

France and the World, from Chirac to Sarkozy

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In its relations with the rest of the world, France has long oscillated between two policy goals, sometimes clashing, sometimes complementary: on one hand, the pursuit and defence of France's national interests, as defined by geographical, economic and historical constraints; on the other, the promotion of its values, believed to have a universal quality. In the pure Gaullist tradition, President Jacques Chirac pursued a foreign policy that will be remembered for France's insistence on independence and multilateralism. Under his leadership, France tried to project a confident image that it still had a special, useful role in the world – that of reminding other countries of the dangers of unilateralism and the importance of allegiance to collective security – in spite of the shared national anxiety about its lack of purpose and lack of relevance in contemporary international affairs. As he took over the French presidency, Nicolas Sarkozy attempted to modernize, redirect and re-energize French foreign policy. The main Gaullist tenet of maintaining the rank of France on the international scene still features prominently on Sarkozy's agenda, but this will be achieved by closer ties to the United States (US), a reinvigorated transatlantic alliance, and stronger language towards recalcitrant countries, in addition to the usual assets of a privileged position at the United Nations (UN) and the possession of nuclear power. How much room to manoeuvre does President Sarkozy possess in transforming French foreign policy? This chapter explores the legacy of Chirac in foreign policy and the constraints that this legacy, as well as economy and geography, impose on Sarkozy as he devises a foreign policy to respond to the challenges faced by France in the twenty-first century.

The foreign policy legacy of Jacques Chirac

Jacques Chirac wanted his second term (2002–7) to be remembered in history for his foreign policy. Like most presidents of the Fifth

Republic, he tried to stay above the melee of domestic politics, leaving his successive prime ministers the ungrateful task of dealing with social and economic reforms, while concentrating instead on imprinting his French mark on the world. By showing that France still mattered in world affairs, he hoped to overcome the sense of national *malaise* and anxiety so pervasive in the domestic context. True to his Gaullist heritage, he helped fashion a foreign policy designed to keep a meaningful, independent role for France and projecting French ideas and values in a multipolar world. His own understanding of the world had been very much shaped by two old prisms – the Cold War and France's colonial ties – through which he analysed the events that unfolded during his tenure. We do not need much hindsight to pinpoint exactly what Chirac's foreign policy legacy will be in history. It is made up of two famous 'No's: the French 'No' to the US on Iraq in 2003, thanks to Chirac's support, and the French 'No' to the European Constitution in 2005, in spite of Chirac's personal support. The rest of France's involvement in the world during this period pales in comparison to these two defining events.

France and the US: the Iraq fallout

Throughout its history, the United States has been allied with France, but this bilateral relationship has not always been easy. The 2003 French-American confrontation over Iraq, however, was unanimously described as the deepest rift between France and the US since de Gaulle withdrew France from NATO's integrated structure in 1966. The dire predictions about the irreparable damage done to the bilateral relationship and, more generally, to the transatlantic alliance never materialized. Even during the height of the name-calling in the two camps, France and the US continued to cooperate deeply on the most pressing issues, above all counter-terrorism. The boycotts of French products in the US and of American products in France did not impact the overall economic relationship in any significant way. But this well-publicized rift came to define French foreign policy during the last five years of Chirac's tenure.

Chirac's second term started under favourable auspices for the United States. After the tragedy of September 11, with which the French deeply empathized, France stood by American foreign policy. In the weeks following the terrorist attacks, France joined the US in 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in Afghanistan, where it is also participating in the International Security Assistance Force under NATO (France still had a contingent of 1000 troops in Afghanistan in 2007).

Historians are now debating when and why relations between France and the US turned sour over the proposed intervention in Iraq. The deeper roots of antagonism between France and the US were, in addi-

tion to centuries of cultural prejudices, worries about the US role in propagating *laissez-faire*, neo-liberal globalization and about its unilateralism vis-à-vis the rest of the world, as illustrated for instance in climate change, the International Criminal Court and trade disputes. The more immediate roots of the dispute were laid down in late 2002. In the autumn of 2002, France was very instrumental in mediating a compromise resolution at the United Nations (Resolution 1441) to reinstate weapons inspection in Iraq. Yet relations between France and the US started to deteriorate the following month, when the Bush administration argued that Iraq was impeding the inspections and concealing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and was therefore in breach of Resolution 1441. For the US, further decisive action was needed to obtain compliance by the Iraqis, including the use of military force. The French government disagreed with this interpretation and wanted to give the inspections more time, since the inspectors had no evidence that WMDs were being concealed.

French-American relations took a nasty turn at the end of January 2003. At a public meeting on Martin Luther King Day, Secretary of State Colin Powell felt that he had been ambushed and double-crossed by the French when he learned there that France would not authorize a second UN resolution. French policy-makers also felt double-crossed when they realized that the Bush administration had already made up its mind about invading Iraq, no matter what their efforts in brokering a compromise solution. In February 2003, the US circulated a draft UN resolution that would justify military action against Iraq, with the ultimate objectives of regime change and the establishment of democracy in Iraq, to serve as a model for the whole Middle East. The French government disagreed loudly with these objectives, in addition to disagreeing that Iraq was actually impeding the inspections and concealing weapons. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, France threatened to use a veto if the US-proposed resolution were submitted to a vote. The French government also actively tried to convince the other members of the Security Council not to support this new resolution, thereby becoming the number one enemy among America's allies.

As a result of French opposition, and opposition from other countries spearheaded by France, the Bush administration decided to go to war in Iraq in March 2003 without the legitimacy of a new UN resolution. The sour relations between the US and France continued even in the face of the initial, apparent success of the operation, beyond the American overthrow of the Hussein government in April 2003. Chirac and his Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, continued to be very vocal in their criticisms of the American invasion, denouncing it as an occupation and predicting that the situation would soon deteriorate. They argued that only a true provisional government whose legitimacy

will be underpinned by the UN and will benefit from the support of the countries of the region' could avoid chaos in the long run. As a result, France repeatedly refused to send forces to Iraq as part of the US-led multinational force, since it did not want to condone the American invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The Iraq conflict is often presented as a poster child of French anti-Americanism in action – with French leaders, bowing to their public opinion enraged by the media, having acted more out of genuine subversion than legitimate dissent. But was anti-Americanism the primary driver of French policy during that period? Most likely, the anti-war position of France was motivated primarily by a very different understanding of the threats facing the world, by a rational assessment of its interests in the post-Cold War, post 9/11 geopolitical environment, as well as by a distrust of unconstrained unilateralism.

France had long disagreed with the US over the threat posed by Saddam Hussein and over what to do about it, seeing him as dangerous above all for his own people, but not for the moment for the rest of the world, thanks to the international pressure exerted by multilateral sanctions and inspections. Moreover, France had expressed strong reservations and concerns over the new American doctrine of pre-emption, according to which the US should pre-empt an attack by striking first when suspecting future harm, if not supported by the UN. It is not that France had totally ruled out the use of force in principle; rather, force should only be a last recourse and its legitimacy could only come from the UN. Finally, for French foreign policy, the sole legitimate objective in Iraq was to destroy any existing WMD, which would be done through inspections and, if they failed, through the use of force mandated by the UN – the objective was not regime change or a remodelling of the map of the Middle East. The consistent strands of this policy reflect more distrust of American unilateralist temptations than bias and hatred directed to sabotage US policy.

French foreign policy was also shaped by the specificities of French history and experiences. French intelligence was convinced that the Iraqi regime and Al Qaeda had had no significant contact. Moreover, the recent lessons learned by France in fighting Islamic terrorism, after a wave of attacks in the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, suggested that the war proposed by the United States was not the right approach. Most importantly, many French analyses of the Iraq situation, including those of President Chirac, were informed by their own experiences in Algeria during the war of independence against France from 1954 to 1962, which served as the main prism through which they understood what might happen in Iraq and predicted more frustration, anger and bitterness in the Arab and Muslim world.

Yet if not the cause of the Franco-American crisis over Iraq, anti-Americanism was instead a by-product of the crisis, as was French-

bashing in the US. In the aftermath of 9/11, French public opinion had initially given the benefit of the doubt to the US foreign policy strategy. But the deeper the rift between the French and American positions, the stronger the anti-American prejudices that appeared in the French media – and the stronger the stereotypical French-bashing that surged in the US. The French even gave mixed signals about whether they really wanted America to succeed in Iraq; so much so that in April 2003 French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin had to remind public opinion that 'the Americans are not the enemies. Our camp is the camp of democracy'. The same was true about anti-French prejudices in the US. In May 2003, the French ambassador in the US, Jean-David Levitte, formally delivered a letter to administration officials and members of Congress, complaining about and detailing a series of false stories that had appeared in the US media over the past nine months, undiplomatically referred to as part of an 'ugly campaign to destroy the image of France' by anonymous administration officials. The extreme public name-calling on both sides of the Atlantic lingered for several months, if not years, even after diplomacy had resumed its normal course.

France and Europe: the referendum fallout

The second defining foreign policy legacy of Chirac was his decision to hold a referendum on the European Constitution in May 2005. The failed 2005 referendum is dealt with elsewhere in this volume in terms of its electoral sociology and domestic political significance, in Chapters 1, 4 and 16 notably. Our remarks here broadly concern the foreign policy dimension and consequences of the failed referendum. One can debate the extent to which Europe is still considered foreign policy for France. After all, for most matters relating to the internal market and economic activity more broadly, from the regulation of food safety to antitrust policy, Europe has been internalized in France as a source of domestic policies. But Europe is also an object, and an essential component, of French foreign policy. The electorate's rejection of the European Constitution was a major blow to the standing of France in Europe and in the world, perpetuating the very feeling of loss of relevance of France in the European project (and the world, more generally), which the naysayers had been trying to combat.

For several decades after the founding of the European Community in 1957, France had been one of the main engines of European integration and its co-leadership with Germany had gone, for the most part, unchallenged. Its influence within Europe, however, was seriously weakened over the years by the successive enlargements which have shifted Europe's geographical and cultural centre and diluted French power. France was no longer the heart and soul of a European Union

of 27 members. The negative results of the referendum further diminished the influence of France by sidelining it and destroying its ability to lead the EU. The Plan B promised by many of the French opponents of the Constitution did not materialize, nor did the informal establishment of a core group of countries (presumably led by France) which would have been able to integrate further in some areas, at a more rapid pace. The Lisbon 'mini-treaty' agreed to in October 2007 certainly does not represent this elusive Plan B.

Another negative side effect of the French 'No' is that it thwarted, at least temporarily, French efforts to engineer real changes to European foreign and security policy, such as strengthening its military capabilities or integrating it further among the member states. The draft EU Constitution proposed the creation of a post of EU minister of foreign affairs, the granting of an external, legal personality to the EU so as to be able to conclude treaties on its own behalf, and the progressive framing of a common defence. If passed, this would have strengthened the potential impact of France in the world, if one believes that the voice of European countries is heard louder throughout the world when Europe is united. The Constitution would also have enabled France, through Europe, to counterbalance American power and stand up more forcefully to the US when needed. Chirac insisted on these arguments during the campaign in favour of the referendum in May 2005, but they proved insufficient to carry the day. As a result of the negative vote on the referendum, France was sidelined in Europe and almost silent in the world for the remainder of Chirac's second term.

France and the world

The firm French stance against an invasion of Iraq not legitimated by the UN in 2003 put France back temporarily on the map of major foreign policy players, even though *ex post* interpretations of the role France really played diverge. For the Bush administration, France went much further than a simple disagreement between friends. Instead, the active French campaign to prevent the US from obtaining the blessing of the UN was a betrayal and certainly contributed to the quagmire in which the US then found itself in Iraq. By contrast, for many in France, the 2003 episode represents the apex of French foreign policy, if not diplomacy, in the past decade. The run-up to the war in Iraq indeed crystallized all the defining elements of French foreign policy, for better or for worse: UN legitimacy, multipolarity and independence from, not subservience to, the United States. And history, at least for now, seems to show that the French were indeed right when they argued that the threat posed by Saddam Hussein was not imminent, that democracy-building in Iraq would be a lengthy and bloody process, and that such

a perilous intervention would trigger more anti-Western sentiment in the Muslim world.

Yet, what is puzzling about this episode is that France did not derive more benefit or more clout in the world from this act of bravura and prescience. The image of France in the world was at its highest level of popularity in the two years following the US-led invasion of Iraq. But French foreign policy was not able to capitalize on the stance it took in 2003, especially in the Middle East when one could have expected France to have gained stature and momentum as an 'honest broker' thanks to its holding out against the US. Nor did French foreign policy seem to be following a coherent strategy or be guided by a particular vision. It had been mostly oppositional and opportunistic, with France presenting no elaborated alternative, aside from abstention, to the American policy on Iraq. French foreign policy lacked conceptual thinking, and no grand vision was articulated by any of the successive foreign ministers – Dominique de Villepin (2002–4), Michel Barnier (2004–5), Philippe Douste-Blazy (2005–7). For the remaining four years of Chirac's presidency, French foreign policy vis-à-vis the rest of the world was anaemic, low-key and uneventful, with the exception of the disastrous referendum on the European Constitution.

The only time when France found itself at the forefront of world affairs again was in 2005 and 2006 in Lebanon. After the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the subsequent protests over Syria's involvement in the country, France teamed up with the US to demand an immediate and total withdrawal of all Syrian troops and intelligence agents from Lebanon and to apply successful pressure for Syria to comply. French diplomacy was implicated in this affair probably more out of Chirac's personal, long-time friendship with Hariri and France's traditional historical ties with French-speaking Lebanon, rather than out of immediate national interest or promotion of values. France was involved again in the Lebanese crisis in the summer of 2006, during the war between Israel and Hezbollah. French diplomacy succeeded in pushing Resolution 1701 through the UN, demanding the full cessation of hostilities, the disarmament of Hezbollah and the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Lebanon, as well as the deployment of UN forces in the south. However, the high profile taken by French foreign policy was tarnished when France subsequently displayed reluctance and wavering in deploying troops: and taking the command of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). After some hesitation, the French finally took lead of the peacekeeping operations in Lebanon and had 1700 troops stationed there in 2007.

Apart from Lebanon, France was neither heavily involved, nor particularly creative, in the Middle East during that period. Instead, the bulk of French foreign policy focused on France's traditional sphere of influence in Francophone Africa. France took part in a military intervention

in the Ivory Coast, as part of a UN mission, which included helping in the evacuation of foreign residents and protecting civilians from warring factions. It now has a contingent of 3500 soldiers in the Ivory Coast. France also sent 1000 soldiers as part of a EU peacekeeping force in Congo and currently has soldiers deployed in Chad, Djibouti, Senegal and Gabon.

With the US mired in Iraq and partially discredited as an interlocutor in the Muslim world, France tried to broker the growing Iranian nuclear crisis. Along with Britain and Germany, France led negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme on behalf of the EU. The 'EU-3' agreed to recognize Iran's nuclear rights in exchange for a commitment by Iran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Chirac, who did not believe that economic sanctions are effective, had a particular stake in seeing a successful resolution of the international crisis triggered by the Iranian nuclear build-up, since it could prove that France was still a major world player and French diplomacy could succeed where others had failed.

Towards Europe, French foreign policy was two-pronged. On one hand, Chirac wanted to push for further integration of European security and defence capabilities, in the hope that France, a medium-sized power, would see its voice and ambitions better heard and its force multiplied throughout the world – provided that Europe could be fashioned by France. On the other hand, France slowly started its reintegration into NATO and participated, as part of NATO, in providing peacekeeping troops in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

As for the rest of the world, outside France's traditional sphere of influence, especially in Asia, French foreign policy was neither much involved, nor very coherent. The most notable action was the 2004 embargo on arms sales to China – much to the dismay of the US. France argued that the embargo, which had been imposed after the Tiananmen events, was obsolete in light of China's changes since 1989 and its growing inclusion in the international community, from the World Trade Organization to the Olympics. Instead, the embargo should be lifted, but accompanied by a 'code of conduct' and demands for China to ratify the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This move was interpreted in Washington as a confrontational, anti-American action, because of the potential for China to use European arms in a fight against the US over Taiwan and the meddling of Europe in a part of the world where it has no stakes – a clear balancing move initiated by France to curb the American hyperpower. The French position on the Chinese arms embargo may have been more about commercial greed than grand geopolitical ambitions, however. China, the world's most dynamic economy, had adroitly put pressure on France and Germany, dangling

the carrot of more Airbus and high-speed train purchases, in addition to submarines, helicopters and other avionics technology, should the embargo be lifted. Moreover, several European countries (including France) have said that the EU move on the arms embargo to China was not designed as a confrontation against the US, since China's main suppliers of high-technology weapons then were two friends of the United States – Russia and Israel. After China's decision to pass an 'anti-secessorist law' against Taiwan in March 2005, the EU put off plans to lift the arms embargo indefinitely, but for France the idea is not a moot point.

New leadership, new foreign policy?

With the changing of the guard in 2007, after the election of Nicolas Sarkozy, a new team and new generation acceded to power in France, without the foreign policy baggage of the Chirac administration. It was accompanied by a radical change in tone, if not in policy, with a more optimistic view about the possibilities of French influence on the international stage. And indeed, the first few months of the Sarkozy presidency were marked by a whirlwind of foreign policy activity, trying to mend fences and repair partnerships in Europe and in the US, as well as new positions on Darfur, Russia and, more controversially, Iran. But can Sarkozy really change the direction of French foreign policy in the near future? Does he genuinely have the opportunity to set the counter back to zero and conduct a foreign policy breaking with those of his predecessors? For as much as Sarkozy has been portrayed as innovative and activist, French foreign policy operates within a set of constraints – historical, geographical, economic and domestic – that limit the options available.

Foreign policy and the 2007 presidential election

Foreign policy has long been a non-issue in France, at least not an electoral issue, given the broad consensus that has prevailed since the days of de Gaulle. On the Right as on the Left, everyone seemed in agreement that French foreign policy should promote France's independence and universal values. It is as if there were a firewall between domestic policies, very contentious, and foreign policies, very consensual. Not surprisingly, foreign policy was not a central topic of debate in the 2007 presidential campaign either. Gaullist policy, and Chirac's policies more specifically, were not questioned. Did the Gaullist approach serve France best? How did France benefit from it? Did it enhance French influence in the world? What comes next? No one asked these questions with any resonance.

The absence of foreign policy debate in 2007 can, additionally, be explained, by two facts. First, none of the main candidates (Bayrou, Royal and Sarkozy) had much foreign policy experience, hence they had more to lose than to gain in engaging these issues. Indeed, foreign policy appeared to be a slippery slope, an easy way to make gaffes, as was demonstrated several times by Ségolène Royal in particular, for instance when she praised the expediency of the Chinese justice system. Therefore the candidates tried to avoid this as much as possible during the campaign. The second reason for the absence of foreign policy from the debate is that, unlike in the United States, the war in Iraq was not perceived as an immediate, pressing issue. With no apparent stake in the conflict, the French population is very detached from the Iraq War, with not even a debate or an interest about the possible role of France in the future of this country. Indeed, in a CSA exit poll taken during the first round of the election, only 9 per cent of the thousands of respondents said foreign policy was a factor in their choice for president. By contrast, 44 per cent said proposals for job creation played a role.

An activist French foreign policy

If foreign policy played a low-key role in the Sarkozy platform, it has been anything but low-key since Sarkozy came to power. His acceptance speech was replete with references to what France would do abroad in the months to come: reach out to Europe, reassert France as a friend of the US, fight global warming, build a Mediterranean Union, free the Bulgarian nurses jailed in Libya and Ingrid Betancourt held hostage in Colombia, and so forth. And indeed what is most striking in the first few months of the Sarkozy presidency is how activist French foreign policy has been – some say ‘hyperactive’ – especially compared to the torpor in which it had apparently lain since the height of France’s omnipresence on the world stage in the spring of 2003. Sarkozy’s inauguration was immediately followed, on the same day, by his first trip abroad, to Germany. Since then, French foreign policy has constantly been in the headlines, providing one diplomatic coup after another and giving to the French and to the world the impression that with enough effort and energy France can do anything.

The first action was the relaunching of the constitutional process in Europe, or rather the end of the paralysis and French isolation brought by the French rejection of the EU Constitution in 2005. Sarkozy personally spearheaded the negotiation of a ‘mini-treaty’ in June 2007 (agreed to by the 27 member states in October 2007 in Lisbon), which gives new functions to European foreign policy, extends majority voting to 40 new areas, and grants the EU legal personality. With this move, France appeared to have re-established its central role in European affairs. This pro-European activism has been counterbal-

anced, however, as Sarkozy has simultaneously criticized the independence of the European Central Bank, revealed deep protectionist streaks and combated the inclusion of references to free and untortured competition in the EU treaty, all of which might eventually create tensions between France and Germany and France and the UK.

The next diplomatic coup of Sarkozy was the July 2007 liberation of the Bulgarian nurses jailed in Libya for allegedly having deliberately infected Libyan children with HIV in 1998. This is another example of a very activist policy – one where France’s interests do not seem directly at stake, but which contributes to raising the profile of France as a diplomatic actor. This initiative earned France, and Sarkozy, triumphal headlines – if only briefly. Very quickly, criticisms emerged. First, Sarkozy’s intervention ruffled a lot of feathers among France’s European partners. The release of the nurses had been steadily negotiated by European diplomats for a long time, and they did not appreciate that Sarkozy, thanks to his last-minute effort, was the only one taking credit and reaping the public benefits from the liberation. Another criticism was the lack of transparency surrounding the whole operation, and in particular the blurry role played by Sarkozy’s then wife, Cecilia, in the process. This irritated a lot of people, including in French diplomatic circles. But the biggest cost of this diplomatic coup may be what it really took France to obtain the release of the nurses – which came out in public sooner than Sarkozy seemed to have anticipated and intended: Gadaffi’s son revealed that Libya would benefit from a military agreement with France to manufacture arms and purchase several 100 million euros worth of French anti-tank missiles. It was also later revealed that France may have sold a nuclear reactor to Libya as part of the deal. As for Gaddafi, he was invited to a high-profile, five-day visit to Paris in December 2007, crowning his rehabilitation in the West.

The next diplomatic coup came a few weeks later, when Sarkozy spent two weeks of summer vacation in the United States – unheard of for a French president – and used this opportunity to meet with President Bush and his family in Kennebunkport. This seemed to ease the rapprochement between France and the US much faster and in an easier way, at least for public opinion, than if the rapprochement had been initiated and conducted by traditional diplomatic channels alone.

No sooner was Sarkozy back in France than he gave his first major foreign policy speech, at the end of August 2007. The highlight of the speech was France’s new hard-line position on the Iranian nuclear crisis. Sarkozy declared that ‘a nuclear-armed Iran is for me unacceptable’ and raised the spectre of bombing Iran (without saying that France would do it) if all else failed. In a serious policy inflexion from the Chirac era, Sarkozy also suggested that France may be ready to envision economic sanctions, alongside the US and the UK, but outside of the UN framework, in order to stop Iran from enriching uranium.

Adding fuel to the fire, in September, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner declared that the world should prepare for possible war against Iran. Kouchner's remarks were echoed the next day by Prime Minister François Fillon, who called for hard negotiations to force Iran to abandon key nuclear activities. Even though Kouchner was later forced to backtrack and Sarkozy disavowed his mention of war, arguing that France is committed to using diplomacy to resolve the nuclear crisis with Iran, this whole episode signalled that France, once again, was back at the forefront of world affairs.

Sarkozy's foreign policy ubiquity has continued ever since. Over the following months, Sarkozy multiplied official state visits to foreign countries, including Morocco, China and Algeria. These visits were opportunities for commercial as well as for traditional diplomacy, once again showing off the image of a dynamic and re-energized France. Sarkozy also visited the United States, where he delivered an address to Congress and was treated to an official visit to Mount Vernon to celebrate the anniversary of Lafayette, a symbol of Franco-American friendship.

Contingencies and constraints

Will this activist policy be able to continue and what shape will it take? How far can the Sarkozy team go in departing from the path traced by 50 years of Gaullist foreign policy? The shape of French foreign policy will be determined in part by the following three conditions: whether the particular historical juncture persists; how the power play between the President and his Foreign Minister plays out; and whether the domestic and international constraints remain the same.

The activism of French foreign policy under the Sarkozy presidency has been made possible by a particular historical juncture. On the one hand, President Bush has been seriously weakened, both domestically and internationally, and he is on the way out. The world sees him as a 'lame duck president'. With the US less strong and less credible, it is an opportune time for European (and therefore French) diplomacy to step up. On the other hand, President Sarkozy is on the way in, with both his domestic opposition and the international community giving him the benefit of the doubt and a long honeymoon period. But this favourable historical juncture can change as Sarkozy stops being perceived as successful at home, where his initially sky-high approval ratings have plummeted, and once the US elects a new President in November 2008.

The shape of French foreign policy will also depend on the political power play inside French foreign policy circles. Traditionally under the Fifth Republic, foreign policy has been the reserved domain (*domaine*

réserve) of the President. The President appointed a Prime Minister to take care of domestic affairs, and he took care of foreign policy himself, with a docile Foreign Minister. Not under President Sarkozy, where the division of powers has become blurry with respect to foreign policy. It is not that Sarkozy went the other way, being a hands-on President on domestic affairs while leaving the care of the external relations of France to a competent diplomat. Rather, the division of labour between the President and his Foreign Minister and the division of the President's time between domestic and foreign affairs are open questions under the Sarkozy presidency. Sarkozy may turn out to be an activist President both in domestic affairs and in foreign affairs.

Sarkozy appointed Bernard Kouchner as Foreign Minister, in a shrewd political move that stunned everyone, most of all Kouchner's fellow Socialists. A world-famous human rights activist, Kouchner is the founder of Doctors without Borders and an outspoken proponent of the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of countries that violate the rights of their citizens. Therefore, he supported the American intervention in Iraq in 2003, albeit only for humanitarian reasons (not WMD). If Kouchner were to truly direct French foreign policy in the years to come, one could expect more humanitarian intervention to promote international solidarity and justice and less Gaullist efforts to maintain French independence. For now Kouchner has kept a low profile and has not dissented on even the thorniest issues, such as the visit of Gaddafi to Paris in December 2007. However, how the potential power struggle between the Foreign Minister and the Élysée will play out will determine partly the direction of French foreign policy.

Finally, the shape of French foreign policy will also depend on how domestic and international constraints exert themselves. On the domestic front, both public opinion and budgetary constraints have the potential to affect foreign policy. In the first months of the Sarkozy presidency, activism in foreign policy paid off at home. According to a poll taken in August 2007, for the first time in years a majority of French people think that the international role of France is getting stronger. But the French may start to question Sarkozy's activist foreign policy when they discover that there are indeed costs to a strong French presence in the world. The ambitious economic and social reform agenda of President Sarkozy may lead to disgruntlement and demonstrations in France, with the effect of reinvigorating anti-globalization positions and limiting the budget available for foreign policy ventures. Economic strains at home and declining presidential popularity may also reduce the goodwill granted to Sarkozy's initial pro-American alignments.

International constraints are also a vital determinant of the room for manoeuvre given to Sarkozy in foreign policy. Some of these constraints

will, predictably, challenge French foreign policy. For example, the entry of Turkey into the EU, which Sarkozy openly opposes, will be the topic of negotiations in Europe in the next few years. Sarkozy would prefer for Turkey to form a partnership with the EU, along the lines of his proposed Mediterranean Union – a bloc of moderate Muslim states along the Mediterranean whose main interlocutor would be Europe. It is unclear, however, whether either Turkey or France's European partners support this alternative.

Other looming challenges in Europe include the question of the status of Kosovo; the evolution of the Russian regime; and the future of NATO. Indeed, as part of his Atlanticist agenda, Sarkozy envisions a complete return of France to the integrated military structure of NATO if two conditions are met: a parallel advance in an independent European defence capability, and a profound institutional renovation of NATO that would enable France to have a greater voice and a leading role in NATO's command structures. This vision is controversial both among France's partners and at home. Indeed, some analysts and policy-makers in France are openly questioning how rejoining NATO's military command would be beneficial to French political and strategic interests.

Iraq is a constraint on French foreign policy, whether the French population likes it or not. For many years, the French argued with the US that 'you broke it, you own it'. But the collapse of order in Iraq affects a much broader number of actors than those involved in the current conflict, and French interests and national security are indeed at stake in the Iraq conflict. French foreign policy will therefore be more involved in trying to mastermind a solution in Iraq, not out of sheer alignment with the US, but in order to protect its own interests.

Another predictable challenge is the inevitable occurrence of terrorism directed against Western nations, including France. More generally, French foreign policy is deeply concerned with the proliferation of nuclear weapons and WMD, in particular in the case of Iran, on which France has taken a firm stance and leadership role. Other threats and challenges may seem less salient and more remote, but they can be identified: global warming; uncontrolled globalization; the rise in economic and political power of China.

Within a few months of the election of Nicolas Sarkozy, French foreign policy has already undergone a radical transformation, both in tone and in actions. France has been omnipresent on the world stage, from Libya to Iran, from state visits to China and Algeria, from pushing for a UN force in Darfur to advocating a 'planetary New Deal'. The same method seems at play in foreign policy as in domestic policy: French foreign policy has been a frenzy of proposals, a ubiquitous involvement of France, a constant whirlwind. The style of French foreign policy certainly has changed as the President changed: while

Chirac was cautious and grandiloquent, Sarkozy is aggressive and opportunistic. The instruments of foreign policy may be different too: oppositional and reactive for Chirac, constructive and proactive for Sarkozy. But deep down, the objectives of French foreign policy are still the same. The main goal is to get France to be taken seriously again and to enable it to project its power and values throughout the world, like in de Gaulle's time. Sarkozy declared to the *New York Times* in September 2007, 'if France doesn't take the lead, who will? Like so many presidents before him, Sarkozy believes that France is in a unique position to steer world affairs, that French values are universal and therefore ultimately destined to radiate throughout the world.'