

May 12, 1998

M-74-98

## In Time of Crisis, Britons and Germans Would Count on U.S. Most

*The French, however, would turn more to Germany*

*Recent USIA surveys in Britain, France, and Germany show that publics in these countries continue to appreciate the European alliance with the U.S. in the face of new security challenges. But many west Europeans remain uneasy with the extent of American influence over their countries.*

Only in France is there majority support for a reduced American role in NATO.

- West Europeans do not tend to see an expanded security role for the EU and continued support for NATO as mutually exclusive options.

### KEY FINDINGS

- West Europeans remain generally positive toward the United States and its leadership role in world affairs. However, they continue to express resentment over the extent of American influence.
- Half or more in Britain, France and Germany believe that NATO is still essential to their country's security.
- Publics in Britain, France and Germany are generally satisfied with how European countries and the U.S. share responsibility for European security.

### U.S. Ties Still Seen As Important

As found in past surveys, majorities express a generally favorable view of the United States (Britain 76%; France 59%; Germany 81%). Moreover, two-thirds or more in Britain (68%), France (68%) and Germany (72%) believe that their country's ties with the United States are just as important now as they were during the Cold War. In both Britain and Germany, about one in ten each say the relationship is more important and about the same percentage say it is less important; in France, 20 percent say it is less important.

Perceptions of the importance of the U.S. have not shifted dramatically in Britain or Germany since 1993, though the French public has become more appreciative of its U.S. ties. In 1993, fully

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*This report is based on data from face-to-face interviews conducted in early- to mid-April 1998 with 1,029 adults (age 18 or older) in Britain, 1,148 in Germany, and 1,012 in France. The research firms IRB in London, Louis Harris in Paris, and INRA in Moelln conducted the interviews for USIA*

a third in France (35%) said that U.S. ties were less important and less than half (48%) said that they were equally important.

**Britons, Germans Would Count Most on U.S.**

Asked which country “we could count on most” during a time of crisis, Britons (82%) and Germans (56%) are far more likely to name the United States than name a European ally. Many say they “don’t know” (Britain 12%; Germany 22%). In France, more say they would count on Germany (44%) than either the U.S. (31%) or Britain (14%), and few Britons (3%) or Germans (16%) name France.

**Many Consider U.S. Influence Excessive**

Beneath this fairly broad consensus that their ties to the United States remain important, many west Europeans express concern about the extent of American influence on their countries. Majorities think “the U.S. has too much influence over our country’s affairs” (Britain 67%; France 74%; Germany 54%), and two-thirds in France (68%) and half in Britain (50%) think that their country is not treated as an equal partner by the U.S. in affairs that concern them both (27% and 39%, respectively, think their country is treated as an equal partner). A majority in Germany (57%), however, think that their country *is* treated as an equal partner by the U.S. While majorities think that strong U.S. leadership in world affairs is desirable for the interests of their own country (Britain 77%; France 53%; Germany 64%), about as many, if not more, think that strong leadership by the EU also serves their country’s interests (Britain 76%; France 83%; Germany 72%),

**Favorable Views of U.S. Ties Consistent With Support for NATO**

West Europeans’ generally favorable views of their relationship with the United States largely carries over to their views of the NATO alliance which cements these transatlantic ties. Half in France (50%) and majorities in Britain (67%) and Germany (60%) say that NATO is “still essential” in the post-Cold War world, and even more support their own country’s membership in the alliance (Britain 75%; France 64%; Germany 68%). Opinions on NATO’s essentiality have fluctuated somewhat in recent years within a relatively narrow range, suggesting an underlying stability in public support for the alliance.

Majorities in France (54%) and Germany (57%) and two-thirds in Britain (66%) also have at least a fair amount of confidence “that decisions made by NATO will be in the best interests” of their country. Moreover, many feel secure in their allies’ defense commitment: majorities in Britain (57%), France (80%) and Germany (61%) have confidence that “our European allies would help us in our defense” if their country’s security were threatened.

**Few Think Europe Carries Unfair Share of Security Burden**

West Europeans appear basically satisfied with the United States’ commitment to European security (Table). A plurality in each country think that the U.S. and European countries are “each doing their fair share in maintaining peace in Europe,” and a sizable number even believe that the U.S.

<b>Sharing the European Security Burden</b>			
	<u>Britain</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>Germany</u>
Each doing their fair share	48%	50%	44%
US does more than its fair share	36	26	23
Europe does more than its fair share	10	14	16
Don’t know	17	10	17

is doing more than its fair share. Fewer than two in ten in each country believe that European countries are carrying more than their fair share, and about the same proportion have no opinion.

#### **French Stand Alone In Questioning American/European Balance In NATO**

Reflecting this satisfaction with allied burden-sharing, majorities in Britain (55%) and Germany (55%) favor “keeping the same security relationship with the U.S.” within NATO, while only about a third would favor having European countries assume “more of the responsibility and control of our security” within the alliance. In France, however, the percentages are reversed, with a majority (55%) favoring a greater European role and just over a third (38%) preferring the status quo. Support for an expanded European role declines even further when these publics are reminded that reducing the American role in NATO may mean “that west Europeans would have to spend more money on defense.”

#### **Publics Divided on Effects of Cold War’s End, But NATO Still Seen As Essential**

The European public’s enduring support for NATO may be due in part to the belief of many that the unraveling of the Soviet Union has not necessarily made the world safer. Small majorities in France (57%) and Germany (59%) *disagree* with the statement “Since the fall of the Berlin Wall the world has become much safer,” while a third (35%, 33%, respectively) *agree*. The British public is evenly divided (42% vs. 43%). French and German opinion has changed little since the same question was asked by USIA in spring 1996, though the British have become less positive since then (57% agreed vs. 35 percent disagreed). Asked specifically whether NATO is still needed even though “there is no longer a Soviet threat,” two-thirds in Britain (66%) and half in France (54%) and Germany (50%) say that NATO is still needed “because there are other potential security threats.”

Among those who perceive other security threats, publics in Britain, France, and Germany overlap somewhat in the specific threats they have in mind. In Britain, about two in ten say the Middle East is the threat they are most concerned with, and a comparable proportion specifically mention Iraq or Saddam Hussein. In France, about two in ten perceive a threat from Arab and North African countries and about one in ten mention Iraq. In Germany, about two in ten see Russia as the greatest security threat, one in ten each say Iraq or the Middle East generally. Many in all three countries who say that NATO is needed because of other security threats give very general answers indicating concerns about war and turmoil when asked to specify the threat they have in mind.

#### **Many Favor Security Role for Both NATO and EU**

At the same time, two-thirds in France (70%) and Germany (68%) and half in Britain (53%) support the creation of a common European defense force, but at least two-thirds of those favoring such a force believe it should act in conjunction with NATO rather than replace or act separately from the alliance. Asked directly to choose between the EU and NATO, the French and the Germans are more likely to think that the “most important decisions about the security of Europe in the future” should be made by the EU than by NATO (France: 61% vs. 27%; Germany: 49% vs. 32%; respectively). In Britain, NATO (40%) is favored over the EU (33%).

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Issued by Office of Research and Media Reaction, USIA.

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## Methodology

This report is based on preliminary data from face-to-face interviews conducted in early- to mid-April 1998 with 1,029 adults (age 18 or older) in Britain, 1,148 in Germany, and 1,012 in France. The research firms IRB in London, Louis Harris in Paris, and INRA in Moelln conducted the interviews for USIA.

Survey questions for each country were prepared by the USIA Office of Research. The questionnaires were translated and formatted by the contractor and reviewed by Office of Research staff.

In theory, 19 times out of 20, results from samples of this size will differ by no more than about 4 percentage points in either direction from what would be found if it were possible to interview every adult in each country. Sampling error is larger for subgroups within the population of each country. In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting a survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the results.

For further information, please contact the analyst.

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