



BOOKS

In Praise of Balance

Testimony: France in the Twenty-First Century

Nicolas Sarkozy, edited and translated from the French by Philip H. Gordon; Pantheon Books, 2007, \$24.95, hardcover, 251 pages.

REVIEWED BY DEBORAH CAVIN

In July 2006, just as Parisians packed up beach reading for the long summer vacation, the French politician Nicolas Sarkozy released a book titled *Témoignage* that was part memoir and part political vision. Shortly before his election to the presidency in May 2007, Sarkozy released an English-language version: *Testimony: France in the Twenty-First Century*. This version includes a new preface for American readers and incorporates two chapters from Sarkozy's 2001 book *Libre (Free)*. A new edition of *Testimony* is being released this fall.

Like its author, *Testimony* is direct, unabashed and often persuasive, with a heavy focus on French domestic challenges. With early chapters covering topics such as politics, schools, work and social issues, it's tempting to skip straight to the penultimate section, "Rethinking Foreign Policy." Unfortunately, that chapter, reflecting the original work's purpose as an appeal to voters focused on domestic issues, reads like an annotated checklist compared to the detailed sections on economic and social issues.

Still, it offers some insight into the new president's thinking. France must strongly defend human rights as

a universal value, he writes, and he alludes to the failings of China and Russia — but without suggesting any foreign policy implications. He urges action on Darfur, but discusses Africa mainly in terms of his thesis that development aid, not unchecked immigration, is the solution to that continent's problems, and to Europe's problems with Africa.

In three pages on the broader Middle East, the author offers scant evidence of rethinking traditional French policy (perhaps because the section was called "Rethinking Our Foreign Policy Message" in the original French). Balance is the order of the day. Recalling the violence in Lebanon in 2006, Sarkozy defends President Jacques Chirac's decision to send troops, criticizes Hezbollah, and presents a nuanced understanding of Israel's legitimate defense needs — and "disproportionate" actions. He also carefully describes the Palestinians' right to a state as non-negotiable. Sarkozy defends Chirac's decision not to join in the invasion of Iraq, although he slams his predecessor's threat to veto a U.N. resolution authorizing U.S. intervention.

Turning to Iran, he insists that the "outlaw regime" must be prevented from developing nuclear weapons and stoking a regional arms race. Ideally, it should be blocked through diplomacy, but with all options on the table to strengthen chances for success. Sarkozy's one novel idea is a corollary to that position: he proposes the creation of a "World Bank for civilian nuclear fuel," under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Sarkozy urges the French to embrace globalization and change, arguing that growth is required to address unemployment. He opines that France has adopted the worst elements of two neighboring economic systems: the "inequality and poverty of the Anglo-Saxon model" and the high taxes of the Nordic system — but with none of the benefits of either model.

The new president has given considerable thought to the French-American relationship. He takes on the leftist critics who dubbed him "Sarkozy, the American" by arguing cogently for strong relations with the United States, while defending his European sensibilities. Alluding to his status as the son of an immigrant, he praises the U.S. for its social mobility and diversity among elites, for valuing work, and for political checks and balances. But he prefers France's public health-care system, its strict handgun-control laws, and its tradition of giving immigrants a "new identity as French citizens."

Foreshadowing his efforts as president to reach out to Washington — while challenging the U.S. to lead — he diplomatically assigns some blame to both countries for poor relations. He tells his countrymen that they should refrain from systematically opposing or criticizing the U.S., a good friend and ally, but he notes that Americans have an irritating habit of always thinking they are on the side of good, "and thus everyone else is on the side of evil."

Despite occasional lapses into utopian political rhetoric, notably in the concluding section, *Testimony*



provides American readers with a clear outline of the new French president's personal and policy preferences. These center on action, plain talk and calculated risk-taking, along with what Sarkozy terms a "balanced" approach to governance.

Deborah Cavin, an FSO since 1983, is currently serving as a Foreign Service assessor in the Human Resources Bureau's Office of Recruitment, Examination and Employment.

Missed Opportunities

**A Second Chance:
Three Presidents and the
Crisis of American Superpower**
*Zbigniew Brzezinski, Basic Books,
2007, \$26.95, hardcover, 240 pages.*

REVIEWED BY HARRY C. BLANEY III

Zbigniew Brzezinski's new book is a highly personal tour of the strategic political landscape of the last 15 years, covering the presidencies of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

True to his policy-planning heart, the national security adviser to Jimmy Carter frames his analysis in terms of how well each of these leaders handled three broad sets of tasks: shaping or managing central power relations; containing or terminating conflicts, preventing terrorism and controlling the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and promoting collective peacekeeping.

Along the way, Brzezinski sometimes succumbs to the temptation to defend old battlements. But he does take into account the landscape in which each leader operated, including emerging trends. He also asks strategic and moral questions: Is American

society guided by values? Is our government structured in a way that is congenial to effective long-term global leadership? On the latter point, I am giving nothing away to note that he has doubts that it is.

Overall, the author gives Bush 41 high marks for his conduct of foreign relations. But he does criticize him for a lethargic response to growing evidence that existing restraints on nuclear weapons proliferation were starting to crack. In particular, he cites Bush's slowness to recognize the danger of the India-Pakistan nuclear rivalry and North Korea's progress toward acquiring a nuclear capability.

Clinton's report card is mixed. There was some progress on nonproliferation issues, such as safeguarding nuclear stockpiles in the former Soviet Union, but the president left much undone. A chapter titled "The Impotence of Good Intentions" sets forth Brzezinski's view that most presidents, including Clinton, have not accompanied offers of inducements with sufficiently potent or credible threats to change the decisionmaking process of rogue states. But he weakens his case by not spelling out what we should do when neither carrots nor sticks work.

Few (if any) readers will be surprised that the current president gets poor or failing grades pretty much across the board in a chapter titled "Catastrophic Leadership (and the Politics of Fear)." The author is scathing about the decision to invade Iraq and the disastrous impact of the war on America's global capabilities. In his judgment, Bush 43's overall strategy in the Middle East, including the campaign to impose democracy, has been devastating, both in its effects on the ground and because it has pushed so many other pressing issues off the diplomatic agenda.

The book's final chapter, "Beyond

2008 (America's Second Chance)," asserts that Washington missed two grand historical opportunities in the post-Cold War period. All three administrations failed to shape and institutionalize an Atlantic community with a shared strategic focus and to move decisively on the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

Brzezinski argues that no other power is yet capable of playing our dominant role, providing some room for maneuver. He summarizes the landscape as follows: Europe still lacks the requisite political unity and will to be a global power, while Russia cannot decide whether it wishes to be an authoritarian, imperialist, socially backward Eurasian state or a genuinely modern European democracy. China is rapidly emerging as the dominant Asian power, but it has a rival in Japan; nor is it clear that Beijing can resolve the basic contradiction between its freewheeling economic momentum and the bureaucratic centralism of its political system.

The author is adept at identifying the shortcomings of the past and the challenges of the future, though he puts the emphasis on useful approaches rather than detailed recommendations. However, his attempts to thread the needle between realism and idealism are not always successful. For instance, despite his criticism of recent U.S. military actions, one gets the sense that he might be among the first to resort to that option in some cases. Yet he does offer a clear path forward, based on "intelligent, cooperative governance, reinforced by power that is viewed as legitimate." In that spirit, his policy recommendations deserve thoughtful consideration and, in many cases, adoption. ■

Harry C. Blaney III, a retired FSO, is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy.