

Interview with Javier Solana, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, from Le Monde (29 March 2003)

Caption: In an interview granted to the French daily newspaper Le Monde, published on 29 March 2003, Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union, sets out his role in international crisis management, incumbent upon him as High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and emphasises that the responsibility for establishing common positions, as well as responsibility for the domain of foreign policy, lies primarily with the Member States of the European Union.

Source: Le Monde. 29.03.2003. Paris. "Javier Solana, haut représentant européen pour la politique étrangère", p. 10.

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Javier Solana, EU High Representative for foreign policy

The United States must accept that the UN has a role to play in Iraq

‘There can be no common European foreign policy if Paris and London disagree,’ he says.

Mr Solana was interviewed by Laurent Zecchini

Europe has been criticised for its lack of unity, because it is not mature enough to have a common external policy. Would you agree?

No. I agree that Europe is divided on a major question. However, we must recognise that it is not long since the EU first started devising its common foreign and security policy. What is more, we did not decide to take decisions in this area by qualified majority, nor did we decide to have a single external policy.

So putting the blame on the CFSP would be taking things too far. The two EU countries with permanent seats on the Security Council [*the United Kingdom and France*] disagree, that is true. The EU has done its best to limit the consequences of that disagreement by acting as a buffer. The fact is that we are disunited on a common cause, the disarmament of Iraq.

You have not been exempt from criticism: what are you as High Representative doing to give the Union leadership?

I accept full responsibility, but only for those areas for which I am responsible. I have done my utmost to limit the damage. I went to all the EU capitals, I talked to the Americans, and I repeat: if the President of the French Republic and the UK Prime Minister are at odds with each other, you can put in the best candidate in the world as High Representative, and it still won't work.

France and the United Kingdom insisted on setting up the post of High Representative, but they are the two countries which most jealously guard their foreign policy prerogatives. Hasn't there been an ambiguity here, from the very outset, as regards your role?

The EU countries, for historical and political reasons, have foreign policies which differ in certain areas. It will take time to pool these policies. I have been High Representative for three years; during that time, I think we have made progress. Let's imagine for a moment that we didn't have this crisis over Iraq: on Monday, we are going to launch Europe's first military operation, in Macedonia, under the European flag. All this has happened in an extremely short time: Saint-Malo [*the Franco-British summit which first got the European defence system off the ground*] was in 1998.

What way can you see out of the crisis for Europe and for Europe's relations with the United States?

These differences of opinion between EU countries over Iraq are no great surprise. As for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, that's a problem which is going to be with us for years. It has to be said that for us in Europe, it was not one of our primary concerns, in sharp contrast to the United States. At the same time, we do not think that the use of force should be our first recourse in resolving crises.

The way out of this crisis is to look to the future. We cannot run the risk of being disunited at the first stage, that is over the territorial integrity of Iraq, the central role of the United Nations, humanitarian aid, the Middle East situation and so on. On all these issues, we must have an honest discussion among ourselves and then with the Americans, so that we can come to some agreement.

Doesn't this crisis show that a great many Europeans don't have the same vision as the Bush Administration?

Probably. Many Europeans do not subscribe to the United States' strategic options. The central issue is the

question of pre-emptive war. I cannot speak for all Europeans, but a large number of them are clearly worried about that doctrine, because it is the fundamental question in the post-Cold War world.

Are you afraid that, for Washington, going to war unilaterally, far from being an accident, is a fundamental orientation?

I hope not, I hope that the multilateral structures that we have established will continue to be at the heart of international life. The United States must accept that the United Nations has a part to play in Iraq, in particular if it is to avoid looking like an occupying power.

What lessons for Europe's defence policy should we be learning from this crisis?

That we should move faster and in a more serious way: we have to tell the public in Europe, which has had its say on the crisis — and that is certainly the positive side of it — that we must stop being hypocritical: if we want to play a part, we need the financial resources to pay for the military capacity. Nowadays, we want to play an important role on the international stage, but at the same time we are not prepared to make sacrifices to increase our military budgets. This is the clear message that I would give to Europe's leaders: they must talk to the people of Europe, all the people of Europe, and not just to their own fellow-citizens.