

Barack Obama: 'arrogant US has been dismissive' to allies

President Barack Obama has offered an apology for the Bush era, declaring that America had “shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive” towards its allies.

By Toby Harnden in Strasbourg

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President Obama said the US had “failed to appreciate Europe’s leading role in the world”.

His speech in Strasbourg went further than any United States president in history in criticising his own country’s action while standing on foreign soil.

But he sought to use the *mea culpa* as leverage to alter European views of America and secure more troops for the war in Afghanistan.

He declared that there had to be a fundamental shift on both sides of the Atlantic. “America is changing but it cannot be America alone that changes,” he said.

Addressing a crowd of some 2,000 mainly students from France and Germany, Mr Obama said: “In America, there is a failure to appreciate Europe's leading role in the world.

“Instead of celebrating your dynamic union and seeking to partner with you to meet common challenges, there have been times where America has shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive.”

He then balanced this striking admission with a tough message to Europeans that blaming America was foolish.

“But in Europe, there is an anti-Americanism that is at once casual, but can also be insidious. Instead of recognising the good that America so often does in the world, there have been times where Europeans choose to blame America for much of what is bad.

“On both sides of the Atlantic, these attitudes have become all too common. They are not wise. They do not represent the truth. They threaten to widen the divide across the Atlantic and leave us both more isolated. They fail to acknowledge the fundamental truth that America cannot confront the challenges of this century alone, but that Europe cannot confront them without America.”

Earlier, Mr Obama had thrown down the gauntlet to his European counterparts, saying: “We want strong allies. We are not looking to be patrons of Europe. We are looking to be partners of Europe.”

Mr Obama lauded France as America's "oldest ally, our first ally" and hailed Mr. Sarkozy's "initiative, imagination, creativity." Returning the compliment, Mr Sarkozy spoke of a new White House occupant who wanted to "change the world" and was not concerned only with narrow American self interest.

But behind Mr Obama's charm was a tough message that Europe needed to do more, particularly in Afghanistan where the US is sending 21,000 more troops.

"It is probably more likely that al Qaeda would be able to launch a serious terrorist attack on Europe than on the United States because of proximity," Mr Obama said.

"We would like to see Europe have much more robust capabilities. That's not something we

discourage."

Mr Obama said that Nato would remain the bedrock of American foreign policy but made clear he believed it should not be a one-way street.

"Nato is the most successful alliance in modern history. And the basic premise of Nato was that Europe's security was the United States' security and vice versa."

Mr Sarkozy praised Mr Obama for pledging to close the Guantanamo Bay prison: "Guantanamo was not in keeping with US values", adding that using "terrorist methods" was not a way to defeat terrorism.

The American president responded: "I made the decision to close Guantanamo because I don't think it makes America safer."

Mr Obama took the opportunity to warn North Korea that it should abandon its "provocative" plans to launch a long-range rocket. He said he had made clear the reclusive Stalinist state should "stop the launch" or the US would "take appropriate steps to let North Korea know that it can't threaten the safety and security of other countries with impunity".

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