

INFLUENCING AMERICAN ELECTIONS

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What is going on with respect to European polls showing widespread dissatisfaction with President Bush's foreign and domestic policies and pronouncements (70-80% unfavorable)? Two questions beg answers: First, what are the policies and programs that so distress Europeans? And second, is there a hidden agenda in giving the results widespread coverage in Europe and the United States?

As a lead-in to the first question, remember that President Bush is a Republican with a generally conservative agenda while Europe's leaders are socialists and comfortable with much Marxist economic thinking and values. And decidedly more comfortable with a Democrat rather than a Republican administration.

Some generally stated policies of the Bush administration which have disquieted European leaders include:

- *Limited or no deployment of U.S. armed forces in regional conflicts where America's national interest is non-existent or, at best, marginal. In other words, America will no longer act as the world's policeman.
- *When governments run surpluses, some or all should be returned to taxpayers.
- *Increased defense spending when threats to national security are identified and clear without regard to world opinion.
- *Defending America's widely accepted customs and laws that are at odds with norms in Europe. e.g. right to work laws, the death penalty in capital cases.
- *Decreasing taxes across the board by decreasing government spending.
- *Stating in clear language that America's European allies should shoulder a greater share of NATO's budget.
- *Criticizing official UN pronouncements and reports which routinely condemn the United States with little or no basis in fact while at the same time ignoring documented human rights violations in other countries.
- *Giving America's national interests equal billing with so-called global interests.

Specific Bush administration actions which have displeased European leaders include:

- *Going forward with an anti-ballistic missile defense system.
- *Withdrawing support of the Kyoto Treaty whose provisions would penalize American industry.

*Favoring a balanced approach to environmental issues.

*Announcing plans to downsize American forces in worldwide peacekeeping operations.

*Insisting that UN sanctions against Iraq be kept in place until Iraq's military threat to its neighbors ends.

And all of the above in unequivocal, to the point, language.

Before discussing the second question of what might be behind the polls and unusually widespread coverage given to them, it is important to recognize that the United States, as the world's only military and economic superpower, is fair game with respect to influencing its electoral processes. This is nothing new. Attempts to influence American foreign policy go back a long way. Nor are foreign governments alone in attempting to manipulate election results outside their own national boundaries. America's CIA, over many years, interfered with elections in a number of foreign countries.

The American elections of 2000 were no exceptions to past history. The People's Republic of China attempted to influence the outcome by contributing funds to the Democrat Party whose policies were more pro-China than those of the Republican Party. It was a clumsy attempt and failed. European leaders, on the other hand, were content to subtly make known their preferences for a Democrat administration. But if the Chinese government was unhappy with the election result, Europe's socialist leaders were hardly thrilled. A close presidential contest and an almost evenly divided legislative branch, however, offered Europe's leaders hope. The hope was for a Democrat-controlled House and Senate in 2003 and a president in 2005 more receptive to European advice with respect to America's foreign and social policies. The question was how to achieve this end without being accused of directly interfering in an American election? One thing going for them is that in socialist states the media is more dependent on government good will than are media operating in a free enterprise environment.

The technique that seems to be emerging is ingenious but simple. First, have high placed government officials consistently and constantly criticize those Bush policies that they find offensive. Second, reasonably expect Europe's media, that generally tilts to the left, to give widespread dissemination to the criticism. Third, commission or encourage opinion polls in which Europeans are asked to evaluate objectionable Bush policies. Fourth, publish the expected favorable results in the European press, and finally, trust America's liberal press to give the results national coverage in the United States.

Not a bad technique all in all. It avoids covert CIA-type operations; avoids the risk of covert financial support being exposed, and has a holier than thou fallback position, i.e., that Europe's leaders have every right to express their opinions about an American president's policies to their own people on their own turf.