

Europeans Oppose 'Axis of Evil' Line

by Rainer Apel

The conduct of the American delegation at the annual Munich Wehrkunde conference on international defense strategy (see *EIR*, Feb. 15, 2002), and President George Bush's "axis of evil" formulation in his State of the Union address, have provoked strong public denunciations from the European allies of the United States. Criticism has become particularly strong in the camp of traditionally pro-American politicians in Germany.

On Feb. 6, French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine used unusually harsh, undiplomatic language in an interview with the France Inter radio world news program. "Today we are threatened by a simplistic quality in U.S. policy that reduces all the problems of the world to the struggle against terrorism. This is not properly thought out," said Védrine. "We cannot reduce the world's problems to the fight against terrorism alone, although it is essential to fight terrorism." Furthermore, he said, this fight is being reduced to use of only military means. Although military means are necessary, "we must deal with the root causes, poverty, injustice, humiliation, and so on," he said.

Védrine also highlighted the trans-Atlantic policy differences over the handling of the Mideast. "Europeans have not let themselves be overawed in the last few weeks by the White House's position, which backed the very hard line of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. We think this is a mistake, a tragic, strategic mistake," he said. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who met with Védrine during the Feb. 8-9 European Union (EU) foreign ministers meeting in Caceres, Spain, stated support for his French colleague's criticism: "Talking about so-called 'axes of evil' is not the way we here in Europe approach things."

Christopher Patten, Britain's EU Commissioner for External Affairs, in an interview with the daily London *Guardian* published on Feb. 9, said that he was not speaking from an anti-American point of view, but rather, as a concerned "Americaphile." Patten said, "I think it is very dangerous when you start taking up absolutist positions and simplistic positions." Concerning President Bush's talk about the alleged "axis of evil," Patten said he thought "there is more rhetoric than substance to the policy. . . . I hope that America will demonstrate that it has not gone on a unilateralist drive." Europe must raise its voice against that, he said. "I do not

think that keeping quiet makes us good allies."

Patten said he found it "hard to believe that's a thought-through policy," and that it was "unhelpful." By contrast, the European approach of "constructive engagement" with the moderates in Iran and with North Korea—two of the "rogue" nations on Bush's list—was more likely to get positive results. Moreover, the Americans need to consult others, because they need allies, Patten said. "Gulliver can't go it alone, and I do not think it is helpful if we regard ourselves as so Lilliputian that we can't speak up and say it. . . . However mighty you are, even when you're the greatest superpower in the world, you cannot do it all on your own."

Patten also criticized the Bush Administration's obsession with military spending, and its opposition to substantial aid for development in the poor nations—which the Europeans argue is the main venue for crisis prevention, and a better way of dealing with instability, rather than letting things deteriorate and then intervening with force. "Smart bombs have their place, but smart development assistance seems to me even more significant," he said.

In an interview with the Feb. 12 German daily *Die Welt*, Foreign Minister Fischer again took on the "axis" issue: "The international coalition against terror does not provide any basis for conducting anything against anyone, especially not on one's own. All European foreign ministers see it that way. Therefore, the term 'axis of evil' does not help us further. Throwing Iran, North Korea, and Iraq all into one pot, where does that lead us?"

Fischer also said that while there is no doubt the United States is the leading power in the world, there can be no doubt either that "a world of 6 billion human beings does not want to be guided into a peaceful future even by the mightiest power, alone."

Iraq Dismemberment Would Have Fatal Consequences

Indicative of the changed attitude in Europe, especially in Germany, were remarks by Karl Lamers, a decidedly pro-American politician and longtime foreign policy spokesman of the Christian Democrats. In a Feb. 13 interview with the daily *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Lamers replied, when asked whether he could foretell the point at which a German Chancellor would have to draw a line against the U.S. President: "You cannot define that in theoretical terms, you have to know the concrete case. But if he did, he would have to do it together with the European friends." Lamers added, "For example, there is the case of Iraq, which cannot be viewed as isolated from the other conflict spots in the Middle East. Therefore, the Europeans were justified to state with great directness, that they oppose an attack on Iraq. That would be a wrong approach for many reasons. Because you do have to ask yourself: What happens with that country, afterward? The dismemberment of Iraq would have fatal consequences for the stability of the entire region."



French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine (left) and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. Their statements reflect a revulsion across Europe against the “axis of evil” policy.

A new round of criticism began on Feb. 18. In Germany, Fischer was quoted in issue No. 8 of *Der Spiegel* weekly: “No one has shown me any evidence yet that the terror of Osama bin Laden has anything to do with the regime of Saddam Hussein. . . . The international coalition against terrorism is not a blank check in and of itself for an invasion of some country, especially not single-handedly.” In the same issue, August Hanning, director of the German foreign intelligence agency BND, also said he has seen no hard evidence yet, of Iraqi links to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda.

Also on Feb. 18, Karsten Voigt, chief coordinator of U.S.-German contacts among policymakers, stressed in two radio interviews, with ZDF and Inforadio Berlin, that “so far, no evidence has been provided that Saddam Hussein is linked directly to terrorism.” There was a problem with certain armaments in Iraq, potentially having to do with weapons of mass extinction, but that should be monitored through tight UN controls. Voigt said that military strikes on Iraq were opposed not just by Europeans, but that there was also opposition in the United States (though he did not say from whom).

Guido Westerwelle, national party chairman of the Free Democrats, said in a Feb. 18 interview with the Hanover daily *Neue Presse*, that Europe must “show a united position” against U.S. plans for strikes on Iraq. “If the U.S. President proclaims, just like that, three states as targets of military strikes, this must meet the resistance of the Europeans, because going it alone would pose great threats to the NATO alliance.”

The ‘Arrogance of Power’

A particularly interesting aspect was addressed by former German Culture Minister Michael Naumann, in an editorial in the Feb. 18 *New York Times*. He warned that a war on Iraq

would be especially dangerous, because in the heavily armed, explosive Mideast, “too many guns are drawn, too many fingers are on the triggers, and some of them could be nuclear bombs.” Naumann added, “The United States might benefit from recalling the late Sen. J. William Fulbright’s diatribes against *arrogance of power*.”

On Feb. 19, Elmar Brok, a German Christian Democrat and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the European Parliament, in an interview with Berlin’s SFB station, said that he fears that the U.S. targeting of Iraq, is more than just talk. He said that if Iraq is attacked, the Arab coalition against terrorism might collapse, several moderate Arab regimes might be overthrown by Islamic fundamentalists, and in this way, the world would be thrown into a

“real Clash of Civilizations.” Brok added that, whereas the tone and style of Foreign Minister Fischer’s criticism of the Americans were “not well chosen,” in his view, the content of what Fischer had said is shared by Christian Democrats and others throughout Europe. Brok said that the Americans must be brought to understand that they cannot play the role of a “world order power” if they exclude any non-military instruments from that and only rely on military force. The Americans should be told that crisis-prevention is more crucial than intervention, he said.

In Moscow on Feb. 19, French Ambassador to Russia Claude Blanchemaison told a news conference that France and Russia share the same views on the “inadmissibility of a military strike on Iraq,” and especially so, if it proceeded without the official consultation of the UN Security Council. The ambassador said that Bush’s term, “axis of evil,” is negatively received in France, because of its immediate association with the alleged urgency of using military force to remove that “evil.” By contrast, the French are aware, Blanchemaison said, that there are many strictly economic reasons for problems in the world, which the French government thinks should be discussed by the EU, the United States, and Russia, and solved by joint economic and financial initiatives, rather than aggravated by military operations.

Former French Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn elaborated on the idea of economic initiatives, saying in interviews on French radio and television on Feb. 19, that what is most urgent, is a large-scale economic program for the Mideast and the entire Mediterranean region, something that resembles the late 1940s’ U.S. Marshall Plan for economic reconstruction of Europe after World War II. But this time, he implied, a similar program should be launched before a war begins.