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Aspirations and Reality: French Foreign Policy and the 2012 Elections

This spring, the French will either reelect Nicolas Sarkozy for another five years or, for only the second time since General Charles de Gaulle inaugurated the Fifth French Republic in 1958, opt for a president from the Socialist Party, in this case François Hollande. Sarkozy's defeat is a distinct possibility in light of his unpopularity, France's struggling economy, and a widespread sense that the country is headed in the wrong direction and is ready for change.

Sarkozy has conducted a proactive and highly personalized foreign policy which has taken France in a more Atlanticist direction. He adopted a tougher line than the United States on Iran's nuclear program and Syria's resistance to democratic reforms, took the risk of a military intervention to oust Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, and helped to install the winner of the Ivory Coast's presidential elections. On the economic and financial issues that have dominated so much of the international agenda during his term, Sarkozy has shown strong leadership in Europe, the G8, and the G20. Yet he has been unable to prevent a serious deterioration in Franco-German relations, and most of his proposals to impose new global regulations on the financial sector have not been adopted. He also has not been able to establish the privileged relations he sought with President Obama or the leaders of Russia and China.

If François Hollande wins the presidential elections, he would impart a less impulsive, less personalized, and more consensual style to French foreign policy,

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but he is not expected to significantly alter its direction. France's foreign policy since the founding of the Fifth Republic has been characterized by an essential continuity in goals and objectives, despite fundamental changes in domestic politics and on the international scene. The country's priorities have consistently been to promote democracy and human rights, international law and multilateral cooperation (UN mandates, proliferation, peacekeeping, terrorism, etc.), development and humanitarian action, and cultural, scientific, and university exchanges. Although France has often been accused of abandoning its principles when circumstances require, its engagement with the European project and relationship with the United States has brought it fairly closely into line with its principal allies on most major issues (the disagreement with the United States in 2002–2003 concerning the Iraq war being one major exception).

Can 21st century France maintain the diplomatic and military means to influence events?

This policy continuity is linked to geography, history, and the conception of France's national interests. What has most dramatically changed, however, is the increasing complexity of the international environment—with more actors (both state and non-state) and issues that must now be addressed in a multilateral rather than simply bilateral fashion. In many ways, the greatest test for France in the 21st century concerns whether it can maintain the diplomatic and military means to influence events. Whatever the outcome of the 2012 election, the next president will face the challenge of adjusting French international ambitions to shrinking means in a less Europe-centered world.

Sarkozy's Mixed Legacy

With France seeking new vectors of global influence, Nicolas Sarkozy was elected president in May 2007. A generation younger than his predecessor Jacques Chirac, Sarkozy announced a desire for "rupture," or at least an approach where everything was under consideration concerning French foreign policy. He initially appointed a foreign minister from the left, Bernard Kouchner, and several other figures not from the right to indicate he wished to break with previous practices and be more inclusive and innovative. He ordered several reports and white papers on foreign policy and defense, and pushed the debate about what could be accomplished with available resources. In his first months, he announced the "return of France in Europe" (to overcome France's rejection

of the 2005 EU referendum); a full and complete return to NATO's command structures; a reconciliation with the United States, marked in particular by sending additional troops to Afghanistan; an initiative for a Union for the Mediterranean; and a renewed relationship with Africa as well as the Middle East. These efforts were intended to underline a new French activism on the international scene.

"Rupture" in foreign affairs, however, is never easy. First, success depends very much on interactions with other countries and leaders, and always in an atmosphere of "realpolitik," with each party defending its own perceived interests. Second, reforming diplomatic and military instruments often requires painful adjustments—redeploying France's international presence or reforming the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example—and re-evaluating military basing and equipment. Resistance arises from the organizations themselves, as well as from public opinion. And finally, elements of continuity usually persist for years, no matter what energy and effort are brought to bear on them.

Sarkozy has imparted a more Atlanticist and proactive orientation to France's foreign policy, yet has fallen short of actually breaking with overall continuity. He has been the most Atlanticist of any president of the Fifth Republic—disagreeing with U.S. policy over Iraq while respecting the decision, mending fences with George W. Bush before the 2008 U.S. election, and reintegrating France fully into NATO, a move very unlikely to be reversed by a president from the Socialist Party. Regarding its relationship with the United States, France has adopted an attitude similar to Angela Merkel in Germany and Tony Blair's successors Gordon Brown and David Cameron in the United Kingdom: we are friends and as such we should talk to each other, like friends do, and periodically disagree without provoking a crisis. This convergence reflects a shared European attitude vis-à-vis the United States. While Sarkozy has not achieved his goal of establishing a privileged personal or bilateral relationship with Obama, arguably no European or other foreign leader has achieved that either.

In Europe, Sarkozy has brought France back into the mainstream after his country's vote against the so-called European Constitution in the 2005 referendum, which shook Europe and briefly marginalized France. In France and the rest of Europe, his presidency of the European Council in 2008 was deemed a success, especially in the Russia–Georgia conflict, and reinforced Sarkozy's image as a strong leader and effective problem-solver. Yet France's relationship with Germany has deteriorated significantly under the Sarkozy and Merkel tandem. The contrast in personal styles is quite real, but the root of this crucial development is Germany's ascendency and increasing self-confidence at a juncture when France is accumulating problems and seen as weaker. It is also explained by the emergence of issues on which France and Germany do not see

eye-to-eye, such as European institutions and governance, economic and fiscal policies, the financial and Euro crises, nuclear power, and intervention in Libya. Trying to improve relations with Germany will be one of the major challenges the next French president has to face.

Sarkozy's record with the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) countries is also significant, yet incomplete. He has sealed strategic political and economic relations with Russia, India, Brazil, and even South Africa, but has encountered difficulties with the pace of military or strategic trade cooperation with India and Brazil. The frustrating relationship with China also has to be redefined by the next president, but France's margin of maneuver as a mid-size power and part of Europe is restricted. On his first Asian trip in November 2007, Sarkozy emphasized trade rather than human rights, and China rewarded the French with $20 billion in contracts. However, in March 2008 Sarkozy said he would not attend the opening of the Olympics in Beijing unless the Chinese government met with the Dalai Lama or his representatives to discuss Tibet. This offended the Chinese and there were problems with the Olympic torch being relayed across France. Sarkozy ended up going to Beijing but not for the opening ceremonies, and as the European president rather than the French president. After Sarkozy met with the Dalai Lama in France, the Chinese cancelled an EU–China summit, and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao skipped France but not Germany during a European tour, even though Merkel had also met with the Dalai Lama.

In Africa, Sarkozy exploited his success in the Ivory Coast, where the anti-French Laurent Gbagbo tried to stay in power after losing the election to Hassan Ouattara. By providing decisive support to Ouattara while trying to downplay the level of its interference in the Ivory Coast's domestic affairs, France reaffirmed its influence in a crucial former colony, culminating in May 2011 when Sarkozy attended Ouattara's inauguration as president.

With North Africa and the Middle East, in the end Sarkozy has conducted a proactive policy supporting the Arab Spring and showed leadership on Libya. The most dramatic challenge this past year for the French has been the emergence of the Arab Spring. Paris, along with most others, was caught off guard by the rapidity of events in Tunisia and Egypt. The French have been playing catch up as events have unfolded and are having some difficulty in positioning themselves vis-à-vis the new or emerging governments. In Egypt, the situation is still very much in flux, and the status of the regime in Syria is increasingly challenged. After many decades of stasis, 2011 has been a year where everything has changed in that region of the world. The French have long-standing interests in the area, but the means that it can bring to bear are quite limited. Beyond declaratory support, it is difficult to see that they will be able to offer substantial assistance on their own. It is true, though, that the

European Union as a whole appears willing to extend more assistance to this neighboring area as it seeks to stabilize and consolidate recent democratic gains.

This still-evolving situation helps to explain Sarkozy's aggressive posture on Libya. After being behind the curve, Sarkozy in particular attempted to seize the initiative (along with the United Kingdom) calling for Qaddafi's departure and getting NATO involved. Certainly these efforts appear to have tipped the balance, with a new regime recognized and attempting to settle in after Qaddafi's death.

French intervention in Libya has helped to correct France's image in the United States, a few years after the Iraq crisis had painted it as weak, pacifist, and anti-American. The Libyan operation created some friction with the Obama administration, in part because of Sarkozy's arguably excessive speed in recognizing the Libyan opposition at a very early stage, when there was minimum intelligence on its composition, background, and real intentions. There were concerns that al-Qaeda could have infiltrated the Libyan Transitional National Council and that Sarkozy had involved the United States in what could turn out to be a civil/tribal war rather than one of liberation. There was also suspicion that Sarkozy's motives might be linked primarily to domestic political calculations to improve his very low popularity standing. The Obama administration was frustrated by Sarkozy's reluctance to agree to NATO's taking over the full conduct of the war. Although now a full member of NATO again, Paris still did not play by the same rules as, say, London. On France's side, there were also frustrations with Obama's attempts to limit U.S. engagement for what were seen as primarily domestic political reasons.

> The key for Paris is how to maximize diminishing French and European influence, and on what issues?

On global issues, Sarkozy has understandably concentrated on economic and financial challenges. He has taken the lead in pressing for more regulations following the financial crisis that began in 2008. His personal engagement and the direction of reforms he advocated were well-received in France, but his ability to influence the process was limited by less bold approaches in the United States and the United Kingdom. Likewise, Sarkozy pushed hard for an agreement on climate change at Copenhagen in 2009. U.S., Chinese, and Indian opposition to an ambitious agreement forced him to backtrack on environmental policies, at home and even in Europe. France alone cannot make much of a difference here, and Sarkozy has been unable to score any victories on these issues.

France still considers its seat on the UN Security Council as a recognition of its international standing and a key lever to achieve its goals. It is deeply involved in peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and economic development, but remains constrained by its own financial and domestic political realities. Like the United Kingdom, France has resisted giving up its seat on the Security Council in favor of a single EU seat. Its official position favors enlarging the Security Council to include rising developing powers (e.g., Brazil and India), but also Germany and a seat for Africa. In this arena, France will try to avoid foregoing any national advantage, even for the sake of Europe. It takes a similar stance concerning representation at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

At the end of Sarkozy's first and perhaps only term, Europe's influence in the world, and France's position in both Europe and globally, remains challenged and declining. Even French–African relations, for example, remain strained with the situations in the Ivory Coast and Rwanda demonstrating the limits of French influence. The Middle East peace situation has always retained French interest, but France has no special leverage with either side. Even the Franco-German tandem in the European Union has its fissures, such as economic governance and support for nuclear power.

France is essentially a regional power in Europe, Africa, and parts of the Middle East.

With the emerging powers, France has already encountered difficulties with China, as previously noted, and Brazil (sales of the Rafale fighter jet, for example) that indicate that France (or really any other nation) is not in a position to dictate anything to these countries. Former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva had seemed willing to buy the Rafales, but did not do so before he left office at the end of 2010. His successor, Dilma Rousseff, seems lukewarm to the idea. Finally, even U.S. interest in Europe generally appears to be flagging, as it is no longer at the center of American geopolitical concerns, while U.S. and French interests are diverging on global economic governance, whether to reinforce French troops in Afghanistan, Turkey's membership in the European Union, and the role of nuclear weapons following the "global zero" preference expressed by President Obama. The key for Paris over the next five-year presidential term is how to maximize diminishing French and European influence, and on what issues?

France's Agenda: Looking Ahead

Even though France has a global outlook, particularly through the United Nations and other multilateral organizations, it is essentially a regional power in

Europe, Africa, and parts of the Middle East. Beyond that, for its global ambitions, Paris must rely on managing its relationship with the United States, engaging on global issues, and intensifying relations with the BRIC countries. Regardless of who holds the presidency, France's foreign policy and its ability to weigh in on regional and world affairs faces four challenges:

- The global center of gravity is shifting to the East, especially toward China and India. This is the area of the world where French political, economic, and even cultural presence and influence is the weakest. Bridging some of that deficit is a major challenge and has to become a priority.
- French influence will have to be wielded through multilateral channels, whether the European Union or other organizations. Paris has extensive multilateral experience, know-how, and influence, yet it has also shaped important bilateral relationships and has a penchant for a strong, independent voice. It is likely that France's distinct voice and national leverage will be more constrained in the future. Just how France will adjust to this remains an open question.
- Economic and financial issues are playing a larger role in an age of globalization. France and the rest of the world have traditionally perceived Paris's strengths to be primarily political and cultural, not economic. Globalization's increasing domestic impact, and the issues it raises, might redirect the focus of French foreign policy. Over the last few years, the French have become acutely aware of the impact of globalization on their lives, and have welcomed some, while resisting other, necessary adjustments that need to be made domestically. France's foreign policy will have to take greater account of growing domestic economic and social challenges at home, in Europe, and beyond.

France has traditionally perceived its strengths to be primarily political and cultural, not economic.

- Resources available for foreign policy and defense are declining. Under continuing pressure to reduce budget deficits and the national debt, it will be politically more expedient for France to cut spending on foreign policy and defense than on domestic social welfare programs. What precisely will be cut is still unclear, but the number of troops, overseas operations, weapons programs, and diplomatic activities will not be spared. Even the maintenance of France's independent nuclear arsenal might also suffer, although it has already been reduced to the point where its credibility might start to be questioned anyway.

How might this Eastward shift in global affairs toward economic issues, with Paris's influence being limited by declining resources and multilateral channels, shape the French president's priorities and relations with the rest of the world?

Europe First

The winner of the election needs to re-emphasize the centrality of Europe for France.

Whether Sarkozy or Hollande is the next president, the winner of the election needs to re-emphasize the centrality of Europe for France. Europe has become as much a domestic as a foreign policy issue for France. One of Hollande's paramount tasks would be to better manage the Franco-German relationship, which has deteriorated during Sarkozy's term. It has been a major challenge for France to adjust to a stronger Germany since unification and the opening up of Eastern Europe, which has ended the political parity between the two countries. A more confident Germany does not need France to pursue its own goals either as much as Germany used to, or as much as France needs Germany.

Even though the French Socialist Party split in 2005 between partisans and opponents of the so-called European Constitution, it seems to have regained a semblance of unity, successfully sidelining the anti-European left of the party for the moment. Hollande would have to resist pressures from his left as well as the Greens for a more corporatist and protectionist Europe. But this should significantly change neither France's European policies nor Europe's direction as a whole, given France's more limited influence in a 27 member-state Europe. A Socialist president would probably not be as vocally opposed to the prospect of Turkey joining the European Union as Sarkozy has been, but the French are nevertheless unlikely to support Turkish membership.

Africa and the Middle East Next

In addition to Europe, France's top priorities are Africa and the Middle East. However, France's focus is shifting away from sub-Saharan Africa to the Horn of Africa and the Persian Gulf, illustrated by its closing its military base in Senegal and opening one in Abu Dhabi. The lessons of Libya for future French foreign policy are mixed. They confirm French strategic interests in North Africa and the Middle East, despite the fact that some countries and areas such as Libya, Saudi Arabia, or Anglophone Africa are outside France's traditional sphere of influence. Paris is determined to coordinate with the United States in its intensive efforts to combat terrorism in Africa and the Middle East.

Libya, however, is most likely a one-off intervention: France would not wish to consider a military intervention in the Middle East only for humanitarian or democratic reasons any more than the United States or the United Kingdom would. The costs would be too high. But Libya is a sparsely populated country just across the Mediterranean from France, and its desert landscape facilitates military operations. It was a calculated risk, one that Sarkozy was ready to take. It is not certain that a less bold—some would say impulsive—French president would have made the same decision, but Jacques Chirac or François Hollande probably would not have, from what we know of the latter's personality and the Socialist Party's priorities.

The lessons of Libya for future French foreign policy are mixed.

Over the last few years, democratic elections and the replacement of a generation of African leaders have shown that the cozy relations France has entertained with Africa—what has been called "la Françafrique"—have given way to a more "balanced, modern partnership" for democracy and development. The left has traditionally been critical of la Françafrique, even though realpolitik prevailed under former President François Mitterrand from the Socialist Party. The current scandal involving revelations of cash being sent from African leaders to French presidential candidates has the potential to hurt Sarkozy's reelection chances more than make a change in France's relations with Africa. France will continue to target non-Francophone Africa, especially South Africa and Nigeria, where French investment exceeds that in Francophone countries. One of France's priorities is to turn Africa's promising economic growth and development into a greater opportunity to promote French interests, but France faces a tough competitor in China.

The left has always had a stronger inclination than the right to give priority to the developing world and "cooperation," which covers foreign aid and technical assistance. That concern could filter into political discourse, but diminishing resources will be a major constraint. France currently gives 0.5 percent of its GDP to development aid, but it may not be able to achieve its announced goal of 0.7 percent by 2015.

Challenges in U.S. Relations

If he is elected, Hollande is not expected to reverse Sarkozy's decision to fully integrate France into NATO's integrated military command, even though the Socialist Party criticized that decision when it happened. A reversal would not be understood by either the United States or the other Europeans and would be a

setback for French diplomacy. Reintegration now has to be considered entrenched. Most Socialist politicians, like a majority of the French public, have expressed a desire for French troops to leave Afghanistan. Hollande could be tempted to exploit the political advantage of promising a rapid withdrawal of French troops. The more likely option is that this will take place in due time, in coordination with the United States, rather than as a unilateral action.

Once withdrawal from Afghanistan is completed, it is plausible that France and other European countries might not participate in all of America's future foreign interventions, and vice-versa. Such decisions will not necessarily lead to a crisis, as in the case of Iraq, but are more likely to be jointly agreed. Such a development would be the result of different strategic priorities and senses of national interests, different internal political contexts, or a regional division of labor. As in Libya, the United States could let Europeans lead in North Africa or the Caucasus, limiting its contribution to logistical support. If the United States were unwilling to participate, military cooperation between France and the United Kingdom would become crucial. Yet it is also conceivable that France would not participate in U.S.-led actions while the British would choose to side with the United States.

A Socialist president would have no obvious reason to abandon Sarkozy's tough stance on Iran. Around Sarkozy, there was considerable surprise at what was considered to be the naïveté and inexperience of the early Obama administration in its dealings with Tehran. Nevertheless, Hollande is aware that being tougher than the United States on issues where Europe does not "carry a big stick" may not be an attractive option.

On Israel and Palestine, Sarkozy has wanted to re-balance France's relations which, seemingly at the expense of Israel, had tilted toward the Palestinians and Arab world more generally. Yet, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line policies have limited the benefits of such a rebalancing. The French Left is part of a broad national consensus in favor of Palestinian statehood, but is generally more critical than Sarkozy of Israel's policies toward its neighbors under Netanyahu.

The main area where friction is likely to continue is on the economy, and monetary and financial issues. France's approach to globalization has always underscored the need for trade regulation, as well as oversight in monetary and financial affairs. Tensions over international monetary policy will undoubtedly resurface periodically. The ongoing financial and economic crisis has legitimized some of France's ideas and policies, or at least many in France believe that. But France cannot do much in these matters without the backing of its European partners. Nevertheless, the scope and intensity of transatlantic ties in trade and

foreign direct investment force Europe and France to keep relations with the United States on an even keel.

If Obama is reelected, Hollande's temperament might be more to the U.S. president's liking than Sarkozy's. Even though Sarkozy often viewed Obama's popularity on the international scene with jealousy, he also expected to have a closer personal and strategic relationship with him. Obama has not obliged. Obama and Hollande are both cerebral and controlled, which could facilitate their personal rapport.

Relations with Rising Powers (BRICS)

Hollande would want to amplify Sarkozy's efforts to beef up France's political and economic relations with the BRICs. Sarkozy has sealed new strategic alliances with Brazil, Russia, India, and to a lesser extent, South Africa. In Brazil, France still hopes that the possible sale of Rafale jet fighters will facilitate a breakthrough in bilateral relations. The same is true with India, to whom France could sell nuclear plants. With Russia, Paris has made some inroads with both Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev, and is set to deliver helicopter carriers, but its relationship is not as comprehensive and intense as Berlin's with Moscow. France is much less dependent on Russian natural gas than Germany, which gives it a bit more latitude.

France's setbacks in China have been disappointing. One of Hollande's priorities would be to devise a better approach for dealing with Beijing. France's diplomatic corps long thought that the country's early recognition of the PRC and public preference for a multipolar world would go a ways toward ingratiating them with China's leaders. That, however, has not proven to be the case. On the contrary, China chose to punish Sarkozy and France for putting human rights and the Dalai Lama on the agenda just before the 2008 Olympic Games. China's ability to divide and punish in Europe makes it increasingly difficult for France to pursue any diplomacy too independent from the rest of Europe, or even the United States.

France's "Soft Power"

France has always used soft power to considerable effect, vaunting its *savoir faire* to the rest of the world. Many determinants of France's image overseas, however, are beyond the reach of presidents. For example, the retreat of the French language worldwide, to the advantage of English, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese, is a long-term trend. The Socialists traditionally value culture as a policy priority within France, and a vector for French influence overseas. Teachers and scientists posted overseas are often part of their political constituencies. The Socialists would certainly want to increase budgets, but financial constraints would also seriously limit their ambitions.

In the English-speaking world, France suffers from the outdated image of a country that is reluctant to change and take on the challenges of its time. The Socialists in power would probably confirm to some in international business circles that France is clinging to its old ways and an obsolete ideology. Foreign direct investment might suffer if the Socialists make economic policy decisions that are not deemed "business-friendly," such as on taxes or the labor market.

The Socialists, however, are likely to be more discreet than Sarkozy on immigration and integration. In the past, Middle East conflicts have had repercussions in France. During periods of heightened tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, some in the large and fast-growing Muslim population in France have fostered inter-community strife in many schools and neighborhoods. Paris's Middle East policies are often assumed to be partly constrained by the presence of such a large and potentially restive French Muslim community. Over the last few years, the decisions to ban the veil and burqas worn by some Muslim women have been publicized worldwide and generally contribute to a negative image of France's treatment of its religious minorities. The left is split between strong defenders of the French "Republican model," with *laïcité* (broadly meaning French secularism) on one side and multiculturalists on the other, and is inclined to be cautious about re-opening this kind of public debate, which could pit its own constituents against each other.

What Might Change?

Should the Socialists come to power this spring, would France change its strategic posture and major foreign policy orientations? A first remark is that it would take the Socialists some time to settle into running the government since they have been out of power for so long—17 years. If Hollande becomes president, he will arrive without ever having held a ministerial portfolio. Yes, he did graduate from the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA, the National School of Administration), has worked in government, and was First Secretary of the Socialist Party (the party chief) for 11 years, but that is very different from leading a nation and having to set up a government that would need to include representatives from the party's various constituencies. Public demands in the current climate would compel focus on domestic issues, and given foreseeable resource constraints the tendency will likely be to pull back from international commitments. Perhaps not to end existing situations, at least not immediately, but rather not to extend or expand them or take on any new initiatives. As our previous analysis suggests, most of France's international obligations are tied to long-standing French interests (*raison d'état*), so essential continuity in foreign affairs would be the likely outcome.

Hollande has virtually no foreign policy experience and the directions he would follow are still obscure. Yet his likely style of leadership, quite different from Sarkozy's, would color his foreign policy: Hollande was trained as a technocrat and groomed in politics by Mitterrand. He is cerebral, level-headed, deft, and consensual: a diplomat without being one, he had to practice the art of compromise during his long tenure as first secretary, even if he predictably made enemies of all the heavyweights of the party (because of the job rather than his personality). He seems suited more for grueling European negotiations than for taking bold decisions on war and peace.

There are also few conspicuous foreign policy experts in the Socialist Party. The most prominent remains Hubert Vedrine, the former secretary–general for the presidency under Mitterrand (1991–1995) and minister of foreign affairs under Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (1997–2002) during cohabitation with President Chirac (cohabitation refers to periods when the president and prime minister are from different parties). He has become known for calling the United States a "hyperpower," which was mistakenly perceived in the United States and elsewhere as critical (Vedrine has said he only meant that the United States was more than a superpower). His personal relations with Hollande and his future role, if any, are unclear, but Hollande is aware that giving Vedrine a prominent role in French foreign policy would not please many in Washington.

Foreign Policy—An Electoral Asset for Sarkozy?

Since he took over the presidency of the European Union for the last half of 2008 and dramatically brokered peace between Georgia and Russia, Sarkozy has developed a taste for foreign policy. He relishes the visibility offered to him by international conferences and meeting with leaders of the major nations. He understands how his natural qualities—sheer energy and determination, his force of persuasion, and mastery of substantive policy—can make a difference in European councils and help to address crises in Europe and elsewhere. He also realizes that foreign policy exposure and successes could translate into domestic political gains.

As a consequence, Sarkozy has fully invested himself in France's current presidency of the G8 and G20. He pushed for two distinct summits, in Deauville for the G8 and Cannes for the G20, despite Obama's original wish to have only one. The Cannes meeting was overshadowed by Prime Minister George Papandreou's call for a referendum in Greece, but Sarkozy still received a substantial bounce in the polls from the event. The French like seeing their country playing a leading role on the international scene, in this case only months before the presidential elections. Sarkozy is well aware that this won't be

enough to make up for his unpopularity on the domestic front, but it could at least underscore the contrast in experience with Hollande.

This is where Dominique Strauss-Kahn's absence from the race matters. Strauss-Kahn's international visibility and experience as managing director of the IMF had the effect of neutralizing Sarkozy's advantage in international affairs. DSK, as he is called, did not have Sarkozy's damaging baggage in domestic politics. The financial and Euro crises played even more in DSK's favor. If he could manage the international financial crisis, he could certainly handle France's, in close cooperation with its foreign partners. Although Hollande's area of specialization is economics, which he taught for a long time, that is little known and does not make up for his lack of international experience.

This is why, as the campaign is heating up, Sarkozy has been emphasizing his international stature and experience more and more. He portrays himself as the president who spares no effort working around the clock to help solve France's financial problems, including protecting the standard of living and savings of average French citizens. Much more than in the past, the French, like Americans and other Europeans, have become fully aware of the relevance of international events and economics to the domestic economic scene. This heightened awareness would have helped Strauss-Kahn, but now is an advantage for Sarkozy in his duel with Hollande. It is also an advantage for Sarkozy against his rival on the right, Marine Le Pen. International events have made many French people, including those attracted by the proposals of Le Pen's National Front party on domestic politics, aware of the shortcomings of a candidate like Le Pen, who has little knowledge of international politics let alone any experience. Her key proposal for France to do away with the Euro looks naïve and even dangerous in the midst of efforts to save the common currency and people's savings.

Resources have become the overarching problem of French foreign policy.

Doing Less with Less

Resources have become, in a general sense, the overarching problem of French foreign policy. With the second largest diplomatic establishment in the world (after the United States), the foreign ministry has nevertheless seen its budget consistently reduced (down 20 percent in the past 25 years) to the point where it provoked a revolt among its personnel in 2009. Various reforms have been introduced to cope with the problem of declining means, but it is ineluctable that one will end up doing less with less.

This situation is compounded by an overall international context that is not very conducive to French influence. English is now the dominant international

language, the hegemony of free market ideas is quite different from France's *dirigiste* heritage (basically a capitalist economy that includes strong government participation), general Western dominance is tempered by the emergence of new powers, the multiplication of global actors, and the complexity and longevity of current conflicts. The role of "critical ally," which France has long favored, the use of the *Francophonie* (community of French-speaking nations) card, and the Security Council veto option no longer seem as relevant and effective as they once were. Gaullist foreign policy was founded on creating subtle room for maneuvering French positions in a bipolar world—a world that has not existed for more than 20 years. Paris and others are having to adapt to more transnational issues on the international agenda such as the environment and global warming, health (AIDS and other pandemics), nuclear proliferation, and cultural diversity.

Despite basic continuity, French foreign policy today has evolved from its classic Gaullist roots. Grandeur has disappeared from the vocabulary, and independence as well as sovereignty no longer have the same meaning in today's globalized and multilateral world. Sarkozy and the French have essentially understood this development and have reduced their expectations a generation after the Cold War. France really cannot act alone on international issues anymore, although it can and does attempt to get out in front. And because the European Union's foreign policy mechanisms are slow in developing, this provides the French with an opportunity to continue to assert themselves for the foreseeable future.

Some of the old Gaullist reflexes are still there, but today's realpolitik dictates a more modest approach in line with the more limited resources available to carry out France's global vision and goals. Even as the world's fifth largest economy, a population of more than 65 million, and a global presence, there are definite limits to what France can accomplish. It is only by working closely with others, especially Europe and the United States, that France can hope to have an impact and influence that matches its aspirations. That said, the French will continue to speak out, offer criticism, and attempt to be an initiator rather than merely a reactor. No matter who is elected this spring, France is unlikely to abandon its efforts to lead, come up with new ideas, and be one of the major international players. It will just have to find new ways to do so.