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Shaping French Foreign policy for the next 5 years:

Ségolène Royal vs. Nicolas Sarkozy

On 22 April 2007, the first round of the French presidential elections, widely regarded as the most unpredictable in years, resulted in the selection of two candidates for the run-off on 6 May 2007. With an exceptionally high turnout (almost 85%), French voters set the scene for a classic left-right contest between the socialist candidate, Ségolène Royal (25.87%) and the centre-right/Gaullist candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy (31.18%).

The presidential election put the 5th Republic back on track. The memory of the Le Pen trauma of 2002¹ led to a high voter turnout as well as a reshuffling of the votes to traditional political parties, to the detriment of small parties and the extreme right. However, the resurgence of the centrist party, “Union pour la Démocratie Française” (UDF), on the French political spectrum is to be noted. The 18.5% of votes obtained by the UDF means that the two front-runners are dependent on François Bayrou’s electorate in order to win in the next round. As the centrist candidate’s future depends on his ability to consolidate the identity of his party and to remain independent for the next two runs of parliamentary elections in June; the die is far from being cast.

The outcome of the run-off is not only of significant importance for French citizens but also for the rest of the world, particularly Europe. While many European presidents are devoid of real power this is not the case for the French president, as he/she determines foreign policy issues in France almost unchallenged. This being the case, the result of the forthcoming final ballot will have profound implications for France's foreign policy, not least, due to the candidates diverging policies in this regard.

This paper intends to outline the two run-off candidates' respective foreign policy positions and point out what their ideas would entail.

I. Two ways to a stronger Europe

The two runners-up, Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy, have both been laying out their policies regarding the EU. Both are clearly in favour of re-activating the European constitutional process. However, the two candidates have stated that neither of them is willing to accept the treaty in its present form since the French population rejected it in 2005². In fact, the two remaining candidates see eye to eye on a number of issues.

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Similarities:

- The ECT is unacceptable in the form rejected by French and Dutch voters in 2005
- The EU needs reforms to function properly after recent enlargements
- There should be no reference to Christianity in a new text
- The provisions concerning the CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) should be strengthened
- The proposed US missile defence shield should be discussed at the European level
- Protectionism against globalisation
- Incorporating growth and unemployment into the charter of the ECB as well as increasing political control of the ECB.

Despite these similarities there are also significant differences in the European programmes of Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy. These can be summarized as follows:

Differences:

- Simplified (NS) versus a more developed treaty (SR)
- Ratification via referendum (SR) versus ratification via parliament (NS)
- Turkish EU-membership
- Two-speed Europe/Groups of leading countries

Concerning the revival of the constitutional process, Ségolène Royal, has put forward a socially-oriented proposal, which opts for further development of the existing treaty. Her programme states that she desires to build a Europe that protects its citizens. She calls for a complete revision of Part III of the ECT. Instead, she proposes an additional “protocol”³ which would deal with “new policies, social progress, public services and the environment”⁴. Nicolas Sarkozy, on the other hand, advocates a “simplified-treaty”⁵. According to Nicolas Sarkozy, Europe needs to reform urgently in order to become more efficient: only a simplified and pared-down version of the treaty can ‘unblock’ Europe⁶. Substantially, the new text would retain the legal innovations acquired since the Treaty of Nice (2001) so as to enable the EU institutions to work more efficiently. Furthermore, he proposes that the European Parliament elects the Commission President and that the Commissioners are chosen by the Commission President so as to create a real team. Also the election of a long-term President of the Council, as well as the creation of the post of EU Minister of Foreign Affairs, is to be part of this simplified treaty.

As regards the new treaty’s ratification, Ségolène Royal proposes a new referendum while Nicolas Sarkozy wants to avoid going down the route of a referendum, advocating the option of ratifying the treaty by the French parliament instead.

A two-speed Europe/Groups of leading countries

An issue often put forward by the pro-integrationists in the EU is the idea of forging ahead with an elite group of select member states in a core Europe. The question of a two-speed Europe has not, at least recently, been addressed by Ségolène Royal, but according to her spokesman and foreign affairs adviser, Gilles Savary, Royal does not

support the two-speed Europe idea. However, he admits that her plans about re-launching Europe with Germany, Italy and Spain could lead to a “quartet” of nations leading the way and as such, open up the possibility of having ‘treaties within the treaty’⁷. As for Nicolas Sarkozy, in his view an effective EU is needed more than ever based on a new and flexible model, one of his key proposals in this regard being the creation of *ad hoc* groups of countries – on the model of the first G5 (United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and France, Italy) meeting held in May 2003 on security and immigration issues. Poland would also be able to join this group in the future.⁸

In this regard, he has proposed doing away with unanimity, preferring an extension of qualified majority voting, co-decision and double majority voting⁹. Under such a system, Member States disagreeing on certain issues would not prevent the rest of the EU from “going ahead”.

Another issue where the two front-runners do not see eye-to-eye concerns the enlargement of the European Union. Ségolène Royal has stated that it is necessary to take a break in the enlargement process¹⁰, but at the same time (and in this she differs not only from her rival but also from French public opinion at large) she has signalled that she will not rule out the possibility of Turkey joining the EU. Nicolas Sarkozy has on the other hand firmly stated that he is clearly against Turkey ever becoming a member of the EU. Instead he proposed the status of “privileged partners” to Turkey and other EU neighbours. Furthermore, he states that no further enlargement should take place without institutional reform¹¹.

II. Transatlantic relations

The principle of autonomy and speaking its own mind *vis-à-vis* the United States is a matter of consensus in France - a legacy of the Gaullist era. During Chirac’s presidency, France became the most fervent opponent of US intervention in Iraq.

The views of the two leading candidates, Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy, remain to some extent in line with this basic consensus. Both candidates condemned the US military intervention in Iraq, calling it either “a tragic mistake”¹² (SR) or an “historical mistake”¹³ (NS). Nonetheless, Nicolas Sarkozy has put some distance between himself and the Gaullist legacy, saying that he regretted France’s “arrogance” towards the US.

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Unlike most French politicians, Nicolas Sarkozy, has a genuinely positive view of the US¹⁴, which was emphasized during his trip to the US in September 2006 when he spoke only in warm terms about relations with the US and got himself photographed with George W. Bush. However, since then he has realized that his pro-Americanism is domestically damaging and subsequently he played it down.

In relation to security issues, Sarkozy has in several instances made it clear that he embraces many American ideas. Firstly, he has expressed his admiration for the former mayor of NYC, Rudy Giuliani, for re-establishing security and cleaning up the city. Secondly, he said that if he is elected president, he would create a National Security Council centralising information on both internal and external security matters¹⁵, and that this would be modelled on the existing American example. Thirdly, he would join the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) founded in 2001 by the US Senator Sam Nunn and Ted Turner, which is backed by the IAEA and the UN, and financially supported by Warren Buffet¹⁶. Overall, it can be assumed that Sarkozy is more likely than Royal to improve France's relations with America.

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In contrast, Ségolène Royal stays in line with the traditional Gaullist principle of absolute autonomy *vis-à-vis* the US combined with left-wing anti-Bushism, both of which are playing well domestically. While prior to and during the election campaign, Ségolène Royal travelled quite extensively to Europe, China, the Middle East as well as Africa in order to boost her international stature, significantly, she cancelled her trip to the US. Whether this was because, as was rumoured, Hilary Clinton refused to meet her or not, this development shows that the transatlantic relationship is not high on the agenda of the socialist candidate. Indeed, she has made very few statements regarding her position on relations with the US. She acknowledges that the American people are France's friends and allies but she seizes any opportunity to mark her strong opposition to the current American administration.

Royal's anti-Bush pronouncement are often linked with attacking Nicolas Sarkozy's Atlanticist tendencies. For example her team called him a "a neo-conservative with a French passport" and even "Bush's poodle". Yet, it should be borne in mind that

Ségolène Royal is not particularly anti-American by French standards; when she talks, for instance, about the USA as a “hyper-power” or multipolarity, she is only echoing the traditional terminology of the socialist party¹⁷.

Differences:

- Instinctive pro-Americanism (NS)
- Anti-imperialism and scepticism towards the policies of the current US administration (SR)

Despite these conflicting attitudes and sets of values regarding the transatlantic partner, Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy would conduct quite similar policies.

First, both candidates seek to counterbalance the American power by strengthening Europe politically and militarily. While for the socialist candidate, re-equilibrating the transatlantic relationship seems to be an end in itself, with Europe as the means to achieve it¹⁸, for the UMP candidate this policy would be initiated because the USA can no longer ensure the security of Europe. For both candidates, autonomy seems to be a motto. For Ségolène Royal autonomy could be achieved, among other ways, by working towards an independent arms industry, while for Nicolas Sarkozy, it is imperative that Europe takes care of its defence since the security of Europe is not necessarily a primary strategic concern of the US.¹⁹

Second, the two front-runners agree on the attitude to be adopted towards NATO, which is seen as a tool at the disposal of the hegemonic power. Both of them will maintain the participation of France in the institution but intend to limit NATO's prerogatives in order to prevent it from substituting itself to the UN. Symbolically, Nicolas Sarkozy has softened this stance, saying that NATO and ESDP are complementary and that it is only due to the existence of NATO that EU construction was made possible²⁰. In short, the aim of both candidates is to circumscribe NATO's activities to military operations.

Similarities:

- Condemning the US administration's unilateral decision to go to war in Iraq
- Promoting multilateral decision-making at the international level

- Balancing the US hegemony and ensuring autonomy through the reinforcement of Europe
- Limiting the prerogatives of NATO to prevent it from substituting itself to the UN
- Willing to maintain autonomy in relation to the USA
- Supporting the USA in its efforts to fight terrorism but refusing to subscribe to the so-called clash of civilization terminology.

Despite the fact that Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy have quite similar policies concerning transatlantic issues, until a change of administration occurs in the US, it may be expected that the nature of the transatlantic relationship will be different depending on whether “Sarkozy the American” or Ségolène Royal, widely regarded as anti-Bush, is elected.

III. Greater Middle East

On the question of a nuclear Iran, the policy positions of the two candidates demonstrate both common ground and differences. From the outset, Ségolène Royal has stated that Iran should neither have the right to develop nuclear power for civilian – even though it is Iran’s right according to the Non-Proliferation Treaty – nor for military purposes. This view is not shared by Nicolas Sarkozy who called it “irresponsible”²¹. According to him, Iran should have the right to develop nuclear power for civilian purposes if it fulfils the requirements in the Non-Proliferation Treaty. On the question of how to solve the current crisis, they both advocate a diplomatic solution as the way forward since both believe that a new war in the region would have grave consequences. Nevertheless, while seeking a diplomatic solution the two candidates do not rule out the possibility of toughening sanctions against Iran if it does not cooperate. Ségolène Royal opposes all unilateral action against Iran; in her view, pressure must be exerted via Security Council resolutions. Nicolas Sarkozy on the other hand does not rule out imposing tougher sanctions without UN Security Council approval.

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Immediately after she had been elected presidential candidate of the Socialist Party, in December 2006, Segolène Royal chose to visit the Middle East in order to bolster her international stature. In Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories and Israel she decided to meet with all political actors including controversial ones such as members of pro-Syrian parties and the Hezbollah party in Lebanon. Her first official international trip was perceived as marred by a series of gaffes. Also, her proposals for the region are only to be achieved in a European framework of actions. Segolène Royal's Presidential Pact states that she would launch, in collaboration with European partners, an International Peace and Security Conference for the Middle East²². Most of her statements on the Middle East are unexpectedly to be found in a speech on Europe where she states she is in favour of immediately resuming European aid to the Palestinians and believes that allowing the possibility of a civil war there was an irresponsible way of counting on the elimination of Hamas.²³

Nicolas Sarkozy sees the Arab World through another lens and focuses more on the Mediterranean region. He wants to build a Mediterranean Union that would promote development and freedom on the other side of the Mediterranean sea but also resolve security and immigration issues on the European continent. He believes that "the European dream needs the Mediterranean dream" and would like France to take the lead in this project and become a major Mediterranean power²⁴. In the Middle East, Nicolas Sarkozy would support what he calls moderate regimes and he wishes to see Lebanon free from any external interference. On the Middle East, re-launching the peace process in order to see the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian state as well as a reinforcement of Israel's security is also high on his foreign policy agenda. Conflict resolution in the region, he believes, will be achieved by economic development; Europe has a role to play in all of this.²⁵

Similarities

- Strong preference for a diplomatic solution concerning Iran
- Favouring tougher sanctions against Iran if it does not comply with the UN resolutions
- Preference for collective framework of action instead of bilateral action towards the Arab world

Differences

- Allowing Iran to develop nuclear power for civilian purposes or not
- Taking action against Iran through the UN Security Council or not
- Resuming aid to the Palestinian Authority (SR)
- Stronger initiative on Mediterranean for NS

IV: What to expect from the two candidates

No matter which of the two remaining candidate becomes the next French president one thing is certain: Europe will play an essential role in France's foreign policy over the next five years – whether for pragmatic reasons (NS) or more idealistic ones (SR). Regarding the transatlantic relationship, an obvious and immediate *rapprochement* is to be expected if Nicolas Sarkozy is elected, although a warming of relations could also be envisioned with Ségolène Royal if the Democratic Party takes power in the next presidential election in the US. However, as Andrew Moravcsik underlines, the positions of the candidates in matters of foreign policy are “overall, more moderate than those taken by the incumbent Jacques Chirac.”²⁶

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¹Makes reference to the last presidential elections, in 2002, when the extreme-right candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, qualified for the second round on the election, eliminating the socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin. The astonishing outcome of the first round provoked mass protest and led to the re-election of Jacques Chirac with the amazingly high score of 82,21%.

² « La Constitution préparée de façon excellente par Valéry Giscard d'Estaing est morte » Sarkozy, Nicolas. “Le “tout sauf Sarko” est une construction médiatique”, *Le Monde*, 26 April 2007. « Le traité est caduc »

Royal, Ségolène. « L'Europe par la preuve », Press Conference at the National Assembly, 11 October 2006, *Désirs d'avenir* (official website of the candidate),

http://www.desirdavenir.org/index.php?c=sinformer_discours&id=191, last accessed 13 March 2007.

³ Cf. Proposition 90 in Ségolène Royal's Presidential Pact: « Upgrade the standard of living and the social protection in all European countries thanks to a social protocol », Ségolène Royal, « 100 propositions pour un Pacte présidentiel », *Désirs d'avenir* (official website of the candidate),

http://www.desirdavenir.org/index.php?c=sinformer_propositions&serie=9, last accessed 15 March 2007.

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- ⁴ Royal, Ségolène. « Je ne dois rien à personne si ce n'est au peuple français », *Le Monde*, March 6 2007, p. 8.
- ⁵ Sarkozy, Nicolas. « Je veux que l'Europe change », speech delivered in Strasbourg on 21 February 2007, UMP website, http://www.u-m-p.org/site/index.php/ump/s_informer/discours/je_veux_que_l_europe_change, last accessed 13 March 2007.
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- ⁷ Rennie, David. "Segolene urges Britain to choose between Europe and America", *Telegraph*, 22 November 2006.
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- ¹⁰ "Dix enjeux de politique étrangère", *Le Monde*, 16 April 2007.
- ¹¹ Sarkozy, Nicolas. "Le "tout sauf Sarko" est une construction médiatique", *Le Monde*, 26 April 2007.
- ¹² Royal, Ségolène. Discours de Metz, 11 April 2007, http://www.desirsdavenir.org/index.php?c=sinformer_discours&id=1527, last accessed April 12, 2007.
- ¹³ Nicolas, Sarkozy. « Mes objectifs en matière de politique étrangère », 28 February 2007, UMP website, http://www.u-m-p.org/site/index.php/ump/s_informer/discours/mes_objectifs_en_matiere_de_politique_internationale, last accessed 14 March 2007.
- ¹⁴ Sarkozy, Nicolas. « J'aime l'énergie et la fluidité de l'Amérique », *Le Monde*, 11 September 2006.
- ¹⁵ Sarkozy, Nicolas. "Profession de foi", Défense nationale et sécurité collective, April 2007, pp. 34-35.
- ¹⁶ It is interesting to note that Nicolas Sarkozy, made it his own this initiative without mentioning where it came from, as if it was his own. Cf. Sarkozy, Nicolas, « Mes objectifs en matière de politique étrangère », 28 février 2007, site de l'UMP, http://www.u-m-p.org/site/index.php/ump/s_informer/discours/mes_objectifs_en_matiere_de_politique_internationale, 14 March 2007. For more information on the NTI, <http://www.nti.org/>, last accessed April 24th, 2007.
- ¹⁷ This concept was put forward by Hubert Védrine, Foreign Minister during the Jospin government (1997-2002). Royal, Ségolène. « L'Europe par la preuve », op.cit.
- ¹⁸ Royal, Ségolène. Allocution sur la Défense, Paris, March 3 2007, *Désirs d'avenir*, http://www.desirsdavenir.org/index.php?c=sinformer_discours&id=1082, last accessed March 14 2007.
- ¹⁹ Sarkozy, Nicolas. Interview paru dans le mensuel "Défense et Sécurité Internationale", March 2007, <http://sarkozyblog.free.fr/index.php?2007/03/04/324-la-politique-de-defense-selon-nicolas-sarkozy>, 12 March 2007.
- ²⁰ Sarkozy, Nicolas. « Mes objectifs en matière de politique étrangère », February 28 2007, UMP website, http://www.u-m-p.org/site/index.php/ump/s_informer/discours/mes_objectifs_en_matiere_de_politique_internationale
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²¹ Sciolino, Elaine. « Sarkozy outlines foreign policy », *International Herald Tribune*, February 28 2007.

²² Cf. Proposal 92. Royal Ségolène, « 100 propositions pour un Pacte présidentiel », *Désirs d'avenir*, http://www.desirdavenir.org/index.php?c=sinformer_propositions&serie=9, last accessed March 15 2007.

²³ Royal, Ségolène. « L'Europe par la preuve », *op. cit.*

²⁴ Sarkozy, Nicolas. « Mes objectifs en matière de politique étrangère », *op.cit.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Moravcsik, Andrew. « On foreign policy, plus ça change... », *International Herald Tribune*, April 18th, 2007.