



Brzezinski Chair Update

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THE IMPACT OF THE FRENCH ELECTION ON U.S.-EUROPEAN RELATIONS

In three separate articles appearing in May 2007, Simon Serfaty examines the end of the Chirac presidency and the election of Nicolas Sarkozy, in the context of France, Europe, and the U.S.-Franco relationship. “The Post-Chirac French Funk,” published in the spring 2007 issue of The International Economy, is excerpted below. Page two features excerpts from “The Dawn of the Sarko Era,” appearing in The Wall Street Journal Europe on May 8 (versions also appeared in the U.S. and Asia editions), and “Pour Washington, la France est de retour,” published in Le Monde on May 19.

Over the years, France has been America’s most outspoken, most reluctant, and most frustrating ally—and, by French standards, so was America too. Paradoxically, each has also been the other’s most rewarding and effective partner—France because of her central role in making it possible to further the American interest in a united and strong Europe, and the United States because of its decisive role in engineering a new European security order that served France especially well. Yet even in the context of such a history of bilateral discord and cooperation, the French- and Chirac-bashing, as well as the anti-American and anti-Bush discourse, that erupted in 2003 were unprecedented and troubling: a display of ill will, hostility, and even anger that paradoxically unveiled the passion that the United States and France feel for and about each other when either fails to live up to expectations.

After Chirac, and at half past Bush, it is time for the United States and France to stop pretending that life without each other would be easier or better than life together, and it is time for both countries to “re-understand” and accommodate their inability to go it alone, or almost, in new coalitions “of the willing” they might try to form or enter without each other. To so believe *n’est pas du* wishful. The passion that Sarkozy feels for America and Americans is real; it clearly surpasses his compatriots’ ambivalence, as well as that of his rivals. Ironically, that could also have been said of Chirac in 1995, though not of Mitterrand in 1981, and that passion for what America is should not be mistaken, therefore, as a blanket endorsement of what America does.

Chirac’s adamant opposition to the war in Iraq “did honor to France,” reasserted Sarkozy during the campaign. In the future, there will be other clashes but these will hopefully be managed better than was the case over Iraq. Over such decisive issues as the relevance of military force and the future of nuclear weapons, for example, France and the United States are closer to each other than they are to their respective partners of choice, Germany (where there is little taste for anything that is military) and Britain (where there is limited taste for anything that is nuclear). No more time can be lost in exploring the terms of their convergence—over, say, the ongoing Doha round of trade negotiations, the upcoming clash with Iran, the management of radical Islamic groups and their states’ sponsors, and the ever-present Arab-Israeli conflict. In these and other cases, French and Americans understand the need to speak to one another, and they can surely hear each other, but they do not seem to know how to listen to the other.

As a middle power, France matters to the United States to the extent that France matters to Europe and Europe to the United States. In other words, France is of such high significance to and in the United States because it is of even higher significance in and to Europe. If anything, it is therefore with regard to the European Union that historians may question Chirac most harshly. Unlike Mitterrand, he left little legacy in leading the Union. Instead, failure of the Constitutional treaty in May 2005 was Chirac’s responsibility: for having called a referendum when none was needed, for having misjudged the public mood when sound judgment was demanded, and for not having responded to the electorate when a response was still possible.

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Architects of
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War in Iraq

by
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University of
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Dawn of the Sarko Era (Wall Street Journal Europe, May 8, 2007)

Paradoxically, France is a centrist republic that hungers for extreme solutions to its pervasive societal problems of identity, prosperity and security. Enter what might be called the Thatcher factor: Mr. Sarkozy is expected to act forcefully, and not to be intimidated afterward. For that he will need a mandate, so success in next month's legislative elections will be vital to his presidency. With the left in disarray, and with the center hurt by Francois Bayrou's muted endorsement of Ms. Royal, such a majority is within reach.

With regard to Europe, his will to act suits German Chancellor Angela Merkel, with whom Mr. Sarkozy will work closely to address an urgent institutional agenda that has been stalled since the death of the constitutional treaty two years ago. Mr. Sarkozy hopes for a "mini treaty" that can relaunch the EU without any "constitutional" claim or a need for another referendum. Serious discussions about such issues have already been held, and next month's EU summit offers an opportunity to test the new Franco-German duo before the arrival of Gordon Brown, Britain's premier-in-waiting.

Pour Washington, la France est de retour (Le Monde, May 19, 2007)

L'élection de Nicolas Sarkozy est d'autant mieux reçue aux Etats-Unis qu'elle signifie le départ de Jacques Chirac, dont la " trahison " en Irak n'a pas été oubliée, même si une forte majorité d'Américains partagent en 2007 la logique de son opposition en 2003. En faisant applaudir " nos amis américains ", comme M. Sarkozy le fit au soir de son triomphe, le nouveau président n'a pas déçu. " La France, a-t-il insisté, est de retour. " Venant d'un autre, la phrase, d'un ton reaganien - " America is back " -, aurait inquiété ; venant de lui, l'Amérique s'en réjouit.

Le vocabulaire sarkozien, simplifié par son absence de style, passe bien en anglais : " Le travail, l'autorité, la morale, le respect ", définissent une volonté de faire plus qu'une simple volonté d'être. Il décrit une " France debout " se conjuguant à nouveau au futur après vingt-six ans d'un pas de deux présidentiel étouffant. Les sous-entendus telle la juxtaposition de " l'immigration et de l'identité nationale " peuvent faire frémir en France, outre-Atlantique, ils sont intraduisibles ou du moins incompréhensibles.

Selected Recent Talks of the Brzezinski Chair

- "The Evolution of CPA since Riga," *NATO Comprehensive Approach Workshop*, sponsored by the Danish Embassy to the U.S. and National Defense University, May 25, 2007.
- "New Leadership in Europe," *8th Bucerius Governance Talks*, hosted by the German Marshall Fund, Washington, DC, May 18, 2007.
- "The Impact of the French Election on U.S.-European Relations," *CSIS Congressional Staff Forum on Capitol Hill*, May 14, 2007.
- "Washington Journal," *C-SPAN*, May 13, 2007.

About the Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy

CSIS established the Brzezinski Chair in July 2003 to advance understanding in the fields of geostrategy, international security, European affairs, and global politics. Reflecting Zbigniew Brzezinski's achievements during a career including public service, teaching, and writing, the chair is awarded to a leading scholar in the fields of geostrategy, international security, and global politics. Simon Serfaty, Brzezinski Chair holder, also remains a Senior Advisor to the Europe Program at CSIS, where he was director from 1994-2004.

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