

Standpoint... n°:6

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The following views reflect France's official position

...IRAQ/PERSIAN GULF

STATEMENTS MADE BY JEAN-DAVID LEVITTE, AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE TO THE UNITED STATES, WASHINGTON, JAN 21, 2003

In light of the debate that has developed, on the Hill and in the press, on the French position regarding Iraq in recent days, I would like to recall the long-standing commitment of France and French troops on the international stage, in particular in the Balkans. I base my statements not on opinion, but on facts.

1/ France is not shy about the use of force and has resorted to military means to uphold its values several times in the past decade. This was done alongside the United States, both within the framework of NATO and outside of it : When the Alliance intervened militarily, France was in the lead : In Bosnia, immediately after his election in May 1995, President Chirac decided, with the British Prime Minister, to create a Rapid Reaction Force. Made up of French, British and Dutch troops, this robust force was able to enforce UN policy in Bosnia with military muscle and pave the way for NATO's intervention and, eventually, the signature of the Dayton Agreements. Between 1991 and 1995, 70 French soldiers died and 600 were wounded in Bosnia to promote our common values. Today, the death toll in the Balkans for the French military stands close to 100. During Operation "Allied Force" in Kosovo in 1999, France contributed the most in terms of deployed aircraft and assets, as well as in the number of sorties flown, of all NATO Allies other than the United States. When the Alliance has kept the peace, France has also been in the lead. Today, France is the leading contributor of troops to NATO's peace-keeping missions. It has deployed 5,360 troops in the Balkans as of Feb.1, 2003, ahead of Italy, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom.

2/ France has stood shoulder to shoulder with the United States in the fight against the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

This was true for Operation "Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan. The « Charles De Gaulle » aircraft carrier group was sent to the area on its first operational deployment. Our Super-Etendard and Mirage-2000 precision-strike fighter jets provided close air support to coalition forces on the ground. Until the recent arrival of the European Participation Air force in Manas, we were the only ally that provided the U.S. with this type of support. A total of 5,500 French troops were deployed in OEF in the spring of 2002.

My country's commitment to peace in Afghanistan remains strong today, with more than 1,200 men and women still directly involved in the global war on terrorism. Some 500 French soldiers in the International Security and Assistance Force help ensure security in Kabul. France and the United States are the only two countries training the new Afghan National Army, which is key to Afghanistan's future.

I have focused mainly on military assets, but our close cooperation with U.S. intelligence and law enforcement is invaluable in the daily fight against Al Qaeda, and is hailed by U.S. officials.

Our solidarity does not date from the heinous attacks of September 11. You may not know that after the attack on the U.S.S. Cole, the French Air Force evacuated several of the critically injured U.S. servicemen. This offer was spontaneous, immediately implemented from Djibouti, and therefore timely enough to save several lives, according to our colleagues at the Pentagon.

In sum, my country does not hesitate to commit French troops abroad when necessary, and wherever necessary. One of the most recent examples of our active commitment on the international stage is Ivory Coast, where we have encouraged the parties to reach a democratic and peaceful agreement. 3,200 French troops, which have intervened at the invitation of the Ivoirian government, have saved many lives there, including those of American men, women and children. The Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense have thanked us for our assistance in rescuing Americans. We have no doubt that the U.S. would have done the same for us.

So, as recent history shows, President Chirac's commitment to strengthen France's defense and its contribution to peace should not be questioned. Under President Chirac, the French government has also committed to the largest defense spending increase in the last 70 years. This includes a more than 20 % increase in procurement between 2002 and 2008. This effort will enable France to enhance the interoperability of its forces with those of its friends and allies.

3/ Regarding Iraq, my country stood side by side with the United States during the Gulf War in 1991 with more than 10,000 troops and 100 combat aircraft.

As President Chirac reiterated in his interview with "Time" (February 24, 2003), we have no difference whatsoever with the United States over the goal of eliminating Saddam Hussein's programs of weapons of mass destruction. France strongly believes that Iraq must be disarmed. But we also think this must be first attempted through peaceful means. France has never excluded any option, including the use of force. It should remain, however, the last option. That is why we believe that the inspectors must be given the time and the capabilities that they need. Iraq, meanwhile, must cooperate actively.

Regarding our so-called "commercial ties" with Iraq, Iraq is in fact a minor trading partner. It accounts for 0.2 % of our exports and 0.3 % of our imports. Iraq ranks 9th among the countries that supply oil to us. France is the fourth-largest buyer of Iraqi oil, purchasing 8% of Iraqi oil exports, whereas the United States is the largest one, with 56% of Iraqi oil exports.

The United States and France have a longstanding and strong relationship. As you know, President Chirac is a personal friend of America, a country he has known for many years. Let us not forget the strength of our friendship, even though we might, as all true friends do, have our differences. I strongly believe we can have a frank but respectful dialogue over these issues.

INTERVIEW OF PRESIDENT JACQUES CHIRAC BY TIME MAGAZINE, PARIS –EXCERPTS- FEB 16, 2003

Q – But you seem willing to put the onus on inspectors to find arms rather than on Saddam to declare what he's got. Are there nuclear arms in Iraq?

I don't think so. Are there other weapons of mass destruction? That's probable. We have to find and destroy them. In its current situation, does Iraq –controlled and inspected as it is– pose a clear and present danger to the region? I don't believe so. Given that, I prefer to continue along the path laid out by the Security Council. Then we'll see.

Q – What evidence would justify war?

It's up to the inspectors to decide. We gave them our confidence. They were given a mission, and we trust them. If we have to give them greater means, we'll do so. It's up to them to come before the Security Council and say, "We won. It's over. There are no more weapons of mass destruction," or "It's impossible for us to fulfil our mission. We're coming up against Iraqi ill will and impediments." At that point, the Security Council would have to discuss this report and decide what to do. In that case, France would naturally exclude no option.

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INTERVIEW OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTER DOMINIQUE DE VILLEPIN, ON FRENCH TV PROGRAM "LE GRAND JURY RTL-LE MONDE-LCI", PARIS –EXCERPTS- FEB 16, 2003

Q – (...) Does NATO, this Atlantic alliance and thus this military treaty in which some profound disagreements are arising, still serve any purpose? (...)

It guarantees today the security of all the Europeans and creates a strategic link between the United States and Europe. And in this respect it's playing an essential role. What question has it been considering over the past few days? It's whether we were going to join in the military planning in the event of an attack against Turkey? To say the least, the question is premature. And we replied that we couldn't do battle in New York to get the international community to take the inspections process further and launch military planning preparations, there is here a question of consistency.

Q – Even defensive ones?

But at the moment the question isn't relevant. You can clearly see that today Turkey isn't being threatened. We have, and this must be stressed, indicated at bilateral level that, quite obviously, we were giving Turkey all possible guarantees, so there's no ambiguity vis-à-vis Turkey, no lack of solidarity vis-à-vis Turkey, things are perfectly clear. The question was whether we were going to get involved and today we are of the view that the question NATO is considering isn't relevant.(...)

More issues and more on these issues at :

www.ambafrance-us.org (French Embassy in Washington); www.diplomatie.gouv.fr (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

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