

ENVISIONING A NEW FOREIGN POLICY FOR FRANCE

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After this quinquennat- which was marked by failures and many wasted opportunities, but also a few presidential or ministerial successes (the G20, resolution 1973 authorizing military intervention in Libya)- France will need a new foreign policy that is less personal and impulsive, and more thoughtful, coherent, and dependable. It will need to repair damaged bilateral relationships, even with countries wary of change. The French Left should also be prepared to confront the challenges of the moment- the new euro treaty, the aftermath of the Russian election, Israel/Iran, the future of the Arab world, the role of NATO, the rise of China and the emerging powers, etc.-and François Hollande is clearly aware of this. Yet addressing these issues individually will not suffice, because Western countries are facing a massive “reshuffling of the deck” at the international level that will relativize their power and influence. This is more troubling for Europeans, who don’t really know what they want, than for Americans, who, though their preeminence is being challenged, continue to believe in themselves and will maintain their leadership, albeit relative, even after China has surpassed them statistically. It represents a serious challenge for France, a country that believes it has a mission in the world but whose competitiveness- economic, political and even psychological (it is the champion of pessimism)- is eroding. Therefore, looking beyond the current situation, we need a comprehensive, long-term recovery strategy of which foreign policy should be a powerful expression and diplomacy a key instrument rather than a separate activity. By diplomacy, I mean a “savoir-négocié” in all domains, in all settings, and with a large number of actors simultaneously, taking into account the political context and all the other players involved, and successfully managing interactions and staying on course. The aim is that, in thirty years, France will still be master of its destiny and play a valuable role within a stronger Europe and a more orderly world. This implies that France not define itself strictly in terms of its belonging to the «West» or the European Union. It is an active member of both entities, but it is more than that. The strength of such a foreign policy will depend on its capacity to overcome the polemics that encumber it. The opposition between a principled idealism and a cynical realism? In the real world of international affairs, one is almost never confronted with a choice between the two. Human rights? They are a component of any European foreign policy but must not be a substitute for it. The old Atlanticism, historically hostile to the positions of the Fifth Republic? It hardly makes sense with the United States of Obama, primarily focused on Asia. The “Occidentalism” worldview espoused by «neoconservatives» in the U.S., particularly towards the Middle East? It persists in some circles, but we saw with George W. Bush that it led to a catastrophic clash with the Muslim world, as well as with other global powers. Finally, though we may once again be led to intervene under the «responsibility to protect» doctrine, unilateral intervention has seen its day. Of course, there is also a need to determine the degree of European integration. We must stress that convergence must be driven from the top, through strong national foreign policies. The rule should be to strengthen Europe but not to defer to it out of policy fatigue. With a precondition: a clarification with Germany, which finds itself today in a dominant position. Greater diplomatic coordination will allow Europe to develop a long-term strategy vis-à-vis the emerging powers, one that enables us to promote and defend our interests during the long geopolitical transformation underway, through a dynamic foreign policy that is both firm and flexible. In the Middle East, we will need an anti-«clash of civilizations» strategy. For such a strategy to succeed, we should avoid moralizing and accept that the West no longer embodies, by itself, the “international community”. At the same time, we mustn’t renounce our values, which have surpassed us and now belong to all peoples. Also crucial in democracies will be the liberation of foreign policies from the influence of lobbies, as well as from grandstanding and political posturing (thanks to which we undermined our influence with the current chair of the G20, Mexico, and with the next one, Turkey!). Accomplishing all of this will require character, as well as a remobilization of the entire state apparatus, of society, and of the full range of influence tactics... It will only be effective if we make the Foreign Ministry France’s globalization «control tower», with the perspective and the means to coordinate action with the President and the Prime Minister. If so, we may just succeed in building a new consensus on France’s foreign policy and in tackling, from a stronger position, the tough decisions that await us.



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