L'APRÈS 9/11 : L'OPINION PUBLIQUE AUX ÉTATS-UNIS

et dans le reste du monde

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SUITE AUX ATTAQUES TERRORISTES DU 11 SEPTEMBRE 2001, LA SUPER-PUISSANCE MONDIALE S'EST RETROUVÉE DANS UNE SITUATION DE VULNÉRABILITÉ. L'APPUI INTERNATIONAL DES ACTIONS ENTREPRISES PAR LES ÉTATS-UNIS EN RÉPONSE AUX ATTAQUES TERRORISTES FUT CONSIDÉRÉ VITAL. CONSÉQUEMMENT, LES ÉTATS-UNIS SONT APPARU PARTICULIÈREMENT SOUCIEUX DES OPINIONS D'AILLEURS CONCERNANT LES RAISONS D'AGIR DE CEUX QUI ONT PERPÉTRÉ CES ACTES HAINEUX ET DU NIVEAU DE SUPPORT POUR DES ACTIONS MILITAIRES (OU AUTRE) QUE LES ÉTATS-UNIS AVAIENT L'INTENTION D'ENTREPRENDRE AFIN DE CONTRER LA MENACE TERRORISTE. LES AMÉRICAINS VOULAIENT SAVOIR QUI LES APPUYAIENT DANS CES CIRCONSTANCES DIFFICILES. EN EFFET, CES ÉVÉNEMENTS TRAGIQUES ONT DONNÉ LIEU À D'IMPORTANTS CHANGEMENTS D'OPINION PUBLIQUE DANS DE NOMBREUSES RÉGIONS DU GLOBE PUISQUE PLUSIEURS PAYS PROFITÈRENT DE CETTE ÉPISODE AFIN D'ÉVALUER LEUR RELATION AVEC LES ÉTATS-UNIS. LES GOUVERNEMENTS DE DIVERS PAYS ONT CONSULTÉ LEURS CITOYENS AFIN DE DÉTERMINER LE NIVEAU D'APPUI POLITIQUE ET LE DEGRÉ DE SOUTIEN DES ACTIONS ENTREPRISE PAR LES ÉTATS-UNIS. EN PLUS DES QUESTIONS DE CONFIANCE POLITIQUE, LES INQUIÉTUDES LIÉES AUX QUESTIONS DE SÉCURITÉ ET AU TERRORISME DEVINRENT UNE SOURCE D'INTÉRÊT GRANDISSANTE POUR LES SONDEURS.

CONFIDENCE IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Following September 11, Americans rallied around President George W. Bush and the level of confidence in his leadership has remained very high since that time. The President's handling of the crisis was also widely supported by the American population. Americans, and for that matter many Canadians, recall the presence of British Prime Minister Tony Blair during Bush's first major address to the population in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. Initially, Blair too benefited from an increase in popularity as some 83% of British respondents supported the Prime Minister's handling of the response to the terrorist attacks. By mid-October, Blair's approval dropped by slightly over ten points to 72%. For his part, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien had an approval rating of 74% for his handling of the issues related to the terrorist attacks in the weeks after September 11.

Some two-thirds of Canadians felt that government support of American policies struck the right balance while one quarter felt that the federal government was not supportive enough of the United States.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT OF AMERICAN POLICIES IN WAR ON TERRORISM

	Too Supportive	*About Right*	*Not supportive enough*
Canada	10%	65	23
France	11	69	16
Germany	20	69	8
Italy	27	56	13
Great Britain	35	55	10

Sources: Focus Environics, October 2001,
Pew Research Center, October 2001

Canadians remember the failure on the President's part to mention Canada amongst the countries to which he extended appreciation on behalf of the United States (something which he later attempted to correct). In the wake of the September 11 attacks, Blair's presence in Washington and his unequivocal commitment of British support for the United States resulted in considerable appreciation from the American population. According to British analyst Robert Worcester, in the first few days following the events of September 11 there was an outpouring of solidarity in his country. In France the level of sympathy for the United States rose to new heights as reflected in a poll in early November 2001 that had some 65% of French respondents sympathetic, compared to some 41% who felt that way in May 2000. As to Canada, some 78% of the population expressed a favorable view of our southern neighbor.

ALLIES AND ALLIANCES

Since the attacks, more Americans have come to support an active U.S. leadership role on the international front. According to American foreign policy analyst Kenneth Pollack, "... a growing proportion of the public has become more sensitive to the need for the United States to cooperate and listen to its allies, especially with regard to the international response to the threat of terrorism." In October 2001 – by a 2-1 margin (59% to 30%) – Americans felt that they should take into account the interests of their allies with regard to the war on terrorism as opposed to basing decisions mostly on U.S. national interests (this represented an 11 point jump over the opinion given by Americans when the same question was asked just prior to September 11).

LES ACTIONS PARLENT PLUS FORT QUE LES MOTS

Lorsqu'il fut question de l'effort de guerre en Afghanistan, le degré de la sensibilité américaine envers les opinions d'ailleurs a atteint ses limites. Il est évident que les Américains ont recherché le support de leurs alliés dans l'effort militaire en Afghanistan. La période post- 11 septembre est ainsi devenue une occasion pour les alliés de se situer face aux Américains. Quelques trois quarts des répondants britanniques, canadiens et français ont appuyé l'effort militaire des États-Unis afin de combattre le terrorisme. D'après Pew Research, en Italie (66%) et en Allemagne (53%) le pourcentage de la population prêt à participer dans l'effort militaire était plus bas. En ce qui concerne les opérations militaires des É.-U., tandis qu'une majorité des Japonais (59%) et des Sud-Coréens appuient de telles interventions, seulement 36% des répondants chinois furent d'accord avec la réaction américaine.

Expressions of friendship for the United States did not imply unequivocal support for all actions taken by that country, and both in Europe and Canada important numbers of citizens wanted to take a closer look at the root causes of the attacks. Some 48% of Canadians believe that efforts should be focused on addressing the root causes of terrorism, such as the despair and poverty of displaced peoples around the globe. Similar sentiments were expressed in many European countries.

Indeed a 2001 Pew Research Center survey revealed that Americans have failed to convince the European public that the war on terrorism was *their* War. Pollack writes that:

> *on the other side of the Atlantic the view appears to be that September 11th changed the United States but not the world, and Washington is waging a war on terrorism for its own good, and not necessarily for the good of the Atlantic Alliance ... the view from the old world seems to be that this is an American war on American enemies, not a universal struggle against evil, as the White House likes to define it.*

AXIS OF EVIL

The characterization by President Bush of the 'axis of evil' (Iran, Iraq, North Korea) was greeted with mixed enthusiasm in various parts of the world. About three-quarters of Americans think the statement was correct and half agree that he should have stated it publicly (some 25% that share this point of view do not think he should have said it publicly). Approximately two-thirds of Western European respondents disapprove of the Axis of Evil rhetoric with some three-quarters expressing such sentiment in Germany and 55% in Great Britain. Within Canada some 53% approve of Bush's statement on the axis of evil although there appears to be a big gap in opinion on this matter based on mother tongue with 37% of English-speaking Canadians disapproving Bush's declaration and 69% of French-speaking Canadians expressing such disap-

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proval. In effect while opinion on such discourse amongst English-Canadians is closer to that of the American population, opinions given by francophones are closer to the views expressed by Western European respondents.

LA PEUR DU TERRORISME

En octobre 2001, quelques 71% des Américains étaient de l'avis qu'une autre attaque majeure était soit très ou quelque peu probable, (73% en février 2002). L'imminence d'une autre attaque terroriste était une opinion partagée par 79% des répondants en France. Entre octobre 2001 et janvier 2002, le groupe Environics observa une importante baisse du pourcentage des Canadiens qui craignaient une autre attaque terroriste. Au début de cette période une majorité (55%) pensait qu'une telle attaque était probable tandis qu'à la fin de cette même période se pourcentage était de 44%. D'après Michael Marzolini de Pollara (le groupe de sondage du parti Libéral), les Canadiens se sont

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remis du choc causé par les attaques du 11 septembre et ne craignent plus une attaque terroriste au Canada. En juillet 2002, 77% des Canadiens questionnés ont déclaré qu'ils ne croyaient pas qu'une attaque terroriste pourrait avoir lieu au Canada. Seulement 14% ont affirmé être de l'opinion qu'une attaque sur le sol canadien était probable. De plus, contrairement aux Américains qui démontre un appétit beaucoup plus prononcé pour des actions fortes et décisives et une attitude semblable à celle des Canadiens à la fin du mois de novembre, Marzolini observe une baisse significative de l'inquiétude au sujet du terrorisme parmi les Canadiens.

SENTIMENTS MUTUELS

Le support et la sympathie du Canada pour les États-Unis sont similaires à ceux de la Grande-Bretagne. En fait, les États-Unis ont des sentiments positifs pour les deux nations qui sont placées au premier rang de leurs alliés principaux. En février 2002, quelques 93% des Américains avaient une opinion favorable du Canada, 90% étendaient cette opinion à la Grande-Bretagne, suivi de l'Allemagne avec 83% et la de France avec 79% de la population américaine la percevant de manière favorable.

On balance, the view that residents of Saudi Arabia have of the United States is not a positive one. Nearly half (49%) describe their view of the Unites States as "very unfavorable", and almost two-thirds (64%) say their view of the United States is either mostly or very unfavorable. The United States is typically seen as a country that pursues biased diplomatic policies (65%), is saddled with a high crime rate (65%), and is characterized by aggressive (62%), conceited (61%), ruthless (54%), and arrogant (54%) behaviour. Roughly two-fifths (43%) also see the United States as a country that is easily provoked. Americans tend to view Saudi Arabia amongst its least favored nations, with some two-thirds expressing either a very or mostly unfavorable view of that country.

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Since September 11, Americans have grown more interested in world opinion and they tend to view things in a polarized way. Shades of gray are more commonly seen elsewhere. America is viewed with disdain by some countries and ambivalence by others, including some of its allies. It remains important both for the United States and its allies to identify those values and interests transcending that which is seen as exclusive to the national interest.

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