

# CRS Report for Congress

## Elections in France, 2007

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Paul Gallis  
Specialist in European Affairs  
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division



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## Summary

On April 22, 2007, the first of two likely rounds of presidential elections is to take place in France. Legislative elections would follow in June. The winner of the presidential elections will have a five-year term.

Since 1981, France has had only two presidents. There is a sense of malaise in the country, in part due to high unemployment and slow economic growth. The current elections could bring to power a younger generation of leaders. The two principal candidates are the Gaullist Nicolas Sarkozy, and the Socialist Ségolène Royal. They present themselves as outsiders, prepared to bring fresh life to French democracy. A third candidate, in a field of 12, is François Bayrou, a center-right party leader. Trailing Bayrou is the racist and anti-immigrant candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Sarkozy is a tough-minded former Interior Minister whose campaign builds on his reputation as hard on illegal immigration and insistent on greater efforts by the country's large Muslim community to better integrate itself into French life.

Royal has pursued a campaign meant to place her directly in touch with French voters. In doing so, she has circumvented some of the steps normally necessary to gain the Socialist Party nomination. This campaign strategy has put her at odds with some of the Party elders. She is gambling that her campaign of "participatory democracy" will appeal to a range of voters beyond the Socialist Party. The core of her political message has been attention to community and family life.

Foreign policy is important in the 2007 French elections. Sarkozy and Royal have stressed the growing danger of Iran; each would maintain economic sanctions against Iran. Both candidates support French participation in U.N., NATO, and EU security and stabilization missions, but there are disagreements with the United States over some elements of NATO's mission and future. Each supports a strong European Union as a partner but not rival of the United States.

Sarkozy presents himself as a friend of the United States and an admirer of American culture, but adds that France under his leadership would assert its usual independence. Royal has been sharply critical of the Bush Administration, and contends that U.S. "unilateralism" in recent years has damaged bilateral relations and increased instability in the Middle East.

It is possible that either Sarkozy or Royal, if elected, would pursue a practical and non-ideological posture towards the United States. Neither is likely to alter the U.S.-French relationship in a stark manner. Cooperation over counterterrorism measures, multinational operations in Lebanon, the Balkans, and Afghanistan, and good trade relations are likely to continue.

This report will be updated to reflect the outcome of the presidential and legislative elections. See also CRS Report RL32464, *France: Factors Shaping Foreign Policy, and Issues in U.S.-French Relations*, by Paul Gallis.

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# Elections in France, 2007

## Introduction

On April 22, 2007, the first of two likely rounds of presidential elections will occur in France. Legislative elections will follow in June. The presidential elections may bring to power a younger generation of leaders at a time when a majority of the French public believes their country is in decline, in part due to enduring low economic growth and high unemployment, in part to an apparent diminishing influence in guiding the course of the European Union (EU).

Since 1981, France has had only two presidents, the Socialist François Mitterrand and the Gaullist Jacques Chirac, each a formidable political figure who dominated his respective party. Chirac is at the end of his second presidential term and is not running for re-election. In 2002, presidential terms were shortened from seven years to five years; there are no limits on the number of terms a president may serve. Legislative elections now follow the presidential elections by a month. The close proximity of presidential and legislative elections may provide the winning candidate with the opportunity to gain a parliament more in line with his or her initiatives, and avoid the periods of divided government (called *cohabitation* by the French) evident in recent years and blamed by some for periods of governmental inertia.

Under the Fifth Republic (1958-present), France has had a strong presidential system, significantly different from many European parliamentary systems. Fifth Republic structures were meant to avoid the ever-changing parliamentary governments of the Fourth Republic (1946-1958), when the country needed but rarely found strong leadership after the Second World War and during the Algerian war for independence (1954-1962), a conflict that led to instability and violence in France as well as in Algeria. The President is elected by a national vote and enjoys clear command of national security and the armed forces. Although the President appoints a prime minister who names a cabinet, it is the President who shapes all major policy initiatives and is the unquestioned political leader of the government.

Compared with the United States, France is a highly centralized country, not only in political authority but also in economic structures. While some industries have been privatized in recent years, the state continues to control or to influence many key industries to a degree unknown in the United States. Even the country's main road and rail systems run through or emanate from Paris.

Important domestic and foreign policy issues are at play in the current campaign. Integration of the large Muslim minority, now nearly 10% of the population and mostly North African in origin, has been a focal point of discussion for a decade, but most pointedly since the attacks of September 11, 2001, on the United States and

riots in the suburbs, where most Muslims live, of several major French cities in 2005. A related matter, control of immigration, is another key electoral issue. A related issue is high unemployment, plaguing the country for years. In foreign policy, the unstable Middle East and the possible rise of a nuclear-armed Iran have drawn great attention from the key candidates. France's role in the European Union is also a question of importance to the population.

There are three leading candidates for the presidency, two of whom present themselves as new blood in the national electoral arena. Nicolas Sarkozy, until recently the Interior Minister and previously the head of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP, the Gaullist Party), is the center-right candidate. Ségolène Royal is the Socialist Party candidate. She is a member of the Chamber of Deputies and the president of the Poitou-Charentes region. François Bayrou is the third candidate scoring reasonably well in public opinion polls; he is the leader of the small centrist Union for French Democracy (UDF) party, the political group founded by former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and ran for the presidency in 2002.

Public opinion polls indicate a close race. Sarkozy has maintained a lead of several points over Royal for several months. A poll in mid-April showed that 28% of those polled favored Sarkozy, whereas Royal gathered 24% of the vote. Bayrou trails with 18%. The same poll indicated that 47% of the electorate remains undecided.<sup>1</sup>

Relations between the Bush Administration and France have been difficult since the run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003. While the United States and France cooperate closely on some issues, such as counterterrorism and instability in Lebanon, President Chirac strongly opposed the invasion of Iraq and raised international criticism of Administration policy, leading to sharp rejoinders from Administration officials and some Members of Congress. Officials in both countries are hoping that the 2007 French elections can lead to an improved bilateral atmosphere on several issues, some of which are discussed in this report. France has been an important contributor to a range of NATO and EU missions, and an improved relationship could relieve strain on U.S. strategic resources.

## **The Elections of 2007: A New Era in France?**

Over the past year, polls, several books, and media commentary have indicated a widespread view in France that the country is enduring a decline in economic, political, and intellectual vigor and influence. GDP growth was only 2% in 2006, and unemployment is now 8.5%, a percentage point above the eurozone average. In a May 2005 referendum, French voters failed to approve a proposed new EU treaty, commonly referred to as the EU constitution, a development that, even if many voters were expressing displeasure primarily with their government, reduced French leeway to demonstrate leadership in the Union. As a result, there are calls for a "renewal" from both the right and the left.

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<sup>1</sup> "Un nouveau sondage pointe une progression de Jean-Marie Le Pen," *Le Monde*, Apr. 9, 2007, p. 6.

The Gaullist Party and the Socialist Party nominate their candidates from within the party structures. There are no national primaries in France. For most of the Fifth Republic, individuals who emerged as a party's candidate rose through the ranks and were the consensus choice of those who ran the party structures. The election season of 2006-2007 has unfolded somewhat differently.

## **Sarkozy: The Gaullist as “Outsider”**

Nicolas Sarkozy is considered a controversial figure in the Gaullist Party. The son of a Hungarian immigrant, Sarkozy was helped through the ranks by Chirac. He is not a graduate of the National School of Administration (ENA), the elite institution that provides France with many of its most important leaders. He broke with Chirac in the 1995 presidential elections when he endorsed a Chirac rival, who lost. Nonetheless, his forceful, aggressive style generated a political following. He became head of the Gaullist Party and built a reputation for being tough on immigration and crime as France's interior minister. He prevailed as the party's choice for the presidency, bolstered by the faltering image of his principal rival, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, politically damaged by an alleged scandal. At a late moment, Chirac gave Sarkozy a rather tepid endorsement.

Sarkozy is a well-known figure in France. As an important political lieutenant of President Chirac, he helped to continue the UMP as a major force in French politics. He has a clear persona among the voters, who see him as decisive, hard-working, and emphatic in his views. However, he is attempting to cast himself as an “outsider” by calling for a “rupture” with past practices in leading the country.

**Domestic Issues.** As Interior Minister in 2005, Sarkozy referred to young rioters in the suburbs of several major French cities as “scum” and said they should be washed away “with a power hose.” Critics of such language contend that the rioters were largely economically disadvantaged and were often North African Muslim youth ostracized by elements of French society.<sup>2</sup> In 2006 he promised to deport more illegal immigrants than were deported in 2005, a pledge he carried out. At the same time, he urged Muslim youth to become more involved in French society and promised to begin a program of “positive discrimination” to ensure their entry into public institutions and the job market as gateways into broader society.

Sarkozy, 52, began his campaign for the presidency in earnest in late 2006 and at first sought to build a more moderate image. The Gaullist Party nominated him in January 2007. In a speech before the party faithful, he said that he had changed. He recounted difficult moments in his personal life and said that, because of certain failures, he had become a milder, more inclusive leader. In his speeches, he has ranged across a variety of issues, for which he has developed often detailed positions. At the same time, his image as tough on illegal immigration and crime has shadowed

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of French efforts to assimilate its Muslim population, see CRS Report RL33166, *Muslims in Europe: Integration in Selected Countries*, by Paul Gallis et al.

him closely; it has gathered supporters from the extreme right and reassured those who believe that there are too many foreigners in France.<sup>3</sup>

In early March 2007, Sarkozy, unable to put significant distance between himself and his principal rivals for the presidency, reverted to a harder line. If elected, he said, he would establish a ministry of “Immigration and National Identity,” a proposal that appeared to be an effort to pull in more voters from the extreme right. The proposal led some to question whether such a ministry was meant to intimidate immigrants to accept vague, undefined prescriptions of “Frenchness.” A month earlier, he told an audience, “If you want to become French, then you must be proud of France.” He refused a demand from the Algerian government, as a requirement for final agreement to a friendship treaty, that France apologize for its era of colonization in Algeria and for brutal measures taken by some French forces in Algeria’s war for independence. He said that most French citizens who went to Algeria during the era of colonization “were neither monsters nor exploiters ... but men who believed in good faith that they were serving an ideal of civilization.”<sup>4</sup>

Sarkozy has laid out a plan to revitalize the French economy, but his message has been mixed. Critics in his own party and on the left have branded him as too “liberal,” or free market. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has long held that the French economy should loosen regulations on the hiring and dismissal of workers to build a flexible labor marketplace better able to infuse workers with new skills into the economy. Sarkozy supports a more “flexible” employment contract that would allow employers to fire workers more easily. He has criticized the 35-hour work week, put into law by a Socialist government, as inhibiting employees who wish to work more and earn more. He is promising tax-free income for those who work beyond 35 hours.<sup>5</sup>

His message on the international economy is more restrictive. He opposes the acquisition or takeover of French “strategic” companies by foreign entities. He condemned the purchase in 2006 of Arcelor, a French steel company, by the Dutch company Mittal. During the campaign, Sarkozy has said that “free trade” is a “policy of naïveté.” In 2004, as Finance Minister, he brokered a deal to merge the two French companies Aventis and Sanofi to ward off a takeover by a Swiss company. More recently, he said, “If I am president, then France will have a real industrial policy.” He has blamed French unemployment in part on the European Central Bank’s tight monetary policy, which, in his view, keeps the Euro at an artificially high level compared with the yen and the dollar, and thereby harms exports and economic growth.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “M. Sarkozy centre sa campagne sur la France et le travail,” *Le Monde*, Jan. 16, 2007, p. 10. Interviews in France, February-March 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in “Nicolas Sarkozy prône désormais le ‘métissage des cultures,’” *Le Monde*, Feb. 9, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> “France’s three rivals frustrate economists,” *Financial Times*, Mar. 30, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> “Sarkozy warns EU to revise fiscal policy or lose popular support,” *Financial Times*, Apr. 3, 2007, p. 4; “Sarkozy underlines resolve to block foreign investors,” *Financial Times*, Mar.

(continued...)

**Foreign Policy.** Sarkozy presents himself as a friend of the United States who will nonetheless not be slavish to U.S. foreign policy objectives. In September 2006, he gave a speech in Washington in which he acknowledged that the U.S.-French relationship would always be “complicated.” He expressed his admiration for American culture, openness, and entrepreneurship. He proclaimed himself an “Atlanticist,” and argued that a stronger EU would not be a rival but a better partner to the United States in solving problems around the world. Sarkozy criticized French condemnation of the U.S. invasion of Iraq as needlessly negative and political,<sup>7</sup> a possible swipe at President Chirac, who called Sarkozy’s speech “lamentable.”

Sarkozy’s foreign policy positions, however, have not centered on the United States. He views Iran as the greatest danger to French interests and a highly destabilizing influence in the Middle East. Sarkozy supports the efforts of the “EU-3” (France, Britain, and Germany) and the United States to use economic sanctions to dissuade Iran from developing nuclear weapons, which he views as a direct threat to Israel’s existence.

As is true of all key contenders for the French presidency, Sarkozy is a strong supporter of French leadership of and involvement in the European Union. As already noted, he places blame for slow French economic growth at the doorstep of the EU and has pledged to use a “diplomatic offensive” to persuade the EU to pursue a stronger anti-dumping policy and the European Central Bank to lower the value of the Euro to boost trade and employment. He believes that the EU constitution, defeated in a referendum in France in 2005, should be put in a simplified form before the French Parliament for debate and possible passage. Sarkozy opposes Turkish membership in the EU, stating simply that “Turkey is not a European country.”<sup>8</sup>

Sarkozy believes that western leaders should be more critical in their assessments of developments in Russia and China. He believes that good trade relations with the two countries are important, but has sharply criticized Russia over human rights violations in Chechnya, and China over treatment of its dissidents.

Sarkozy has been critical of President Chirac’s use of the French armed forces. To protect the country’s key interests, Sarkozy argues that French forces must be carefully marshaled and not overextended. He has said that he would not allow French troops to become “bogged down” in an operation such as the one in the Ivory Coast, a reference to a French military presence there meant to bring stability. Throughout his campaign he has indicated that, if elected, he will reduce France’s military footprint in Africa. He has expressed “regret” at Chirac’s removal of French special forces from Afghanistan, a view implying support for the U.S. and NATO effort to stabilize that country. At the same time, Sarkozy has said that the French army “is not an expeditionary corps that is supposed to play the role of firemen and

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<sup>6</sup> (...continued)  
30, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Sarkozy speech before the French American Foundation, Washington, DC, Sept. 12, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.; “Sarkozy veut que la BEC baisse euro,” *Libération.fr*, Mar. 29, 2007.



gendarmes in the four corners of the world.”<sup>9</sup> He supports continued increases in the French defense budget to reach a figure equaling or exceeding 2% of GDP a year, in line with an informal prescription by NATO for member states.

Although Sarkozy expresses admiration for U.S. values and supports a major U.S. role in the world, he has called the U.S. invasion of Iraq “an historic mistake” that has allowed Iran to expand its power in the region. He has chided the American public and urged them to “be more interested in the world.”<sup>10</sup> Sarkozy has criticized anti-Americanism in France, and has added that although he will be a friend to the United States, he will follow France’s traditionally independent foreign policy.

## Royal: The Socialist as “Outsider”

Ségolène Royal began her presidential campaign in 2005 using new tactics in an effort to gain national recognition. In 2004, she defeated former Gaullist Prime Minister Pierre Raffarin for the presidency of the Poitou-Charentes region, a feat that made her a prominent figure in the Socialist Party. She has served primarily in junior ministerial positions under previous Socialist governments and has developed a reputation for boldness and assertiveness. She is a graduate of the National School of Administration. Navigating the internal party structures to leapfrog prominent rivals for the nomination such as Laurent Fabius, a former prime minister, and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a well-regarded former finance minister, was a formidable undertaking.

Royal, 53, has developed a campaign based on direct contact with the voters, a strategy designed to circumvent to some degree but also to influence the internal party process for the nomination. In several ways, her campaign is a roll of the political dice. Traditionally, Socialist candidates wait their turn, with the party nomination going to a senior figure of long experience. Royal sought instead to jump the line. If she could demonstrate a national appeal, the party bosses, known popularly as “elephants,” might find difficulty in denying her the nomination. She reportedly antagonized some of the elephants when she said, “I am tied to no network, no money source, no lobby, no major media, no large commercial enterprise.” She omitted any debt to the Socialist Party structure.<sup>11</sup>

The elephants manage a large national network of party *militants*, primarily local elected officials such as mayors and town council members, who are influential in their communities. Circumventing the elephants risks losing parts of this network. Royal’s life partner, François Hollande, is chairman of the Socialist Party and one of

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<sup>9</sup> “M. Sarkozy veut impliquer plus le Parlement dans la politique de défense,” *Le Monde*, Jan. 27, 2007, p. 10; interviews in France, February-March 2007.

<sup>10</sup> “Sarkozy: ‘J’aime l’énergie et la fluidité de l’Amérique,’” *Le Monde*, Sept. 10-11, 2006, p. 6; “Sarkozy outlines foreign policy,” *Financial Times*, Mar. 1, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> “Ségolène Royal: ‘Je ne dois rien à personne si ce n’est au peuple français,’” *Le Monde*, Mar. 6, 2007, p. 8; interviews with French observers, March 2007. Some observers, traditionally on the left, criticize the Socialist Party as increasingly unimaginative and ossified by a rarely changing leadership. See, for example, André Glucksmann, “Pourquoi je choisis Nicolas Sarkozy,” *Le Monde*, Jan. 30, 2007, p. 21.

the elephants. He seemed to undercut her early in the campaign when he openly opposed her tax plan, which he found too moderate. Her campaign must navigate such political trap doors if she is to succeed.<sup>12</sup>

Royal has sounded a generally moderate message, concentrating on the home and family, and developed an interactive website, [<http://www.avenir.org>], where she carries on a dialogue with voters and features debates and discussions of policy issues by prominent officials, local leaders, and others.

A member of the National Assembly, Royal raises issues of interest to the French population on the website and solicits the public's opinion. Her campaign of "participatory democracy" is controversial. She has held meetings across France with public groups where she pledged to listen to the voice of the average French person before coming to settled policy positions, a practice sharply different from that of previous Socialist candidates and Sarkozy. In a country where voters are used to Socialist Party leaders presenting highly defined and finely tuned positions on policy questions to the public, this tactic is unusual. Her political challenge has been to listen carefully, but at the same time to demonstrate leadership and creative thinking in guiding the public to resolution of important issues. Even after she bested her party rivals and won the nomination in November 2006, she continued her "listening campaign" and, in the view of some party observers, was slow to articulate a formal position on key issues.<sup>13</sup> For example, when initially asked whether she supported Turkish membership in the EU, an idea opposed by the majority of the French population, she seemed to some to respond disingenuously by saying that she would "listen to the French people" and submit the matter to a referendum, a vote likely to be negative.<sup>14</sup> Such apparent indecisiveness was an apparent factor leading to a sharp decline in her standing in the polls in January and February 2007.

**Domestic Issues.** Royal has also addressed the issue of immigration and integration of Muslims into French society. In the Socialist Party tradition, she insists that France remain a secular country and that young Muslims learn to speak French well and perform well in French schools. She opposes a system of "positive discrimination," promoted by Sarkozy, for immigrants. At the same time, she supports policy initiatives that might assist many young people in France. She has pledged to increase the number of teachers, raise the minimum wage by 20% by 2012, and inaugurate a system of state-funded first jobs.<sup>15</sup>

Royal has a tough message meant to bring greater order and discipline to the public school system. She would send troublesome students to military-style "boot camps" to educate them about appropriate social conduct. This suggestion has brought criticism from elements of the Socialist Party, but might appeal to parts of

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<sup>12</sup> Interviews with French observers, February-March 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with French observers, March 2007; Michel Noblecourt (editorial), "La Course au projet de Ségolène Royal," *Le Monde*, Jan. 26, 2007, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with French observers, January-March 2007.

<sup>15</sup> "Ségolène Royal: 'Je ne dois ...,'" *op. cit.*

the center and right on the political spectrum.<sup>16</sup> Royal was reportedly raised in a strict environment, and she is the daughter of a military family that lived in a former colony.

Royal's views on how to reinvigorate the economy are in sharp contrast to those of Sarkozy. She has pledged to scrap the "flexible contract," which allows short-term hiring and eases the firing of employees, for small businesses. She would extend the 35-hour work week to a larger part of the workforce.<sup>17</sup> She would also re-nationalize the large utility, Electricité de France, and merge it with the state-owned company Gaz de France to create a public sector company. Such a policy would run counter to EU efforts to persuade member governments to privatize state enterprises. She agrees with Sarkozy that the European Central Bank should be persuaded to weaken the Euro in order to generate more exports and expand the economy.

**Foreign Policy.** Royal has no experience in foreign policy, and she has made several slips that have brought criticism. However, most of her views are conventional within the general French approach to key issues. Like Sarkozy, she believes that France should maintain its independent nuclear force, and like Sarkozy, she also believes that France should spend at least 2% of GDP a year on defense.

Several stumbles on foreign policy may have damaged her standing in the polls. She reportedly called for a "sovereign" Quebec, a view long ago abandoned by most French nationalists. The Canadian prime minister rebuked her for the comment. While visiting Lebanon, a Hezbollah member of the Lebanese Parliament, in a group meeting with her, compared Israel to the Nazis. She criticized some of his remarks, but did not refer to this particular comment. After she was taken to task by her political opponents in France, she said that the interpreter had not translated the remark, made in Arabic, likening Israel to Nazi Germany. She condemned the comments by the Hezbollah representative several days later.<sup>18</sup>

Royal describes herself as a "committed European" and a strong supporter of the European Union. She does not support a second vote in France on the proposed EU constitution, preferring instead a debate and then a referendum on a new "Protocol" capturing the essence of several aspects of the constitution, especially matters related to "social progress," the role of public services, and protection of the environment.<sup>19</sup> She has moderated her views on Turkey and, alone among major candidates, supports Turkey's membership in the EU if it achieves the progress towards full democracy laid out by the EU Commission.

Royal supports strong EU initiatives to move forward the peace process between Israel and the Arab world. In line with the views of many European leaders, she believes that Islamic terrorism can best be attenuated by attacking its root causes,

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<sup>16</sup> Interviews in France, February and March 2007.

<sup>17</sup> "France's three rivals frustrate economists," *Financial Times*, Mar. 30, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> "Mme Royal critiquée à Paris, bienvenue au Proche-Orient," *Le Monde*, Dec. 5, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> "Ségolène Royal: 'Je ne dois ...,'" *op. cit.*

such as poverty and poor education. She describes Iran's leadership as a significant danger to peace and stability, and supports sanctions to deny Tehran a civilian as well as a military nuclear capability.

Royal is sharply critical of Bush Administration foreign policy. She has described as "unilateralist" the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. A campaign document, drafted by an aide, on the Socialist Party website describes Sarkozy as "a Bush clone" whose "nourishing milk is American neo-conservatism." Referring to Sarkozy, the document asks, "Is France ready to vote in 2007 for an American neo-conservative with a French passport?"<sup>20</sup> Such comments may have been designed to tap into widely held sentiments in France critical of the Bush Administration and, more generally, a broad anti-Americanism that has increased in the past several years.<sup>21</sup>

Royal has not been specific in her assessment of NATO's tasks and its future, but she has said that it is "doing too much, moving into new fields that it should not be pursuing."<sup>22</sup> Such a view may be in line with a position evident across much of the political spectrum that NATO should concentrate on military issues and build collective defense, rather than venture into political areas such as state-building, more in the realm of responsibility of the European Union. Finally, like Sarkozy, she believes that President Chirac has diluted the effectiveness of French forces by sending them on too many disparate missions abroad.

## Other Candidates

There are 12 candidates on the ballot for the first round. If a candidate wins 50% or more of the votes in the first round, that person becomes President. Such a development is unlikely, given that the poll numbers of Sarkozy and Royal have been consistently in the 22%-30% range since December 2006. Other parties in the race include two Trotskyite parties, another far left party, the increasingly moribund Communist Party, and the Greens. These parties, several of which are known as the "boutique left," played a key role in the 2002 first-round vote, accounting for 23% of all votes cast. In effect, they denied a second round to one of the two favorites, the Socialist Party candidate and Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin. The extreme right-wing candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen slipped in ahead of Jospin to the second round with only 16.9% of the vote. Chirac easily defeated Le Pen in the second round.

Le Pen is again in the race, but he trails François Bayrou, leader of the Union for French Democracy (UDF), a small party with only 29 seats (of 677) in the National Assembly. Bayrou, 55, is a familiar figure on the French political scene; he ran for the presidency in 2002, gaining only very modest support. However, he is

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<sup>20</sup> "Pour le PS, M. Sarkozy s'inspire des néoconservateurs américains," *Le Monde*, Jan. 10, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> In summer 2006, 39% of those polled in France had a positive view of the United States. "Image of U.S. falls again," *International Herald Tribune*, June 14, 2006; and "Europeans see US as greater threat to stability than Iran," *Financial Times*, June 19, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> "Défense: Mme Royal dénonce l'absence de priorités de la droite," *Le Monde*, Mar. 6, 2007, p. 9.

benefitting from apparent voter dissatisfaction with both Sarkozy and Royal, and in early March 2007 was briefly tied in the polls with Royal for second place.

Bayrou is widely viewed as earnest but dull and unimaginative in his views. A former Minister of Education, he supports an improved school system and is strongly pro-business. He is also a strong supporter of the EU. Bayrou opposes Turkish membership in the Union. He is something of an anomaly among senior French politicians in that he is a practicing Roman Catholic in a highly secular country. He appears to be drawing support away from Sarkozy.<sup>23</sup>

The level of support for Le Pen, now 78, is uncertain. Over the years, he has made virulently racist and anti-immigrant comments. His repeated denials of the Holocaust, a crime in France, have led to heavy fines. He has consistently trailed Bayrou in the polls, but he has surprised observers in the past, as in 2002, when few expected him to reach the second round.

## Legislative Elections

Under the revised electoral law that governed the 2002 as well as the current elections, legislative elections will follow the second round presidential vote by approximately one month. A high point of popularity for a French president is often early in a term, a factor that could enhance chances for a majority for the president's party in Parliament and ease governing. At the same time, the modest standing in the polls of the three leading candidates could indicate that the winning candidate will again face a splintered Parliament.

The new president will choose a prime minister from Parliament. Under the Fifth Republic Constitution, the president is clearly the most powerful figure in government. However, over the past 12 years, a president has several times had to choose a prime minister from an opposing party to reflect the composition of Parliament. Such periods of *cohabitation* have seen sparring between the president and the prime minister over authority and uncertainty over key policies.

## Implications for the United States

The essence of the U.S.-French relationship is unlikely to change substantively should any of the three leading candidates win the presidency. Trade disputes will continue to be managed through the European Union. Some U.S. officials believe that either Sarkozy or Royal would be more "practical" in discussing the EU's European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) with the United States; they believe that President Chirac has impeded cooperation between NATO and the EU by insisting that the United States, rather than NATO, engage in discussions over strategic issues with the Union, and by pressing for an "EU caucus" in NATO, where

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<sup>23</sup> "La vague dépassera de beaucoup la présidentielle," *Le Monde*, Mar. 3, 2007, p. 10; interviews with French observers, March 2007.

EU member states would present a united position on selected issues to the United States and NATO governments not in the Union.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, any relationship between allies is a two-way street. Just as some U.S. officials believe that President Chirac has been an impediment to improved relations, many observers in France, in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and highly politicized criticism of France emanating from parts of the U.S. government and media, believe that only the end of the Bush Administration will lead to a moment when the political atmosphere between the two countries can improve.

Despite sharp differences with the Bush Administration, the Chirac presidency has worked closely with the United States on several key issues. These efforts relieve pressure on U.S. resources by contributing to a sharing of the burden for missions important to U.S. and allied security.<sup>25</sup> By all accounts, U.S.-French cooperation against terrorism, primarily through EU structures but also bilaterally, is excellent. France, like the United States, is deeply critical of the Syrian government, and the two countries have worked together to reduce Syria's influence in Lebanon and to shore up the Lebanese government. On the other hand, some French officials believe that the Bush Administration should have used its influence to restrain Israel in its response to attacks by Hezbollah in summer 2006, a response that badly battered the Lebanese economy and political leadership. As noted above, France is one of the EU-3 countries working with the United States to block Iran's nuclear ambitions through negotiations and by imposing and maintaining economic sanctions.

France also contributes to NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, where French forces provide security in Kabul and train elements of the Afghan army. President Chirac, however, believes that the Bush Administration concentrates too heavily on combat action against Taliban forces, to the detriment of building a stable political environment conducive to reconstruction. Chirac also believes that such international institutions as the EU and World Bank are more suited than NATO to manage economic reconstruction in Afghanistan, a view strongly opposed by the Administration. U.S. officials believe that France continues to modernize its armed forces to be more "expeditionary," or capable of distant missions in an era of global terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. France also plays a role in the EU stabilization mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the NATO mission in Kosovo.

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<sup>24</sup> Interviews with U.S. officials, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion, see CRS Report RL32464, *France: Factors Shaping Foreign Policy, and Issues in U.S.-French Relations*, by Paul Gallis.