SPECIAL FEATURE

France, Europe and the United States: The New Realities of an Old Alliance

JEAN FRANÇOIS-PONCET

On February 26, 1981 His Excellency Jean François-Poncet delivered the annual William L. Clayton lecture at the Fletcher School. In his address, the former French Minister of Foreign Affairs discusses the current status of the United States' oldest ally and its foreign relations today. He contends that if the Western alliance is to sustain itself, both Americans and Europeans must overcome their tendencies toward mutual criticism of each other's policies and learn to speak to each other frankly, confidently and in good faith. His Excellency François-Poncet graduated from The Fletcher School in 1948.

It is with some emotion that I return here to The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. I am grateful for this opportunity to find myself once again in the atmosphere of my youth and to experience anew the apprehension a student feels before an examination as I stand before this audience. Being here today takes me back 32 years, and I find myself thinking about the distance covered since then and the changes that have occurred. For instance, the changes in our school. In my day, this was just about the only school that specialized in the study of international relations. Since then, many schools have followed its lead. I am proud to say, however, that Fletcher is still far and away the best in the field in the United States, indeed in the world. Fletcher alumni constitute, as it were, a sort of friendly club whose members I encounter wherever my constant travels take me and whose ties of friendship symbolize the world of tomorrow, reconciled in diversity.

Thinking back over the last 32 years also brings to mind the changes that have taken place in the world. These changes are so profound, so obvious, so universal, that they defy analysis. Sad to say, there has not always been a corresponding evolution in people's thinking. If there is one area where there is a marked contrast between actual changes and the persistence of stereotypes, it is, unfortunately, a subject very close to my heart: French-American relations, the topic of this Clayton lecture.

Why do these misconceptions about French-American relations persist? The answer is perhaps the very simple fact that France, which is the United States' oldest ally, is the only one that has never had a substantial ethnic community on United States soil (without forgetting the Acadians in Maine or the descendants of French settlers in Louisiana).

That is why France's position, its actions, and policies all seem to require more explanation on this side of the Atlantic than those of any other European country. I should like to explain them to you, and I shall focus on three basic observations which I want to list before going on to discuss them.

The first is that France today bears only a remote relation to the France of 1938 or 1945. Public opinion in America will quite readily admit that the Germany of Chancellor Schmidt or the Japan of Prime Minister Suzuki no longer has much in common with the Third Reich or the Japan of the "co-prosperity sphere." But when it comes to France, the general impression is that it has not changed much, that it is still living in the past, with its old failings. One has to face the facts. For better or for worse, France is a thoroughly different country from what it was.

My second observation is that relations between France and the United States are no longer simply bilateral. They have acquired a new dimension because of the European Community. The difficulties encountered in recent years have not been between Paris and Washington, but between the United States and Europe. While France naturally means to retain its personality and assert its resolve, it attaches fundamental importance to European construction. This Europe is making good progress, but in its own way, that is, following a very different model from the one that served to build the United States of America. This explains many misunderstandings. My second point then, shall be Europe's achievements, aspirations and limitations.

My third observation has to do with relations between Europe and the United States. These relations need to evolve so as to reflect the new realities on both sides; they need a new spirit, new structure and new aims.

A Changing France

The old ideas about France die hard. People continue to describe France the way they did 32 years ago: as a politically unstable country, with a rigid social organization, outmoded economic structures, and somewhat undependable as an ally. But France today is almost the complete opposite of that preconceived image of it.

Political Stability

With regard to political stability, of all European countries, France today, because of its present political organization, is probably the one most capable

of making decisions, assuming risks and acting with continuity. The institutions of the Fifth Republic balance presidential power and parliamentary control. They have given France a system of government that is original — indeed unique, because it is unlike any other in Europe — but it happens to be consistent with France's national temperament. The system has now been accepted by all the political parties, including the Communist Party. It certainly has not erased political divisions, but for the first time in our history, it has succeeded in balancing the national commitment to democracy with a desire for order. If there is one revolution that has won its victory in France, it is the one that has brought stability to our institutions.

Social Change

Hand in hand with the political stability that I have just mentioned, there have been far-reaching social changes. In 1945, France was still a predominantly agricultural country. Now, only 11.2 percent of the people live on the land.

France is a country with Mediterranean traditions, where it was long assumed that the woman's place was in the home. Today, more than 50 percent of college students are women. A French woman, Simone Veil, is president of the European Parliament and there are three women in the French cabinet.

It is sometimes said that France is closed to the outside world. Nothing could be further from the truth. France, like the United States, is a country that has welcomed immigrants and refugees from all over the world. Since 1918, almost three million foreigners have settled in France and have been assimilated into the nation. Since 1975, France has admitted 92,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, less than a third as many as the United States but twice as many as all the other countries in Europe combined.

The American press has said that France has been struck by a resurgence of anti-Semitism. Yet the Jewish community in France has doubled in number since 1945 to become the second largest Jewish community in the Western world, numbering 800,000 persons. It is also a community that has been totally integrated into French society while preserving its own identity and self-awareness.

The French Economy

Our economy, like that of other countries, has suffered from the sharp rise in oil prices, and we are having difficulty in bringing under control the great economic scourge of our time: inflation.

In 1980, France had an inflation rate of 13 percent compared with ten percent in the U.S. and five percent in Germany. Yet inflation reached 15 percent in Great Britain and 22 percent in Italy. Despite inflation, there are three indications that the French economy is remarkably sound and dynamic. The franc

has become a strong currency at the top end of the European monetary system, while the Deutsche Mark has slipped to the bottom. Secondly, France is now practically on a par with Japan for third place as a world exporter, although France's population is only half as large as that of Japan.

The third and most significant indication concerns energy. France has no natural energy resources and so it has launched a massive program to develop nuclear energy. In ten years, that is from 1978 to 1988, 52 power stations will have gone into operation. By 1985, half of the electricity used in France will be nuclear-generated. That will be the equivalent of 43 million tons of oil, a figure that should be compared with France's current oil imports, which amount to 120 million metric tons. We do not say that we have freed ourselves from imports, but we have done more than any other Western country to reduce our dependence on foreign energy sources.

France's Value as a Western Ally

The French are puzzled and surprised by questions raised about its contributions as a western ally. There are three reasons for this.

First, since 1975, France has increased its defense spending more than any other ally in Europe. The increase has been even greater than the 3 percent target set by NATO, to which France does not belong. Every segment of public opinion approves of this effort, and none of the candidates in the presidential campaign has challenged it.

Secondly, France's nuclear weapons, acquired without outside help, are limited in number compared with those of the United States or the Soviet Union, but they constitute an effective deterrent. Nevertheless, conventional forces have not been overlooked. A modern fighting force has been created in the European theater,and the draft, which is accepted by all, reflects the French determination to defend itself. A rapid intervention force of 20,000 men has been set up and has proven its combat capability.

Thirdly, France has demonstrated its political determination not only to ensure its own security but also to help ensure the security of the Western world. France is a member of the Atlantic Alliance, and has stated that it will uphold all its commitments to it. In Africa, we have demonstrated our readiness to oppose outside interference and attempts at destabilization insofar as we have been asked by African states whose sovereignty we respect. In the Indian Ocean, 15 warships of the French Navy are proof that we intend to ensure that freedom of navigation is maintained in the Strait of Hormuz.

Independence means a great deal to France. That is why we left the integrated military organization of NATO and why we do not intend to return. Since the end of World War II, we have exercised our own responsibilities in Europe and the world. We have our own points of view about world affairs and there are times when we express them, if I may say so, without mincing words.

So France is often considered to be a difficult ally. But it is a staunch ally, an ally that does not take the easy way out in any aspect of its national life. France is an ally that accepts risks and is ready to make sacrifices, an ally on which its partners can count in times of crisis.

This national dimension of security policy is essential to us. We do not intend to renounce it. But for France there exists another dimension: the organization of Europe.

A New Political Actor

Few countries have done as much for European union as the United States. But the enthusiasm of the first years has faded, giving way to a growing feeling that Europe is not moving forward but is in fact losing ground under the strain of internal disputes. But we should not allow the inevitable difficulties that are bound to arise to darken the picture.

Europe as a Confederation

It is true that Europe is not following the path laid out for it by its founders. Jean Monnet, of whom I was a friend and admirer, had the American model in mind, that of a federal system. History, however, took a different path: the path towards confederation. It is a less ambitious and less rapid course, but it is a surer one because it is better suited to the diversity of Europe. We should not let the change of direction and pace hide the fact that a great deal has been accomplished. Christopher Columbus set out to find a western route to Asia. He discovered America instead. No one complained.

Achievements

The first achievement has been the reconciliation between France and Germany. That was the first goal in the construction of Europe, and it has been its most resounding success. After a century of fratricidal wars, the political and psychological obstacles were enormous. And yet they were overcome. Let me cite a few examples of the close cooperation that has been established since then.

— The chiefs of state and top ministers from each country meet twice a year on a mandatory basis. In reality they meet far more often.

— Thanks to an exchange program, four million young people have been introduced to life in the other country.

— The two countries are each other's leading trading partner, and are making a joint effort in high-technology industries crucial to their future: aeronautics, space, atomic energy and defense.

— There is no major international issue, including East-West relations, on which there has not been a convergence or a harmonization of attitudes.

As it was the old rivalry between France and Germany that was responsible for Europe's unending strife, it is the understanding between France and Germany that so today forms the basis for European construction and progress.

Intra-European Cooperation

It is often said that Europe is a community of merchants, and indeed the partnership established in 1958 created a market of 250 million consumers, the most tangible effect of the Rome Treaty.

The most noteworthy development of these last few years, however, is that Europe is gradually taking on political substance and an international personality. More and more frequently — and I might add without false modesty, at France's initiative — European countries are taking a common stand on major foreign policy issues. In 1980, the nine European countries stood together on 80 percent of the resolutions put to the vote in the United Nations. Last June in Venice, the European governments were able to work out coherent and specific common proposals on a difficult issue that had divided them for many years: the Middle East. I know that these proposals have drawn some criticism in the United States. My purpose here is not to defend them but rather to point out that, by formulating them, the Europeans proved that they were capable of agreement and determined to act.

Among European actions showing the most imagination and strength have been those in the area of aid to the Third World. The European Community signed an economic agreement with 58 African, Pacific and Caribbean countries giving them special status. The Treaty, known as the Lomé Convention, granted these countries, with their 320 million people, free access to the European market for their products, guaranteed their export earnings and pledged seven billion dollars in aid over and above the bilateral aid already given by the member states.

This Europe-in-the-making is a force to be reckoned with. It has responsibilities and meets them. Except for a military force of its own, it has all the attributes of a power in its own right. Europe is already the world's leading power and has caught up with the United States in many areas of technology. It can also count on a large fund of goodwill, influence and respect throughout the world.

But the most important fact about Europe is this: it shares with the United States the same democratic values, the same social structures, the same cultural points of reference. All that makes for an uncommonly strong bond between us in terms of our civilization and future. Our two continents can work together, in the framework of our alliance, to settle the major problems that mankind will have to face at the end of this century. Europe is emerging from a long period of loss of influence in world affairs, which has been something of an

anomaly in view of its history. But now, through its presence and its initiatives, Europe intends once again to play its own role in world equilibrium and peace.

NEW RELATIONS BETWEEN PARTNERS

I have dwelt on the necessity of ridding ourselves of preconceived ideas. I have deliberately spoken only of France and Europe, because I am most familiar with them. Of course, it would not be hard to make up a comparable list of the misconceptions and outdated ideas Europeans readily entertain regarding America. But that list would only serve to illustrate and support the very simple thesis I want to develop now. It is this: today's realities are not yesterday's, and since we have changed as partners, our relations must change, too. What is new about both partners is not, of course, their basic identities, but their capacities and their resolve. By the same token, what must be changed in their relations is not their foundation — shared ideals and destinies — but their spirit, their structures and their aims.

One thing seems to me absolutely essential: we must all make an effort to bury suspicions, and recriminations and the readiness to assume ulterior motives that undermine our relations. Let us, Europeans and Americans, accept one another as equal and responsible partners. When one of us takes an action that surprises the other, we should be ready to interpret it favorably or at least give it the benefit of the doubt. We must both make equal efforts in this respect.

Europeans have to stop thinking of the United States as the shield behind which they can lay down the burden of their responsibilities. They have to stop heaping continuous, contradictory criticisms on the United States, complaining one day that it is too weak and the next day that it is overconfident, decrying its presence in other countries but condemning its isolationism, rejecting its involvement yet fearing its disengagement.

On the other hand, Americans complain that the Europeans are hesistant, weak and divided, that they are incapable of action. But when we do act, for example in the Middle East, Americans often say that our moves are ill-timed or out of place. The United States sometimes acts as if unity were synonymous with uniformity. But alignment is neither the only form that solidarity can take, nor the highest level it can attain. We can express different viewpoints without being disloyal to each other. Let us then agree that Americans have to recognize Europe's diversity and Europeans have to prove they have a sense of responsibility.

An American once said that when it comes to sharing out duties between the two sides of the Atlantic, it is not fair for one side to reap all the benefits of détente while the other has to bear the entire burden of defense alone. This is true. But it would be just as unfair if we reached the point where the consequences of Europe's division were too easily accepted and East-West relations

were reduced to nothing more than a strategic dialogue between the Soviet Union and the United States.

EAST-WEST RELATIONS

A new spirit in transatlantic relations is not enough. We also need new procedures to translate that spirit into action. The basic requirement, in my view, is that these procedures should create the conditions for confidence by limiting the number of participants, keeping talks confidential, maintaining continuity over time, and taking into account the responsibilities that devolve upon certain powers. Here I am thinking particularly, but not exclusively, of those of France. These conditions are the basic ones. Everything else is peripheral. But without these conditions, our consultations cannot hope to fulfill their essential function.

However well the consultative machinery works, it is essential that we agree on broad goals and work together in a wide-ranging but coherent way. In a word, we must agree on a joint enterprise, a shared geopolitical design. Only by doing this will relations between the Western partners be put on the solid footing that is needed to develop them.

This joint enterprise must concern itself above all with East-West relations, because they involve vital stakes and mortal dangers. The underlying principles of these relations have been challenged, and they have a decisive effect on the very destiny of Europe. Therefore, they also affect that of the United States. The time has come to redefine these relations.

The Western countries, including Europe and the United States, cannot allow a destabilization in the balance of power in favor of the Socialist camp. This must be clearly stated. But both the East and West share a common interest in maintaining peace, limiting the arms build-up and solving the problems of managing world resources in a period of population explosion.

Détente, to which France has contributed greatly and which it still values as an objective, no longer corresponds to the present situation. Despite that, we cannot allow East-West relations to deteriorate further. The present tension calls for efforts to stabilize these relations. This stabilization will be possible only if it is founded on clearly defined bases. There are three important issues.

The first is the balance of military forces. It implies that we accept parity of nuclear systems and that none of the parties will try to assert its superiority. It also means that we must have some equilibrium in conventional forces since it is obvious that these forces are decisive if we are to avoid nuclear confrontation. Therefore, this is one area where the West must make a considerable effort.

The second issue is mutual restraint. This means not using force to change the political balance of East-West relations. The Soviet Union and its allies have violated this cardinal rule in Southeast Asia, in Afghanistan, and in Africa. If this rule were to be violated in Europe, the consequences would be in-

calculable. Restraint is essential if the confidence necessary for the development of East-West relations is to be restored. To convince the Soviet Union of the need for restraint, the Western powers must respond firmly to every challenge, while maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the Soviet Union.

Finally, there is the shared belief that the developed countries, Socialist and Western, all have responsibilities and must do their part in solving the global problems upon which peace depends: disarmament, nuclear proliferation, and the struggle against Third World poverty.

It is necessary for Europe and the United States to discuss these concepts. It is essential for the United States to understand that what is at stake for Europe and its relations with the Eastern countries is a gradual reestablishment of the natural ties that have always existed among the people of Europe. The war and the ensuing ideological and political division weakened those ties, without totally destroying them. Repairing the fabric of Europe is not only a political and economic objective. It is also a human aspiration deeply felt in Europe. It is natural for this to be felt more acutely in a country such as Germany, for reasons we all should understand.

This does not mean that Europe will acquiesce in a shift in the balance of power that would jeopardize either its security or its freedom. Europe's determination must be clear to everyone, especially at a time when Poland is striving for an internal solution to its problems, and must be free to do so without foreign interference. Europe values dialogue with the Eastern countries, but it is not prepared to pay for it by a policy of appeasement.

Conclusion

While East-West relations are the dominant issue for us, as they are for you, it is time for Europe and the United States to realize that the West cannot disregard the other problems facing us in the rest of the world, nor the changes that are emerging there, nor even the sometimes conflicting trends sweeping the world. My aim here is not to deal with these issues in detail, but simply to define an approach to them.

The West stands for freedom and therefore pluralism. Pluralism is in evidence everywhere in the world today. It is present in the diversity of political choices, in models for development and in the resurgence of nationalism and religious beliefs.

But pluralism is threatened by the ambition of some to dominate others, by the interplay of economic interests and by ideological claims. The West must do more than respect this pluralism. It must also be prepared to defend it whenever it is threatened. Pluralism can express itself today in non-alignment. Where non-alignment is genuine, the West has nothing to fear from it. The West is not looking for clients but for partners. This, at least, is the main thrust

of French policy in Africa and the direction France is taking in its relations with the Third World.

One cannot, however, use pluralism as an excuse for the law of the jungle. Over and above legitimate differences, there are universal rules for which all peoples and states can and must demand respect. The West would be failing in its duty if it remained indifferent or weak when terrorism breaks out, when diplomatic immunity is violated, when a population is reduced to exile, and states are invaded and occupied.

The West would fail its duty if it ignored the poverty of the poorest in the world, if it failed to devote the greatest part of its effort to helping organize a world in which security and justice are guaranteed for all.

I have tried to speak frankly today, as is only right between friends and allies. Yet this frankness, which must be the hallmark of our relations, is but the corollary of the trust that should inspire them. It is only by displaying such frankness and trust that we shall infuse a new vitality into our 200-year-old alliance, new vigor into our exchanges, and new effectiveness into our cooperation.

That trust is not only the trust each of us has in the other. It is also, and more importantly, the confidence we have in ourselves and in the value of the example we are setting. It is our confidence in the inherent strength and universal appeal of our message. We must proclaim this message to the world, without giving way to doubt, defeatism or resignation.

France and America were born of sister revolutions. They are moved by the same principles and sustained by the same ideals. It is our calling to bring to the world a message that is as revolutionary today as it was two hundred years ago: the message of independence and progress for nations, stability and peace for the world, and liberty, justice and dignity for all mankind.