supportive of Washington's Iraq policy, is advising America that it should be careful while pursuing a deadly option of regime change. Addressing a foreign policy speech the British Prime Minister warned the US President George Bush to listen back to the international community's fears over Iraq and other global concerns or risk pent-up feelings of injustice and alienation pushing mainstream world opinion into the anti-US corner. Blair's warning to Presi-

dent Bush shows how concerned the European leadership is about the ramifications of irrational American handling of its conflict with Iraq. Second, on the question of Palestine and the excessive use of force by Israel against Palestinians, particularly in the year 2002, European countries have followed a totally different position. While condemning Israel and the suicide bombers, the European Union has not supported the manner in which the regime of Ariel Sharon has destroyed the peace process. On that issue also perceptions of the United States and Europe sharply differ because the latter sees a grave threat to international peace if Israel is allowed to continue with the "killing process" in Palestine. Third, on the question of North Korea and the charges made by the United States of its nuclear weapon's programme, Europe has a different perception than Washington. For Europe, instead of further escalating conflict with a country which has a capability to cause maximum damage to the North-East Asia like South Korea and Japan, the United States should try to exercise restraint. Moreover, for Europe it is strange that in case of Iraq, the Bush administration is desperate to change the regime of Saddam Hussain while for North Korea it argues for negotiations and in the failure of that option regime change. With so many fronts, which have been opened by the second Bush administration after September 11, Europeans are very concerned if the US policy of active confrontation with "Axis of Evil" states backfires and plunges the world in serious instability. It is yet to be seen to what extent Washington is receptive to the concerns of Europe and what methodology it has formulated to accommodate the views and suggestions of its Atlantic allies.

Finally, on the question of Afghanistan and the US-led war on terrorism, America and Europe differ on many points. As the British Prime Minister Tony Blair has warned that if the policies of the Bush administration are not changed, the United States will be on the one side and the rest of the world will be on the other side. In that scenario, rogue states and terrorist groups will take advantage and create serious instability. In Afghanistan, the United States, although a major power to launch military operations against the remnants of al-Qaeda is being supported by its European allies. But in that country also, if things reach a critical stage because of the rise of extremist Islamic groups the result could be disastrous not only for the concerned region but also for the entire world.

Things in Europe after September 11 have also taken a different shape. As remarked by Dr Armand Classe, one can see a lot of anti-Muslim bias in Europe, particularly in France and Germany. Some racist elements in Europe have also taken advantage of the US war against terrorism after September 11 by targeting Muslims so as to create insecurity and fear. Let's hope Europe doesn't follow the example of humiliation created by the US Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) requiring visitors primarily from the Muslim countries to go for fingerprints and registration. One only expects Europe to provide a viable, pragmatic and better leadership to the world so that's the forces of intolerance and insanity who have got a new lease of life after the events of September 11 are neutralised.