

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BREAKING THE LINES:
SARKOZY'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Washington, D.C.

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Featured Presenter:

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French Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights

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Moderator:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BENJAMIN: Well, good afternoon and welcome to the Brookings Institution. I'm Daniel Benjamin, and I'm the Director of the Center on the United States and Europe, and I want to welcome you to this briefing, Breaking the Lines: The Sarkozy Presidential Campaign, with Rama Yade, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights in the new government.

Ms. Yade has had the kind of career that I can attest brings tears to the eyes of those of us slipping into middle age. She has been a staff member in the French Senate, was in charge of Franco Vonieff (?) for her party, the UMP, and was one of the new faces brought into the cabinet by President Sarkozy which made so much -- such remarkable splash when he came into office just a few months ago. And I'm delighted that she has joined us today.

She will speak for about 20 minutes after which Monsieur Francois de La Brosse is also going to speak. He is the Communications Advisor to President Sarkozy, and he's going to speak a bit more about some of the communication strategies that were employed in the campaign. And afterward there will be a question and answer.

Minister Yade is going to speak in French. You should have head phones in case anyone is uncertain as to where they should be, it is Channel 1 for English, Channel 2 for French. And if you have a hard time remembering that, just turn around, and it's on the booth.

Because of the issues of translation when it comes to the Q and A, please wait for a microphone. If you don't speak into the mike, you won't be translated, and speak slowly and, of course, let us know who you are.

And, with that, I'm going to turn it over to the Minister. Thank you very much for coming here today.

MINISTER YADE: Thank you, Mr. Director. You said I am supposed to speak in French, but I thought I was supposed to speak in English, so my thesis is in English. It is a problem? Or no?

Maybe, yeah, I will speak in English. Thank you for inviting me here. I'm very happy to be in your country and to speak about our campaign in a period when American citizens are going to live a new campaign, presidential campaign. So it is true that Nicolas Sarkozy's presidential campaign was a bit new. It may be considered as a surprise because he was unexpected. He is young, and French presidents are used to be older. He belongs to the former government, and it is not very easy to be a candidate and to be a new president when you have been a minister in former government, so that's why it was unexpected.

I'm going to try to explain you why there is -- it was something new in his campaign, why he won the election despite his difference, despite the difficulties of his campaign. And maybe we can draw some lessons for the American campaign.

So on Sunday, May 6, Nicolas Sarkozy was elected the 23rd President of the French Republic with 53 percent of the vote. This represented a break with traditional French politics, a break because it was the first time since 1981 that a member of the outgoing government was elected. He had broken with the entire political class of the previous 25 years, not just the left. He was able to transcend the legacy of his own political past begun in 1974.

The two rounds of the elections saw some of the highest turnouts of the Fifth French Republic founded in 1958. Not only did more than three million new voters rush to register, an eight percent increase over three years ago. At some polling places so many young people from the suburbs turned out that line stretched nearly 100 feet. Moreover, turnout in both the first and second round was nearly 84 percent.

This massive revival of interest in politics owed a good deal to Nicolas Sarkozy's break with the past in his way of practicing politics. Although a conservative candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy was elected on a platform and project combining values, traditional values and progress. His notable willingness to seek out talents and ideas wherever they are regardless of political affiliations marked a profound break with traditional political divide.

So the first question is, how could someone who was a Conservative Party member for more than 20 years manage to win election on the theme of a break with the past separating himself from the records of a

government that constituted his own political family? That is a true question.

The answer could be by being a free man whose acts and thoughts are turned toward the future. First of all, our candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy, was a free man. I mean that three years ago, when he had just won the presidency of the Conservative Party, the UMP -- that means Union for Popular Movements in English -- I said, when he had just won the presidency of the Conservative Party, Nicolas Sarkozy stated, "I know we must restore strength, content, nobility, and usefulness to political action."

He had a long political and ministerial career. He served as a government's minister for near nine of the past fifteen years and held party leadership responsibilities for approximately six. This long experience enabled him to establish and lay the theoretical groundwork for severe diagnosis of French politics. He was convinced it was necessary to break with the old ways of conducting politics, and that the French were waiting for such a break.

He was, too, an adept of clear language, and speaking the truth. He established a close relationship with the people during his pictures, which received increasingly media attention. He devoted himself fully to responsibilities without denying his convictions. In his work, he exhibited solidarity with the government to which he belonged. In his political discourse, he was a free man.

Secondly, Mr. Sarkozy developed a future-oriented action. For

him, breaking with the old way of conducting politics isn't just the words of a politician; these words, these declarations are nothing if the men and women who share them don't rise up to defend them. Between -- up to this year, he created a powerful dynamic within the Conservative Party he headed leading it to produce and promote innovative ideas.

He established close ties with old party officials; he met with the regularly, he listened to their experiences, he took them into account, and he took those solutions. He established and achieved an ambitious goal, the goal of raising party membership to many members making the Conservative Party the leading party in France in terms of membership. Each month he met with new members and rallied them.

He used every means of communication to publicize his actions and his position. He innovated. He was the first to use email, for example, to bring the French into the political debate, which was quite controversial, and was the first to use online political advertising.

On the other hand, he called on the French on every front. Activists crisscrossed French beaches during the summer. Open houses were held repeatedly at the parties' local offices, and meetings were organized nationwide. Very early on he undertook an in-depth effort to develop a credible project that would be as broad as possible. Thus he developed all the major impetuses of this project, which generated the strongest ideas of the presidential campaign.

After that, Nicolas Sarkozy developed a forward-looking philosophy. What I mean is, the projects constituted the main break with the past. Mr. Sarkozy wanted to end the fatalism and status quo policies he was criticizing. He showed them as the main causes for the French disaffection with politics, and that's why the project was and disunion could only be done by getting to the bottom of every subject without taboos. He would devote two years to it.

For instance, he engaged the party in a systematic examination of the major issues of France and French society. Over a 24-month period, he held 18 conventions lasting one day each covering such subject as the society of knowledge, future environment, the economy, education, Europe, women, integration, justice, and justice housing, overseas departments and territories, rural development, health, public services, and so on. These conventions benefited from the contributions of 800 experts from a wide variety of social and political backgrounds.

Through the philosophy of seeking out talents and ideas wherever they are, Nicolas Sarkozy supplemented his work with an exhaustive analysis of foreign experiences. Seven study trips were made to the United States, for example, to talk about immigration, education policy; to Canada to talk about immigration, too, integration; to Great Britain to talk about education, social policy, cultural policy; to Sweden to talk about sports; Finland to talk about education; and to Netherlands.

In two years six months before campaigning began, Mr. Sarkozy had won his bet. The French appreciated his plain speaking. They began to be re-interested in politics, fascinated and impassioned by debate. These were the main reasons for the massive voter registration and the extraordinary voter turnout. And at the dawn of the campaign, Nicolas Sarkozy made a break with the past. He had a grand design for France. The man was known, his ideas were new.

But there is a second question: Did Nicolas Sarkozy win on reserve project, values, his personality, or the weakness of his opinions? The answer could be it was a triumph of a political package: personality, values, project bolstered by the years of his opinions.

The idea of breaking with the past was based on the observation that in France the political problem was one of supply, not of demand. And that's why he tried to give of himself the image of -- and that's what he is -- a courageous man in action. What Nicolas Sarkozy brought to the table derived first of all from his own personality. Consistent with the ideas he championed, he preferred candor to seeking popularity, the freedom of making new proposals to doctrinaire thinking. He purposed the three, maintained a dynamic of permanence risk.

The creation, for example, of a Ministry of Immigration, National Identity and Co-development was a perfect examination of these imprints of

constant risk. Originally, decried, even among his own supporters, the proposal of the Ministry of Immigration and National Identity, this proposal initiated during the campaign not only sparked wide ranging debate on national identity, further strengthening Mr. Sarkozy's defense on the concept of the nation, but has become a (inaudible) crucial to the reinvention of France management of migratory flows.

In the eyes of a majority of French people, these aspects of his personality clearly represented characteristics they looked for in a political leader in whom they would interest the western civility of leading the country toward the future. Mr. Sarkozy perceived these expectations. He responded to it, systemically affirming that he intended to say during the campaign what he would do if he were elected, and to do what he had said if he were indeed elected. He made a commitment.

There is another point that may be taken in consideration. It is the backward-looking opinions. The weakness of the Socialist Party's project would have been enough to lose an election it nevertheless considered impossible to lose. Much more likely, it was a disparity between the expectations of the French people and what the Socialist Party had to offer that cause its failure. It is not only my analysis; it is the analysis of the socialists themselves.

And the other side, he tried to restore values, traditional values. We can wonder if Nicolas Sarkozy was a new man or if he has only new ideas.

Did the Conservative candidate come across as a man of progress? The answer could be Nicolas Sarkozy came across as a man of progress because he was able first to reconcile the (inaudible) duality of the French nation, at once conservative and progressive. It is this openness he's putting into practice today.

The repeated affirmation of the importance of value in Nicolas Sarkozy's campaign speeches not only with the French right of its complexes; it also strongly helped bring voters who were turning towards the extremes out of disappointments back to the right in parliaments. It explained Mr. Sarkozy's very strong result in the first round. Thirty-one percent of the vote, the highest relative score for a candidate of the Republican Right since 1934 when Valéry Giscard d'Estaing garnered 32 percent of the vote, and the highest absolute score every obtained by a candidate in the first round.

Mr. Sarkozy placed work at the heart of his project. That is the second sign. He denounced policies that responded to the failure of some by blocking the success of the others. He called on his country to get back to work, but he went farther than that. He appropriated the less traditional theme of defending workers, making numerous references to such figures as Jean Jaurès and Léon Blum, two figures of the socialism -- of French socialism. He denounced the left abandonment of workers; he committed himself on their behalf.

He also evoked his work within the government to reaffirm his

commitment to security. He continued his strive to control immigration, denouncing the doctrinaire thinking that made the subject, the subject sudden in France, and proposed adopted a responsible policy reconciling controlled immigration and co-development.

Finally, he championed the idea of an irreproachable democracy that doesn't survive on the backs of the French. He proposed, for example, lowering taxes after controlling public spending. He rejected the idea of future generations stuck with the bills incurred by their predecessors.

And, finally, he reinvented a new French nation. Nicolas Sarkozy drew the lessons of the failure of the French referendum on the European Constitution. He embraced the analysis of a French writer called Max Gallo, who saw in it an unsatisfied need for nationhood.

His presidential project reinvents the French nation deriving from its history and planning its future in a globalized work. He honored the past by demanding the restoration of strong symbols in the educational system -- for example, the letters of Guy Môquet. He is a young man who resisted during the World War II, even if he is communist, and by putting human life at the heart of French diplomacy and the Republic.

He advocated a new form of democratizing culture, which he wants to make accessible to a larger number of people, but the new French president was not laying out the contours of a closed, inward-looking nation; on

the contrary, the nation he envisions is the nation engaged in Europe and globalization. He responds to the fear of Europe and globalization with the proposition that France must take its international destiny in hand. He counters immobilism with dynamism, opposition with proposition.

Once again without taboos, once again breaking with the past, he affirms that French foreign policy needs a true doctrine. He proposes to revise alliances by becoming a dynamic, constructive partner of its natural values.

And finally, he tried to transcend conservative approaches. For example, during the second round campaign, Mr. Sarkozy once again broke with tradition. He made a point of transcending traditional rightist conservative approaches by extolling fraternity, the fight against poverty, and equal opportunity. He emulated a long litany of attempts to fight poverty by leveling down, contouring them with the restoration in value of work. He countered work-sharing with wealth-sharing.

To those who no longer have homes, he proposed the right to brings with, if necessary, in order to obtain housing. He countered a growing feeling of resentment among the French with the restoration of a state that offers protection.

This last break with the traditional cleavages between the French left and the French right was not the smallest; it was a harbinger of the policy of openness since implemented by Mr. Sarkozy following his election as president,

in keeping with his oft-repeated conviction: "seek out talent wherever it may be found." That's why he hired in his government many politicians from the left wing, such as Bernard Kouchner, for example.

Work, independence thinking, convictions, and candor allowed Nicolas Sarkozy to win the trust of the French. The man who runs for election has an unshakable place in politics and democracy. He has faith in people's ability to choose their destiny. It was with his faith, his conviction that he threw himself into the fray without fear of adversity or attack. It was with them that he dared everything and enunciated everything, broke with immobility, fatalism, renunciation, resignation and conservatism.

Faced with a future he perceived as uncertain, France chose to trust him to help it to gain its own confidence, its own pride. Thank you.

(Applause)

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