

Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union

Volume 2008

Article 8

February 2012

Sarkozy's New Diplomacy: A Reassessment of the Third Rift in Franco-American Relations

David Drake
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu>



Part of the [Comparative and Foreign Law Commons](#), [European Law Commons](#), [International Law Commons](#), and the [International Relations Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Drake, David (2008) "Sarkozy's New Diplomacy: A Reassessment of the Third Rift in Franco-American Relations," *Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union*: Vol. 2008, Article 8. DOI: 10.5642/urceu.200801.08

Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu/vol2008/iss1/8>

This Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Journals at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union by an authorized editor of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

SARKOZY'S NEW DIPLOMACY: A REASSESSMENT OF THE THIRD RIFT IN FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

David Drake

Though at first glance, Franco-American relations since the presidency of Charles de Gaulle seem to represent a fifty year love/hate relationship, they are in reality far more complex. Georges-Henri Soutou identifies a series of rifts and reconciliations between the two nations, culminating in the recent rift following the Iraq war (102), one that may well be remembered in textbooks by the embarrassing appellation, the "Freedom Fries Rift". Today, hostilities between France and America seem to be such a part of the geopolitical status quo that they are taken for granted. For French politicians, anti-American rhetoric is far from taboo, and snide pot shots at the Bush administration usually result in a surge of approval. In America, the conditions are much the same, with Donald Rumsfeld dismissing France out of hand as part of an obsolete "old Europe." Condoleezza Rice was quoted as telling the President to "punish France, ignore Germany and forgive Russia." Even former presidential candidate Mitt Romney, who speaks fluent French and lived two years in France during his college years, could not resist a passing remark underlining France's unimportance on the world stage (Romney, paragraph 17). Using France as a bogeyman has been a cornerstone of Republican policy since 2003 (Canellos, para 2) and for many Americans, belittling the 'cheese-eating surrender monkeys', (a phrase first coined by The Simpsons) pays off with an immediate surge in support.

It is clear, then, that we are experiencing a rift in relations, to put it mildly. The arrival of President Nicholas Sarkozy adds a surprising new twist to the story. Unlike his predecessor, Sarkozy seems enthusiastic about repairing this rift and makes no secret about his admiration for American policies and values. Those who have seen a pattern of rifts and reconciliations may have seen Sarkozy's election as the harbinger of a third reconciliation. Indeed, as President Bush prepared to meet with French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Maine in August of 2007, Georgetown University professor Charles Kupchan said that there was reason to believe the two countries would develop a reliable partnership on areas of mutual concern, such as the humanitarian situation in Darfur, Sudan and nuclear weapons nonproliferation. "The United States and France ought to be the closest of allies, and in fact they were," Kupchan said, in reference to their 18th-century relationship. The two countries

Sarkozy's New Diplomacy

"are quite similar in terms of nations ... that see themselves as the founding nations of liberal democracy" (Kaufman, para. 3). Even ultra-conservative Ann Coulter, outspoken critic of the French, goes so far as to call Sarkozy "their first pro-American ruler since Louis XVI".¹ A gross exaggeration, to be sure, but reflective of the willingness of even the conservative pundits to forgive and forget France's supposed betrayal over the Iraq War.

Others are not so optimistic. In late 2004, French historian and political scientist, Georges-Henri Soutou published the article: "Three Rifts, Two reconciliations: Franco-American Relations During the Fifth Republic." Soutou proposes that the current rift will be a lasting one with no reconciliation in view. He attributes this to four factors. The first is that the French have recently changed the way they view foreign policy. They no longer see close bilateral Franco-European cooperation as being in their best interests. The second is that French geopolitical strategy emphasizes a united Europe, led by a Franco-German alliance. This strategy implies a certain resistance to NATO and American unilateralism. This leads to Soutou's third obstacle, that of ideological differences between France and the United States. His final obstacle is the institutional development of French domestic politics, which structurally prevents a transatlantic rapprochement (Soutou 2004, 7). "Thus," continues Soutou, "while maintaining Franco-American relations on an even keel has never been an easy task, repairing the breach in bilateral relations occasioned by the Gulf War of March 2003 will therefore be even more difficult than in times past" (2004, 6).

While much has been written on the subject of this rift, Soutou's article is of interest because it not only takes a historical perspective on Franco-American relations, but does so from the point of view of a French political scientist. Now it is 2008, and the election of President Nicholas Sarkozy was an unforeseen political event that gives cause for a re-assessment of Soutou's negative prediction on the likelihood of reconciliation. One of the pillars of Sarkozy's foreign policy is to re-establish strong ties with the United States. Sometimes called the anti-anti American, Sarkozy spoke across the Atlantic during his 2007 victory speech, promising "You can count on our friendship."² While it is too early in his presidency to examine whether or not he has been successful, we can examine each of Soutou's four obstacles and see what Sarkozy initially has done to overcome them. If all four issues seem on their way to resolution, America and France might actually experience a third reconciliation in the foreseeable future.

SIGNIFICANCE

Perhaps another way to ask this question is "Why should we even care?" What does America have to gain from getting the approval of their snobbish rivals? Why should France try to win over the boorish Americans? As much as American tourists would enjoy vacationing in Paris without pretending to be Canadians, there must be a more pressing reason to attempt a transatlantic reconciliation.

If America is set on continuing its unilateral approach to foreign relations, then the opinion of France is not a pressing concern. However, should they seek to regain moral authority and soft power to complement their military strength, it must seek to regain the trust of Europe. If they can silence the accusing voices of the French, they will make great strides towards regaining their lost moral high ground as a benevolent superpower. France has even more to gain. As Garton Ash points out, Europe would do better to befriend the world's only *hyperpuissance*, and influence its actions in this manner, than to turn them into an enemy while trying in vain to establish themselves as a global counterweight (2004, 201).

STATISTICAL EVIDENCE:

Because Sarkozy has only been president since May 2007, it is still too early to see all of the statistical information that would reveal improvements in the relation between France and America. What few statistics are available seem to indicate that a positive relationship is developing.

In 2007, despite an economic slowdown in the U.S., brought on largely by the housing market slump and the tightening of credit, the United States remained the largest foreign investor in France. Overall, U.S. investment in France results in nearly 3,000 companies and supports 600,000 French jobs. At the same time, France is the second largest investor in the U.S., supporting almost 550,000 American jobs. Approximately \$1 billion in commercial transactions take place between France and the U.S. every business day (Invest in France Agency).

TABLE 1: U.S. TRADE WITH FRANCE IN GOODS, 1997-2005

	(Billions of Dollars)								
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Exports	16.0	17.7	18.9	20.4	19.9	19.0	17.0	19.6	20.7
Imports	20.6	24.0	25.7	29.8	30.4	28.2	29.2	31.5	33.5
Balance	-4.6	-6.3	-6.8	-9.4	-10.5	-9.2	-12.2	-11.9	-12.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

While some decrease in exports is evident in 2003, both exports and imports have been growing since then. While these numbers do not yet show Sarkozy's influence on trade, they do suggest that from an economic perspective, the rift following the invasion of Iraq was short-lived (CRS Report for Congress).

In the matter of public opinion, the effects of the rift seem to be repairing themselves as well, as this poll of American adults reveals (Gallup Poll. Feb. 11-14, 2008. N=1,007 adults nationwide. MoE \pm 3).

"Next, I'd like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. Is your overall opinion of [see below] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?"

France	Favorable	Unfavorable
2/3-6/03	59%	33%
3/14-15/03	34%	64%
2/9-12/04	47%	49%
2/6-9/06	54%	40%
2/1-4/07	57%	38%
2/11-14/08	69%	27%

The effects of the 2003 rift can be seen, from the drastic drop in opinion from February to March. However since that time American opinion on France has been slowly improving, culminating in an astonishing 12 point jump during Sarkozy's first year. Opinion polls in France also indicate improvement, albeit on a slower scale. In 2004 only 17 percent of those polled thought America's presence in Iraq was effective in combating terrorism, compared to 80 percent who did not (TNS-Sofres 2004). In 2006, however, 37 percent of

those polled thought the actions of the United States were effective in preventing terror, while 45 percent did not (TNS-Sofres 2006). Unfortunately, data regarding French opinion in 2007 was not available as of yet, so we cannot see Sarkozy's influence on French public opinion regarding America. In addition, the question is about American presence in Iraq and its role in the war on terror, not a blanket approval rating like the question to the Americans. Still, considering that this is the main point of contention in the 2003 rift, this 20 percent increase in optimism is promising.

SOUTOU'S FOUR OBSTACLES

Foreign Relations

Soutou's first obstacle to a reconciliation is French foreign policy. He claims the French no longer see their interest lying in a close bilateral relationship with the United States, even on terms favorable to France. This is partly because of an emphasis on a Gaullist policy of national independence, but even de Gaulle sought some sort of useful transatlantic relationship to accomplish this end. Soutou blames this shift on the emphasis on 'multipolarity', (the word *multipolaire* has appeared in 152 speeches or declarations of Jacques Chirac between his assumption in office in 1995 and the 2003 rift) (Soutou 2004, 7). In essence, France sees the bipolar Cold War world shifting towards a unipolar world where American hegemony is unchecked. Consequently, the French see American foreign policy as dangerous, because it leads to a 'clash of civilizations' and to instability. French foreign policy, then, was to resist American unipolar foreign policy within a framework of multipolar institutions, such as the European Union and the United Nations. "For the French, 'multipolarity' is not meant to enhance or even to modify the global role of the United States, but to reduce it, because American power and policy are currently regarded as excessive and unbalanced" (Soutou 2004, 7).

Sarkozy is realigning French foreign policy. In so doing, he is removing some points of opposition between French and American goals. In essence, he is returning to de Gaulle's policy of seeking closer ties with the United States, aiding the larger power while at the same time asserting French interests and opinions. This approach, while a drastic change from his predecessors, reflects French public opinion. In September of 2004, French newspaper *Le Monde* performed an opinion poll by telephone asking questions about America and its role in the world. Of 1,000 people polled, 90 percent thought it important that France develop good relations with America, while only 9 percent did not see this as important (TNS-Sofres, 2004). Sarkozy's efforts to assert French independence while still seeking a useful relationship with the United States can be seen in his recent initiatives regarding Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran.

While both nations disagreed over the invasion of Iraq, Sarkozy wishes France to play a positive role in promoting regional support aimed at bolstering Iraq's sovereignty and national reconciliation. Already in 2006, Sarkozy was causing a stir of comments when in a speech in Washington he criticized French 'arrogance' and indicated that such disagreements among allies that led to the 2003 rift should never again become a 'crisis' (Ramsay 2007, 330). Sarkozy, calling France's opposition to the American-led war in Iraq "a disagreement," told the French American Business Council: "I never quite understood why we had to fight with the United States. I never quite got it."³ In French Foreign Minister Kouchner's August 2007 visit to Baghdad, and in subsequent meetings, France has signaled that it is ready to play a more supportive role in Iraq (Stapleton). French Ambassador Pierre Vimont had this

to say: "We still think that no military solution can be reached in Iraq, but a political solution is possible. France has remained in Iraq since 2003. We have an embassy there having a dialog with the different communities. We have said that we are ready to help, to host a political conference with all the political communities inside Iraq to see if we can help people talk to each other and work together to get out of the present confrontation in these communities." This willingness to help shows how France is willing to work with the U.S. in the area of foreign policy while maintaining its individual stance as a major power.

Afghanistan is another foreign policy issue in which Sarkozy has changed the status quo to be more supportive of America. Sarkozy told members of the United States Congress in his November 2007 speech:

From day one, France decided to participate shoulder to shoulder with you in the war in Afghanistan. Let me tell you solemnly today: France will remain engaged in Afghanistan as long as it takes, because what's at stake in that country is the future of our values and that of the Atlantic Alliance. For me, failure is not an option. Terrorism will not win because democracies are not weak, because we are not afraid of this barbarism. America can count on France (para. 35).

Under Chirac, France often seemed to be looking for a way to get out of Afghanistan rather than remain⁴. The national opinion was one of discouragement towards the war, and the general feeling was that the army had lost sight of its purpose. Despite these concerns, Sarkozy has stated that France is ready to stay as long as needed, and if necessary will increase its military presence. According to remarks given by the French Ambassador to the United States during a visit to Brigham Young University, this will be announced at the next NATO summit.

In November of 2007, Sarkozy joined with Bush in expressing worry over the growing assertiveness of Vladimir Putin's Russia. Here, Sarkozy is able to not only help America attain a foreign policy goal that they have in common, but also show how it can be done through French diplomacy. Sarkozy took advantage of what he called a friendship between France and Russia to speak to Putin about sensitive issues of media freedom, Tehran, foreign investment, energy, and Kosovo⁵. The issue of Kosovo's independence went quickly from a hypothetical to a reality in February of 2008. As Bush saluted Kosovo's independence, stating that he was confident that "history will prove this to be the correct move⁶," Sarkozy was also recognizing Kosovo's independence and proposing the establishment of diplomatic relations between France and Kosovo. Despite opposition from both Belgium and the Netherlands, France has been urging Serbia to accept Kosovo's declaration of independence and to allow Belgrade to sign a rapprochement accord with the EU before the Serbian elections of May 2008. In the matter of Kosovo, there is once again division among the EU member states, with six countries stating that they would not recognize Kosovo's independence any time soon. Unlike the division that split the EU states in 2003 over Iraq, France finds itself on the same side of the debate as America when it comes to Kosovo⁷.

On Iran's nuclear ambitions, President Sarkozy and Foreign Minister Kouchner both have called that country's development of nuclear weapons capability "unacceptable," and spoken out in favor of negotiations backed by stiffer sanctions (Stapleton, para 12). Washington was happy to hear Sarkozy warn French diplomats on August 27th that "an Iran with nuclear arms is, to me, unacceptable" (Ramsay 2007, 330). He even went so far as to

say that the initiative for sanctions is "the only one that can enable us to escape an alternative that I say is catastrophic: the Iranian bomb or the bombing of Iran" (Ramsay 2007, 330). This tough stance on Iran's nuclear program, which envisions new punitive sanctions that will hurt French business interests, is welcomed by the White House.⁸ During his March 21st visit to Paris, presidential candidate John McCain praised Sarkozy for his efforts in this area: "President Sarkozy has already recommended that we join together with meaningful sanctions on Iran that would deter them on their path of acquiring nuclear weapons," he said. "I believe that it could be very effective and I believe President Sarkozy's leadership on that issue is very important." It is this sort of willingness to act as an ally that caused McCain to add: "I think relations with France will continue to improve no matter who is president of the United States because this president is committed to greater cooperation and values our friendship" (Reuters, para. 3). For his part, Sarkozy has distanced himself from the presidential race, but promised his support to whoever wins the American election, saying, "Regardless of who is president -- male or female -- we will work hand in hand together."⁹

Sarkozy has shown that France will do more than talk about supporting the United States. At the same time, he has kept France from becoming seen as a political yes-man to the United States by opposing Turkey's joining of the European Union, (a move toward enlargement that Bush supports), and has even criticized Bush repeatedly for failing to make the environment a high policy priority.¹⁰ Sarkozy has changed France's foreign policy from one of Atlantic antagonism to that of an outspoken, yet supportive ally. In so doing, he has taken steps to resolving Soutou's concerns about conflicting foreign policy preventing a transatlantic reconciliation.

Geopolitical Interests

Soutou's second obstacle is French geopolitical strategy. This strategy has long been one of a partnership with Germany in creating and leading a strong Europe. A common European defense policy would be a crucial point in this. Through a united Europe, France has hoped to influence the global community. With this goal in mind, France has long championed the project of the European Union, often at the expense of support for NATO. President Nicolas Sarkozy changed that. In his November address to Congress, he informed the United States of his plans for NATO: "I would like France, a founding member of our Alliance and already one of its largest contributors, to assume its full role in the effort to renew NATO's instruments and means of action and, in this context, to allow its relations with the Alliance to evolve" (para. 51). He has again followed his words with action, ordering his diplomats to stop obstructing NATO's work and offering to return France to NATO's military structures (Valasek, para 1). Ambassador Villmont affirmed that France is "getting our officers back into the military organization...at the same pace as increasing the European defense".

As Sarkozy campaigned for his election, one of the geopolitical areas he promised to reform was immigration. During campaign speeches, he promised to create a ministry of immigration and national identity, to control immigration, especially from Francophone Africa. He has promised a radical reorientation of the French position in geopolitics, a system that has previously been criticized as an interventionist policy of "propping up dictators and tolerating bad governance" (Mbataru, 2007, para 6). Sarkozy promised to break from "old thinking", taking a stand against French companies that encourage corruption in Africa. In so doing, France would be joining the Americans (and the British) in putting

pressure on corrupt African regimes. This could lead to increased transatlantic cooperation in coordinating policies in Africa, a continent in which France, with its legacy of 14 former African colonies, still has a great deal of influence.

Sarkozy also presents strong support for Israel, a decision not always politically prudent in a nation with a growing Muslim population that already measures five to ten percent of the population (CIA Factbook 2006). “I have a reputation of being a friend of Israel, and it's true,” he said. “I will never compromise on Israel's security” (Ramsay 2007, 330). Though this geopolitical promise of support is sure to please the United States, Israel's long-time ally, it causes critics to point to Sarkozy's mixed Hungarian and Jewish ancestry as defining foreign policy.

The fact that Sarkozy is reevaluating French geopolitical strategy is not surprising. Soutou himself expresses doubts on the sustainability of the French geopolitical strategy of a Franco-German alliance leading Europe. “In the final analysis Germany does not share the French foreign policy agenda: while Berlin certainly wishes to redress the balance inside the Alliance, it will not be anxious to create a new imbalance for the benefit of the French” (Soutou, 11). In addition, there are many in France who have expressed strong doubts about Germany, believing it seeks to create a European Union along the lines of the German federal model. French geopolitical goals were already being scrutinized before Sarkozy took office. Under Sarkozy, they are being re-assessed and altered into something far less antagonistic to American objectives.

Ideology

Third, Soutou suggests that a fundamental difference in ideology prevents France and America from reconciliation. A current trend in French political thought is to view American values not as ‘republican’ but as ‘Anglo-Saxon’, putting them in contrast with European values (Soutou, 2004, 10). A mistrust of globalization and market liberalism has made many French suspicious of the dog-eat-dog capitalism of the U.S. A GlobeScan poll of 20 countries around the world conducted between June and August 2005 showed that the French public is unusually skeptical about the free enterprise economic system. A majority or plurality of 19 out of 20 countries agreed with the statement “The free enterprise system and free market economy is the best system on which to base the future of the world.” France alone had a minority, 36 percent, agreeing with the statement, while 50 percent disagreed. This is in stark contrast with the United States, where 71 percent agreed, while 24 percent disagreed (Stephens, 2006, para 7). French politicians, therefore, have long promised to protect its citizens from the effects of globalization. This has since evolved into a concept of “managed globalization”, the idea that

France should legislate and control globalization to protect France from the negative while embracing the trade benefits (Abdelal and Meunier, 2). While in France, even today, it is “more popular to denounce the ravages of ‘jungle capitalism’ or the ‘dictatorship of the stockholders’ than it is to praise the free market” (Meunier 2003, 22), French political and business leaders have realized that a dominant state role in running the economy is no longer possible in a European single market and a globalizing world. We have already seen that France is very open to trade, and its combined exports and imports made up nearly 50 percent of its GDP in 1997. Despite its lip service about protectionism, France remains the world's fourth largest exporter and has enjoyed a trade surplus since 1993 (Meunier 2003, 22). Sarkozy's France is seeking to “borrow American technology and economic practice;

buy American products; imitate American social policy; even dress, speak, and (perhaps worst of all) eat like Americans and yet not lose their Frenchness" (Kuisel, 1993, 3).

Another fundamental ideological difference between the two nations is a religious one. While both France and the U.S. have a political tradition of separating church and state, the French see this secularization of the state as an important cornerstone of French identity. This tradition of *laïcité*, or secularism, has been cemented in the law of 1905, but can be traced back to the French Revolution. "To this day, anything that smacks of official recognition of a religion - such as allowing Islamic headscarves in schools - is anathema to many French people."¹¹ In fact, the law approved by Chirac in 2004 banned all religious symbols from schools. This atmosphere of strict secularization makes some French commentators gaze incredulously over the ocean to see politicians campaigning from the pulpits of churches and speaking publicly of their faith in God. To print "In God We Trust" on our currency seems paradoxical to a country that sees a separation of church and state as an unapproachable divide cemented in law.

Here again, Sarkozy is seeking to change ingrained French ideology. His December 2007 visit to Pope Benoit XVI marked the beginning of a campaign to reintroduce religion into the public sphere. His goal is to reunite the secular Republic with the Catholic church, an objective that seems Herculean when one considers France's post revolutionary history. "France's roots are essentially Christian," he announced in *la discours du Latran*, going on to explain that Catholicism and the ethical values that come with it helped to form France's culture and moral values.¹² To speak so openly about religion is a huge taboo, a subject Mitterrand and Chirac left alone. To French sensibilities, religion is a matter of personal conviction, and for a public figure to actively promote religion is the secular equivalent of blasphemy. Understandably, this effort at reforming the very cultural climate of France is already meeting with waves of criticism.¹³

Why is he attempting what even the administrative genius of Napoleon failed to do, that is to reunite '*les deux Frances*' of modern republican values and ancient ecclesiastical traditions? One could be justified in pointing out that overcoming ideological barriers between France and the United States is not Sarkozy's goal in attempting this religious *renaissance*. Indeed, Sarkozy gives different reasons, saying that, in wake of rising anti-Christian sentiments, France could profit from what he calls '*laïcité positive*', or a sense of esteem for spiritual currents in political life, as well as the effect they have on the national concept of what is 'moral'.¹⁴ Whether or not Sarkozy's motives even tangentially include a rapprochement with American values, his success in this endeavor would help overcome an ideological distance between the two nations and therefore help resolve Soutou's third obstacle. A better argument would be to question the feasibility of this religious revival. In all honesty, I doubt Sarkozy's efforts will be able to accomplish what over two hundred years of secularization have cemented into society. Without discounting the possibility that some increase in spirituality may take place, it seems for now that the religious ideological differences between France and the U.S. will outlast Sarkozy's presidency.

In the arena of the economy, Sarkozy seems to be experiencing more success. He campaigned on the theme that "the French will have to work harder." In his September 18, 2007 speech to the Senate, he criticized provisions in the French pensions system and attacked the 35-hour work week. While not embracing the same market liberalism as America, Sarkozy is clearly pushing France closer in that direction than it has ever been before. The policy of managed globalization helps paint a less threatening picture of

American style capitalism. While still nothing to be embraced, it is no longer something to be feared. Sarkozy has three main tenets of economic reform: revamp French overtime, make mortgage interest deductible, and abolish the 35 hour workweek while decreasing corporate taxes. These changes are luring businesses back to France (Steiner 2007, 162). Sarkozy also proposed that employers pay a 25% premium for work beyond 35 hours a week, but be exempt from social taxes on overtime wages. In the same vein, employees would pay no income tax on their overtime wages. "This will boost productivity, but it will also change the mind-set of France's workforce," explains Philippe Favre, chief executive of Invest in France Agency. "The French, when they work, are quite productive--in production per hour they are second in Europe to Norway," says Favre, who notes that the most productive French workers will likely get the most overtime (Steiner 2007, 162). While foreign investors poured into France in record numbers in 2007, (\$88 billion worth, with a quarter of that coming from the United States), economists predict that a significant economic boost from Sarkozy's reforms will not occur until after 2008 (Steiner, 2007, 163). These reforms do more than simply revitalize the French economy, they change the French ideology to one that sees American-style economics not as a nightmare, but as a model that can be adopted to a Gallic social system.

His drive for economic reform is unsurprising. Unlike the majority of past French presidents, Sarkozy did not attend the elite *Ecole Nationale d'Administration*, and therefore did not inherit a *dirigiste* reflex. He has what the *Economist* calls "Gaullist faith in the state [mixed] with a tinge of industrial romanticism".¹⁵ This combination of philosophies makes Sarkozy see American economic ideals in a different, and more sympathetic light.

His November victory over the transportation and subway strikes is a direction of the success he is experiencing in this area. Though transportation workers went on strike for ten days after Sarkozy announced his proposed pension changes for rail workers, he held firm to the promised reforms. This was an important victory for Sarkozy, as he proved that the French government could create reforms in spite of powerful worker's unions.¹⁶ While France is still a long way off from mirroring American ideals of free-market liberalism, their economic policies are far less *dirigiste* than the double-talk of French politicians would have us believe. Sarkozy is closing the ideological gap that Soutou sees as an obstacle to reconciliation.

Domestic Politics

Finally, Soutou suggests that a structural problem exists in France that makes it impossible for an openly pro-American candidate or party to gain power. Though Soutou estimates that approximately one third of French political élites do not desire permanent tension with Washington, they no longer have the constituency to influence positive change. A long period of unemployment has destroyed the brief acceptance of liberalism that was present in the early 90's. In addition, recent immigration to France is largely anti-American, due to their sympathies with the Palestinians (Soutou 11). This explains the advice Sarkozy received that his pro-American presidential campaign was doomed to failure (Vimont).

Despite these obstacles, Sarkozy was elected. Political historian Nick Hewlett attributes his victory to the notion of Bonapartism, which can be simplified as follows: An authoritarian but charismatic leader is able to rule with an unusual degree of popularity for a relatively short period of time by claiming to be above party politics. Due to chaos among the established political forces, the leader is able to present himself as a populist, with

popularity spanning all classes. He tends to speak of nationalism and national unity, of modernisation and progress whilst conserving all that is seen as valuable in the past (the concept of 'managed globalization' being a prime example). The circumstances which bring a Bonapartist leader to power and allow them to rule are exceptional, or characterised by crisis, and the threat of return to crisis or instability if the leader departs (Hewlett 2007, 406). In other words, Sarkozy was elected partly because of dissatisfaction with the current government, and partly because of his own rhetoric, preaching a rupture with the traditions of Chirac and Mitterrand. One small aspect of this rupture was a promise to renew a friendship with America. Sarkozy nonchalantly remarked to the American Business Council that during his presidential campaign, he said he "was a friend of America, and with that, they elected me -- not bad."¹⁷

It would be presumptuous to suppose that his election represents a mandate from the people to pursue a rapprochement with the United States. Still, the fact remains that his opponent, Royal, made much of Sarkozy's pro-American sympathies both in foreign affairs and in his 'Anglo-Saxon' economic reformist ideology. According to the *Guardian*, the French see Sarkozy and his wife as 'very American' and 'à la Kennedy' (Singer 2007, 188). No matter how large a factor his love of America was in the election, his victory proves that Soutou's obstacle of domestic politics was not enough to prevent a pro-American candidate from gaining office. Though the French political structure in 2004 made such an event unlikely, the appearance of a candidate using Bonapartist campaign strategies made it possible to use a populist mandate for change and surmount these obstacles. Hewlett reminds us, however, that "Bonapartism is, and always has been, inherently unstable, because it is belt on flimsy bases" (418). Because the voters' decisions are based largely on emotional rhetoric rather than long-term policy plans, Sarkozy's power is volatile. Already, recent data shows Sarkozy's support has since waned, though this is attributed not to his pro-American policies, but rather by the public way he conducted his love life and the rising cost of living (Reuters, para 2).

CONCLUSION

Professor Barnett Singer contends that French public opinion of the United States was already improving before Sarkozy took office, and that his victory is just further proof that the so-called third rift was vastly over-exaggerated. Despite the tired examples of differences in high politics, he claims that the average French person maintained positive feelings towards the United States. He gives several alternative explanations for improvements in French public opinion that predate Sarkozy's election. One reason he attributes to the massive migration from the Third World into France over the last fifteen years (Singer 2007, 189). This influx of visible minorities makes America seem like a lifeline of hope, a nation with a melting pot legacy that has become all the stronger for it. A second reason is France's infatuation with American culture, a guilty pleasure that outwardly condemns the Coca-colonization of the world while at the same time indulges in blue jeans, American style cell-phones, backpacks, internet culture (complete with a French E-Bay, Yahoo, and Amazon), novels, and even tennis shoes (Singer 2007, 190). He shows how the French have taken to following American trends in psychology, urban development, and have even taken to indulging in American-style political correctness, (a large change for a country once famous for speaking its mind without regard to bruised feelings). These are all proofs that Singer offers to show that France has been eager for good relations with America

long before the advent of Sarkozy. These trends correlate with the previously mentioned opinion poll, where 90 percent of the French polled desired France to improve its transatlantic relations.

Singer's theory adds credence to my own. I do not seek to prove that Sarkozy single handedly turned the tide of French opinion, merely that he is making a reconciliation between the two nations more likely. After less than a year in office, Sarkozy has already begun to address each of Soutou's four obstacles to reconciliation. While it remains too early to hang a "Mission Accomplished" banner over Sarkozy's struggle to improve Franco-American relations, early signs all point to success. He is redirecting French foreign policy along a course less at odds with America. He is redefining French geopolitical interests to include NATO's success in addition to the Common European Defense Policy. He is seeking to change the economic ideals of France, creating a more open, hard-working and even religious society? Finally, he has used Bonapartist campaign strategies to overcome the structural obstacles to gaining power that Soutou predicted would prevent a pro-American party from rising. In addition, early statistical evidence suggests that relations between France and America are improving after a clear dip in 2003.

President Sarkozy concluded his remarks to Congress by reaffirming his conviction to reconcile the two nations:

I want to be your friend, your ally and your partner. But a friend who stands on his own two feet. An independent ally. A free partner...It is this ambitious France that I have come to present to you today. A France that comes out to meet America to renew the pact of friendship and the alliance that Washington and Lafayette sealed in Yorktown. Together let us be worthy of their example, let us be equal to their ambition, let us be true to their memories! Long live the United States of America! Vive la France! Long live French-American friendship! (para. 54)

From his actions during his first year in office, it is clear that Sarkozy is willing to follow these words with substantial action. A third reconciliation may not be as unattainable as Soutou predicted in 2004. The 'hyper-president' Sarkozy has done far more than simply spending his vacation time in America. He has become an unexpected instrument for change. Whether he is ultimately successful remains to be seen, but he has certainly taken the first steps towards his goal of a restored Franco-American alliance.

END NOTES

1. Human Events; 05/14/2007. Vol. 63, Issue 17, p 6
2. Wall Street Journal (Europe); 05/07/2007.
3. The New York Times; 11/07/2007, Vol. 157 Issue 54121, pA3
4. The New York Times; 12/18/2006, Vol. 156 Issue 53797, pA10
5. Associated Press Worldstream; 10/09/2007, "Sarkozy Urges Russia to embrace democracy and media freedom"
6. BBC News; 02/19/2008, "Bush Salutes Kosovo Independence"
7. International Herald Tribune; 02/18/2008, "Behind the scenes, EU splits over Kosovo"
8. The New York Times; 11/07/2007, Vol. 157 Issue 54121, pA3
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

11. BBC News; 09/01/2004 "The deep roots of French secularism"
12. Le Monde; 12/21/2007. "Nicholas Sarkozy veut remettre la religion au coeur de la vie de la cité"
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Economist; 6/30/2007, Vol. 383 Issue 8535, p58-59, 2p, 1c
16. The New York Times; 11/24/2007, Vol. 157 Issue 54138, pA6
17. The New York Times; 11/07/2007, Vol. 157 Issue 54121, pA3

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdelal, Rawi and Sophie Meunier. "The Paradox of Managed Globalization," Princeton University, <http://www.princeton.edu/~smeunier/Abdelal%20and%20Meunier.pdf> (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Associated Press. "France to Pull Troops Fighting Against Taliban In Afghanistan" *The New York Times*, Vol. 156 Issue 53797, p A10.
- Astier, Henri. "The deep roots of French secularism," *BBC News Online*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3325285.stm> (accessed April 11, 2008)
- Canellos, Peter S. "Why Romney should not revisit France." *The Boston Globe*. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/03/06/opinion/edcanellos.php> (accessed March 27, 2008).
- Carvajal, Doreen. "Strike Across France Winds Down." *The New York Times*. Volume 157, Issue 54138 (November 2007) p A6.
- Castle, Stephen. "Behind the scenes, EU split over Kosovo." *International Herald Tribune*. 02/18/2008. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/02/18/europe/diplo.php> (accessed April 12, 2008).
- Charlton, Angela. "Sarkozy urges Russia to embrace democracy and media freedom." *Associated Press Worldstream*. 10/10/2007.
- Coulter, Ann. "France Finally Gets It." *Human Events*. Volume 63, Issue 17 (May 2007): 6.
- CRS Report for Congress. "U.S.-French Commercial Ties." http://www.ambafrance-us.org/franceus/US_frenchrelations1.pdf (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Gallup Poll. "Nations." <http://www.pollingreport.com/nations.htm>. (accessed March 21, 2008).
- Garton Ash, Timothy. *Free World: America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West*. New York: Vintage Books, 2004.
- Hewlett, Nick. "Nicholas Sarkozy and the Legacy of Bonapartism. The French Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of 2007," *Modern and Contemporary France* 15, no. 4 (November 2007): 405-422.
- Invest in France Agency. "Press Release: U.S. Maintains its Lead Among Foreign Investors in France." <http://www.ambafrance-us.org/news/statmnts/2008/BilanUS2007.pdf> (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Kaufman, Stephen. "France's Sarkozy May Help Turn Page on Franco-American Relations." *America.gov-Telling America's Story*. <http://www.america.gov/st/washfileenglish/2007/August/20070810163744esnamfuak0.90086.html>. (accessed March 27, 2008).
- Kuisel, Richard F. *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft4w10060w/>

- "L'image des États-Unis auprès des Français." TNS-Sofres. http://www.tns-sofres.com/etudes/pol/151004_etats-unis_r.htm (accessed April 12, 2008).
- Mbataru, Patrick. "What Sarkozy Means for the Continent." *The Nation (Kenya)* (May 2007). (Accessed via LexisNexis on April 11th, 2008).
- Meunier, Sophie. "France's Double Talk on Globalization." *French Politics, Culture & Society* Vol. 21, No. 1, (Spring 2003).
- Ramsay, Allen. "France's New President." *Contemporary Review* 289, no. 1686 (November 2007): 323-334.
- Reuters. "McCain praises Sarkozy over Iran sanctions." Reuters. <http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSL216107620080321?feedType=RSS&feedName=politicsNews&pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=10112>. 3/30/08 (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Reuters. "Sarkozy's popularity slumps further: French poll." Reuters. <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSPAB00388020080219?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews> (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Romney, Mitt. "Mitt Romney Suspends Campaign (Transcript)." *The New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/07/us/politics/08romney-transcript.html?ex=1203138000&en=c6eb43c9d53f694b&ei=5070&emc=eta1> 3/30/08 (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Sarkozy, Nicholas. "Renewing the French-American Alliance." Speech given to Congress, 11/07/2007. Transcript found: http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2007/11/the_frenchamerican_alliance_is.html (accessed March 30, 2008).
- Sarkozy, Nicholas. *Speech to the French Senate, 9/18/2007*. Audio file. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14509757> (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Singer, Barnett. "American Images in Today's France," *Contemporary Review* 289, no. 1685 (July 2007): 188-196.
- Sciolino, Elaine. "Sarkozy throws open his arms to Bush, and the U.S." *The New York Times* 157, 54121 (Nov 7, 2007): A3(L).
- Soutou, Georges-Henri, "Three rifts, two reconciliations: Franco-American relations during the Fifth Republic," *The Atlantic Alliance Under Stress: US-European Relations after Iraq*. Cambridge University Press 2005.
- Stapleton, Roberts. U.S. Ambassador to France. "The New Openness in US-French Relations." Embassy of the United States in France Webpage. <http://213.198.100.51/ambassador/speeches/2007/fallambcouncil.htm> (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Steiner, Christopher. "Vive la Différence," *Forbes* 180, no. 2 (July 2007): 162-164.
- "The Sarko Show" *The Economist* 383, no. 8535 (June 2007): 58.
- "The World Factbook." The Central Intelligence Agency. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fr.html> (accessed April 13, 2008).
- Valasek, Thomas. "France, NATO, and European Defense." Centre for European Reform. http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/policybrief_eu_nato_26march08.pdf (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Vimont, Pierre. French Ambassador to the U.S. Remarks given to Brigham Young

University Students 3/24/08.

Wall Street Journal, "President Sarkozy." May 7, 2007, Europe, <http://www.proquest.com/>
(accessed April 7, 2008).