

# Comparing EU and U.S. Foreign Policies after 9/11

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Photos by Lary Downing/Reuters

**Left:** The U.S. national security team. **Right:** Colin Powell and Javier Solana. Friends forever?

After September 11, the U.S. government cautioned us that the war against terrorism would be long, without respite and that it would use all means at its disposal; and that is how it has been up until now. The U.S. war has begun a new phase characterized by increasing unilateralism, the result of which has been the irritation of its European allies and the weakening of the international coalition against terrorism.

After the events of 9/11, the U.S. perception of the European Union as a single, unified actor seems to have deepened. This is indicated in the constant communication

between U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and Javier Solana, high representative for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Solana has congratulated himself that Powell knew what number to dial when he wanted to call Europe, paraphrasing Henry Kissinger's famous question.

Solana and Powell have developed a close relationship since last autumn's crisis. In the beginning, the Europeans maintained a united front expressing their solidarity with the United States in its fight against terrorism. At the same time the Americans have seen how useful European diplomacy can be. Tony Blair and his foreign minister, Jack Straw, worked intensely to reinforce the international coalition in support of the United States. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and his foreign minister, Joschka Fis-

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cher, also carried out resolute diplomatic activities, especially by organizing the November 27 meeting of Afghan leaders in Bonn that resulted in the naming of the interim government.

However, with the passing months, tensions have arisen between the European Union and the United States, which seems to be giving in to the overwhelming temptation to extend the war to other regions. In his State of the Union address January 29, President Bush mentioned the possibility of a fight against what he called the “Axis of Evil” (North Korea, Iran and Iraq). Though this rhetoric is more for domestic consumption, the message is also directed at his Western allies, the Europeans, indicating the kind of behavior expected, giving them the option of participating by following this line or facing down more U.S. unilateralism.<sup>1</sup>

A qualitative change in the U.S. and European Union international agendas can be observed over the last six months; they have gone from a honeymoon period to a new phase of friction in bilateral relations with regard to anti-terrorist cooperation. The main tensions have arisen about the following issues:

- a) The aims and means of the anti-terrorist war and the definition of the concept of security itself as well as its practical boundaries;
- b) Differences in how to deal with the Middle East problem;
- c) Migratory policies and human rights.

President Bush’s decision to point a finger at Irak, Iran and North Korea as the “Axis of Evil” is the result of the weighing of possible candidates for future military objectives in a broader

war, including countries like Somalia, Indonesia, Philippines and Egypt, countries with presumed terrorist networks, some of them linked to Al Qaeda. The selection of the countries in the “Axis of Evil” has put Europe in a difficult position. On the one hand, pursuing international objectives in the Washington mode, particularly with regard to Irak and Iran, would contradict the kind of very “European” policies based on negotiation, engagement and development, a policy that also includes the establishment of trade relations. On the other hand, refusing to follow the U.S. lead would mean that Europe would have to accept growing unilateralism and run the risk of fracturing

the international coalition and even threatening relations with the Americans.<sup>2</sup> In the end, the element of commitment for both parties could be geopolitical interest and concern for energy resources in areas like the Middle East, given that U.S. unilateralism could lead to its being the only one to exploit oil resources in the area. These are resources Europe depends on greatly, and therefore it cannot allow ideological positions to come before its participation in geo-politically strategic regions.

The gap between the two regions widened during the annual conference on security in Munich in early February 2002, where European legislators and heads of security expressed their re-

servations about the Pentagon and Bush administration orientation. At that meeting, what could be called the “Rumsfeld Doctrine” began to emerge, proposing the creation of a stronger and more flexible U.S. fighting force capable of waging war in the twenty-first century, using any method within its grasp, without rules or ethical considerations, including pre-emptive strikes against any objective it picked.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the Europeans have expressed concern about the unprecedented increase in U.S. military technology spending. This means that in the near future, the United States could carry out military campaigns relegating the Europeans to mere observer status

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or, in the best of cases, being multinational peace-keeping forces. NATO General Secretary Lord Robertson’s comment is illustrative: he said that transatlantic solidarity could disappear if “the Americans do the cutting edge while the Europeans are stuck at the bleeding edge; if the Americans fight from the sky while the Europeans fight in the mud.”<sup>4</sup>

The discussion centers on the already marked differences about the way of conceiving security and defense measures. For a long time now, the European Union has maintained that the main way of defending itself is for countries considered potential trouble spots to achieve development, not

through the exercise of enormous military budgets. This principle has characterized the discussion about the National Missile Defense System, or space shield, and the validity of the ABM Treaty. The European Union considers that a reduction of weapons of mass destruction, together with development programs for countries in economic difficulties, would have a more positive impact on world peace. However, for some analysts, precisely the fact that the European Union lacks a high-impact military structure limits its being heard or taken seriously in Washington power circles.

Both the European Union and the United States have toughened up their immigration policies, at the same time that mistrust of racial and religious minorities, particularly Arabs and Muslims, has increased.

Despite this, even after September 11, education and health spending continue to be considered the priority in the European Union. That is why the military budget has been kept low, while in the United States, the attacks prompted a massive increase in military spending. The next U.S. defense budget will total U.S.\$379 billion, representing three percent of the gross domestic product. The U.S.\$49 billion hike given the Pentagon is more than the defense budget of most NATO members combined. Only France and Great Britain spend two percent of GDP on this item.<sup>5</sup>

Another element of friction has been the U.S. perception that countries like Iran, Irak, Libya or Cuba represent a potential danger. The European Union, for its part, perhaps with the excep-

tion of Great Britain, had tried to establish more harmonious relations with countries that they do not consider a serious threat to world peace. For that reason it tried to foster cooperation and economic-trade relations with their governments, while the United States insisted on considering them dangerous states, shoring up its policies of non-negotiation and sanctioning countries that decided to establish links with them.<sup>6</sup> The simple fact of Bush's declarations considering Iran, Irak and North Korea the "Axis of Evil" seems to indicate the heightening of the already existing tensions between the European

Union and the United States around this issue.

Based on certain recently emerging differences, many observers in the United Kingdom and the United States have expressed their concern about the possibility that the objective of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy is to create a counterweight to U.S. hegemony. While some politicians, particularly in France, perceive it as anti-American, other European leaders have never shared that view. This dual perception generates ambiguity and sometimes confusion in Washington. The case of the Middle East is an example of this.

Although the State Department knows perfectly well that European Union diplomacy could play an important role in attempts to facilitate

relations between Israel and Palestine, the U.S.'s open support for Israel makes it impossible to create the necessary bases for establishing a balanced dialogue for peace.

In effect, the two region's policies on this issue tend to be opposed: the European Union is the main source of financing for the Palestine authorities and in addition recognizes Yasser Arafat as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. In contrast, the most recent speeches by members of Bush's cabinet question whether Arafat is the ideal representative of the Palestinians and place the blame for the current wave of violence in Israel on the shoulders of the Palestinian Liberation Organization leader, excusing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for his confrontational policies.

On the other hand, both the European Union and the United States have toughened up their immigration policies, at the same time that mistrust of racial and religious minorities, particularly Arabs and Muslims, has increased among the populations of both regions. Talks about a migratory accord between the United States and Mexico, for example, were suspended to later be reopened with certain caution. On the European side, in addition to the intensification of border controls, an agreement was reached about the creation of a "European arrest warrant," which would take the place of the current system of extradition among member countries, a measure that would allow one nation to directly hand over individuals sought by judicial authorities in another.

Another reason for tension between the two regions is related to respect for human rights. While in theory both have similar positions, their application

differs: this means that certain practices, like the death penalty, the treatment of the Taliban prisoners in Guantánamo and U.S. refusal to recognize them as prisoners of war, etc., tend to create conflicts in the European-U.S. coalition. In addition, inaccuracies during the bombings and the irremediable civilian casualties or “collateral damage” concerns European civil society and cause more internal pressures that will lead to differences in this year of presidential elections in France and Germany.

Despite certain tensions between the two regions over the definition of the term “security,” as well as the

aims and means in the anti-terrorist fight, the differences could be resolved if the Europeans make concessions in order to protect geo-strategic interests, which would probably lead the United States to limit its unilateral policies. **MM**

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Just like the original name of the campaign, “Infinite Justice,” the term “Axis of Evil” has not been particularly fortunate and has increased frictions with the U.S.’s Western allies, as well as the rejection of the peoples it describes.

<sup>2</sup> Antony J. Blinken, “A Wake-Up Call to Friends to Be Hard on Rogues,” *International Herald Tribune*, 6 February 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Berkowitz, “Let Them Eat Guns,” *Working for Change*, 10 February 2002 ([www.workingforchange.com](http://www.workingforchange.com)).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Fitchett, “Pentagon in a League of Its Own,” *International Herald Tribune*, 4 February 2002.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> They did this through the application of extraterritorial laws like the Iran-Libya Sanction Act and the Helms-Burton Act.