



Foreigners See U.S. as 'Greedy Bully'

WASHINGTON, Sept. 8

While the president was moving to address Congress's concerns about his foreign policy, his secretary of state was getting booed Wednesday at an international conference in Johannesburg, South Africa.

It may not be unusual for an American to be booed at an environmental conference these days, but it may be noteworthy that many of the countries attending the event are friends of the United States.

"I think a lot of people see a greedy bully," says Vuyo Mvoko, a journalist with SABC television in South Africa, "someone who is prepared to run roughshod over other people's interests."

It was a theme that was repeated over and over again when ABCNEWS consulted journalists around the world about the way the United States is perceived at the moment.

"The people in Germany, we accept that you are, in a way, stronger," said Peter Kloeppe of RTL television in Germany. "But what we don't accept is that you just come to conclusions and make decisions without ever putting into consideration what it might mean for other nations — like, for example, the Germans."

"Japanese people think the American people are a friendly people," said Hidetoshi Fujisawa of the Japanese television network NHK. "But these days, some are thinking of them as a little bit self-centered and not knowing much about what is happening outside of the United States."

In France, a poll published this week reported a rise in hostility to U.S. policies.

"They are too much interested in their own personal business," said Christian Malar, a senior foreign analyst for France 3 TV. "They're concerned only by their own personal interest, not caring enough about the interest or sharing interest with their own friendly countries and their own allies."

Going It Alone

As the United States debates going it almost alone against Iraq, the question of whether anti-U.S. views are on the rise is more than academic. State Department officials are sufficiently concerned about growing anti-American sentiment in Europe and Russia, as well as the Middle East, that they have invited a select group of scholars to address the topic at a private conference that started this past Thursday.

As ABCNEWS polled journalists from mainly friendly nations about those attitudes, some consistent themes emerged. Chief among them was concern, even resentment, over the Bush administration's apparent willingness to act without consulting the United States' friends — old ones or new ones.

"What is of most concern to Russians in American policy is the desire seen that U.S. always wants to have the American way, desire to always be on top, to be the only leader, actually to have partners not allowed to disagree," said Alexei Puhkov of Channel 3 in Russia. "This makes Russians nervous.

"The question of Iraq in Russian foreign policy is much more a question of Russian attitudes toward the United States," he added. "Will the United States once again take unilaterally the power to decide which country is a good country and which country is a bad country? Will the United States take another time the right to decide whether to start a war against a sovereign state or not?"

"We are very much worried about the overall attitude of the American foreign policy," said Fujisawa, the Japanese journalist. "We think it to be unilateral, too unilateral and we have a wariness that the American foreign policy is becoming too unilateral to follow."

Nearly all of the journalists made a point of making a distinction between negative views about American policies and the enduring affection and admiration for the American people and their way of life — which perhaps may be some comfort to the Bush administration as it debates how best to defend that way of life.

Anger on Environment

There were other concerns apart from Iraq, such as the perceived lack of interest in global issues given higher priority by allies, like the environment. For example, Powell was heckled in Johannesburg in part because some delegates were angry at President Bush's absence from the event, a conference on the environment and development.

"What we have seen for the last year is a strong environmental movement," said Kloeppe, the German journalist. "We have the feeling America should really be more conscious about the global environment, and not just always say, 'It's our economy that's first.' I think what a lot of Germans say is 'Let's think about our global environment because it's something that belongs to all of us.'"

The Bush administration's strong pro-Israel stance also is an irritant in some countries, like France, that have stronger ties in the Arab world or stronger Arab constituencies.

"They are scared that if the United States has a too much pro-Israeli attitude that we will never get peace in the Middle East," said Malar, the French media analyst. "They would like United States [to have] which involvement is necessary for all conflict in the world to be dealt with, but they wish that this involvement could be more balanced."

Sole Superpower

And some so-called anti-American feeling, these correspondents said, was really just acknowledgement that the fate of small nations is so inextricably bound to desires of the United States, the world's sole superpower and largest economy.

"We know that when the U.S. sneezes we get pneumonia," said Félix de Bedout of UniNoticias television in Colombia.

"I think that many Israelis will tell you that the decisions, the critical decisions concerning what's happening here, are not taken in the prime minister's office in Jerusalem, but in the Oval Office in the White House in Washington," said Emmanuel Rosen, diplomatic affairs correspondent for Channel 2 in Israel. "And that the most important meetings that the ... Israeli prime minister has are not with his foreign minister or minister of defense or chief of staff, but with the president of the United States."

But some argue the United States should pay attention to the world's interests, not just its own.

"If you look again at how America relates to certain leaders and certain dictators, it kisses some but spits at others," said Mvoko, the South African. "Now, those are some of the problems that people would like to see America dealing with more thoroughly and listening to what the rest of the world really has to say."