

# WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 1368  
February 23, 2007

## Ségolène Royal and the Future of Franco–American Relations

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In just over two months, French voters will elect their next president. This election will be critical to the future of France domestically and to its standing in the world. France has lost significant economic and political power over the past decade and needs reform and reinvigoration. The new president must also seek to repair frayed ties with Washington. It is highly doubtful that this would happen under Ségolène Royal.

Royal, the Socialist presidential candidate has outlined a 100-policy presidential pact “for France to rediscover a shared ambition, pride, and fraternity.”<sup>1</sup> Royal is frequently touted as the face of change, a breath of fresh air, a new start for France. But almost the opposite is true: Royal represents the *status quo*. She graduated from the École nationale d’administration, the institution that has bred an entire class of French political elites; she is instinctively protectionist and virulently anti-globalist; and in true Gaullist spirit, she is no friend of America.

**Royal’s Foreign Policy.** A series of diplomatic blunders have left an indelible bad impression of French foreign policy under a Royal presidency.

In trips to the Middle East, the Far East, and South America, Royal could do no right on the diplomatic front. During her high-profile five-day Middle East trip in December, not only did she fail to react when Hezbollah legislator Ali Ammar compared Israeli actions in Lebanon to Nazism, but she even thanked him for “being so frank” when he described U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East as “unlimited American insanity.”<sup>2</sup> Matched with other

serious errors of judgment—such as praising China’s justice system and calling for independence for Quebec<sup>3</sup>—Royal has lurched from one crisis to another in foreign affairs. As BBC correspondent Clive Myrie observed, “Segolene Royal’s campaign has suffered a series of self-inflicted wounds.”<sup>4</sup>

It is highly unlikely there would be a thaw in U.S.–French relations under a Royal presidency. In what can only be described as an opportunistic attack inspired by pure anti-Americanism, she pointedly criticized her closest rival for the presidency, Nicolas Sarkozy, during his successful trip to Washington in September 2006. “My diplomatic position will not consist of going and kneeling down in front of George Bush,” Royal told the press.<sup>5</sup> Last month, she again harkened back to deep anti-American sentiment, condemning Sarkozy as a “clone of Bush” and “an American neo-conservative carrying a French passport.”<sup>6</sup>

Royal continues to snipe from the sidelines about Operation Iraqi Freedom and advocates America’s withdrawal from Iraq.<sup>7</sup> She believes that decisions about Iraq’s transition should be made solely by the Iraqi government, barely concealing her implicit criticism of American involvement in the region.<sup>8</sup>

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/research/Europe/wm1368.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/research/Europe/wm1368.cfm)

Produced by The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002–4999  
(202) 546-4400 • [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

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During her keynote manifesto speech outlining her presidential platform, she not only acknowledged the divisions caused by France's vocal opposition to the war in Iraq, but even pledged to speak "louder and stronger."<sup>9</sup>

She has also made diplomatically crass comments about President Bush. "I do not mix up Bush's America with the American people," she has said. "The American people are our friends."<sup>10</sup>

Royal was scheduled to visit Washington in December 2006 but postponed the visit because she needed more time to "finalize the programme."<sup>11</sup> In reality, Royal has alienated not just the current U.S. administration but even natural allies such as Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY).<sup>12</sup> It is therefore highly unlikely that there will be a Royal visit to Washington of any consequence before the French elections.

It is difficult to imagine a Royal presidency being anything other than a recipe for tense transatlantic relations. Royal's damaging international trips, matched with her failure to mend fences in Washington, are a realistic indication of what a

Washington–Paris axis would look like under a Royal presidency.

**Royal and the European Union.** Royal's dedication and commitment to further European integration are hallmarks of her political inclinations. In her presidential pact Royal calls for a "reconstruction of a political Europe,"<sup>13</sup> and like French leaders before her, she is deeply wedded to Brussels' integrationist, protectionist, and interventionist policies. She believes that a full and enhanced EU constitution should proceed, including those elements inimical to American strategic interests, such as a Common Foreign and Security Policy, a single EU Foreign Minister, and an independent military procurement policy.

In fact, Royal's anti-Americanism drives her European policy as much as her enthusiasm for Brussels. A key motive for backing the European Constitution is to counterbalance what she sees as "the American hyperpower."<sup>14</sup> The Socialist Party campaigned in favor of the European constitution with the slogan "A strong Europe to face up to the USA."<sup>15</sup> In line with Gaullist thinking, Royal sees

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2. Adam Sage, "Royal Stumbles in Row over attack on Israel As 'Nazi,'" *The Times*, December 4, 2006.
3. Adam Sage, "Canada Tells Royal 'don't interfere' over Freedom for Quebec," *The Times*, January 24, 2007.
4. Clive Myrie, "Gaffes Tarnish Royal's Campaign," BBC News Online, January 29, 2007, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6310557.stm>.
5. Charles Bremner, "Sarko measures up to Bush," Times Online, September 20, 2006, at [http://timescorrespondents.typepad.com/charles\\_bremner/2006/09/sark.html](http://timescorrespondents.typepad.com/charles_bremner/2006/09/sark.html).
6. Roger Cohen, "In French Politics, U.S. Serves a Purpose," *The International Herald Tribune*, January 31, 2007.
7. Daphne Barak, "Interview with French Presidential Candidate Segolene Royal," *ReporterAssociati*, February 3, 2007, at [www.reporterassociatiinternational.org/content/view/3089/2/lang\\_ar\\_AR/](http://www.reporterassociatiinternational.org/content/view/3089/2/lang_ar_AR/).
8. "Iraqi Foreign Minister Says Determined to Disband Militias," Associated Press Worldstream, November 3, 2006.
9. Craig S. Smith, "French Contender Makes Her Presidential Case," February 12, 2007.
10. Daphne Barak, "Interview with French Presidential Candidate Segolene Royal."
11. "French presidential hopeful Royal to visit United States," Servihoo.com, December 8, 2006, at [servihoo.com/Aujourd'hui/kinews/afp\\_details.php?id=145204&CategoryID=74](http://servihoo.com/Aujourd'hui/kinews/afp_details.php?id=145204&CategoryID=74).
12. "Queen of the Democrats snubs France's Royal visit," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 19, 2006, at [www.smh.com.au/news/world/queen-of-the-democrats-snubs-frances-royal-visit/2006/12/18/1166290475312.html](http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/queen-of-the-democrats-snubs-frances-royal-visit/2006/12/18/1166290475312.html).
13. Mark Beunderman, "French presidential candidates fine tune ideas for Europe," EUobserver.com, February 12, 2007, at [euobserver.com/9/23473](http://euobserver.com/9/23473).
14. "Beyond These Shores," *The Economist*, October 28, 2006.
15. "France politics: Beyond these shores," Economist Intelligence Unit, October 27, 2006, at [db.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=VWPrintVW3&article\\_id=471341432&printer=printer](http://db.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=VWPrintVW3&article_id=471341432&printer=printer).

the European Union as a competing power to the U.S., not a complementary ally. With the European constitution's lengthy policy prescriptions and deep centralization of foreign policy, Royal sees it as a way for France to project its power counter to the aims of the United States.

Tied into this, Royal has also weighed in on the U.S.–U.K. Special Relationship. Through her spokesman and foreign affairs adviser, Gilles Savary, she launched an astonishing attack on the U.S.–U.K. alliance in November in an interview with *The Daily Telegraph*, demanding that Britain chooses between being “vassals of the United States” or a fully integrated member of a highly centralized European Union.<sup>16</sup> Savary's comments amount to a major affront to the sovereign foreign policymaking of a European ally and illustrate the deep-rooted anti-Americanism driving Royal's European policy.

The French Socialists are pushing an agenda in Europe that represents a strategic threat to the United States. The Royal vision for the European Union would make Brussels a rival to America, rather than a partner. In contrast to the European vision outlined by Margaret Thatcher at Bruges in 1988, Royal wants an E.U. based on deeply integrated foreign and defense policies. This represents a major threat to

America's future coalition-building prospects and an immense challenge to constructive transatlantic foreign relations.

**Conclusion.** As a major power in Europe and a medium-sized global power, it is in France's interest to adopt a less combative and more conciliatory stance toward the United States. But as a committed Socialist and darling of the Left, Royal would steer a *status quo* course for French politics that would continue the disintegration of the Franco–American relationship and put even more distance between the Elysée Palace and the White House.

For France to be heard in Washington, the French government must adopt a new approach. This would not happen under Ségolène Royal. She has shown neither the desire nor the ability to craft a credible, conciliatory approach to rebuilding the French–American alliance and has undertaken to make Brussels, with France at the forefront, a rival power player to Washington.

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16. “Segolene urges Britain to choose between European and America,” *The Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 2006, at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/11/20/wsego20.xml](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/11/20/wsego20.xml).