

The National Strategy Forum Speaker Series

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France and the United States: The Old Alliance and New Challenges of the 21st

Century, Featuring Jean-Baptiste Main de Boissiere, Consul General of France in Chicago, The Union League Club of Chicago

October 15, 2007

Summary of Remarks Made to the National Strategy Forum

On October 15, 2007, the Consul General of France in Chicago, Jean-Baptiste Main de Boissiere discussed how the US and France can enhance their longtime relationship. Consul General Boissiere outlined several ideas related to the new US-France alliance.

“[The US-France] friendship constitutes the baseline of the political relationship,” the Consul General explained. This requires reinvigorating many of the relationship fundamentals which include a shared and mutual appreciation for culture as well as strong common values. Although often perceived as contentious, differences in the political cultures should not be seen as a problem, but to the contrary, as an opportunity for two Nations to complement each other on the international arena, the Consul noted.

Mr. Boissiere stated that France, a leader in Europe with its roots in the European Union, can serve as an important access point for the US with regard to its network of contacts and influence. Also, France has an in-depth understanding of vast regions of Africa and the Middle-East and can provide strategic insights and diplomatic guidance to the US. It can serve as an important advisor to the US with regard to understanding countries’ history, culture, and contemporary problems. Conversely, France counts on the US involvement and strong engagement to advance peace, stability, and security in the world, notably to address challenges posed by the Middle-East crisis, the disruption of the financial markets, or global warming.

“A complementary relationship can therefore be a positive sum game [for the US and France]”. But to be mutually beneficial it needs to be oriented towards positive goals. Consul General Boissiere offered several examples, including securing peace, assisting developing countries, fighting terrorism, preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, fighting the development of pandemic diseases, ensuring the stability of the financial markets, integrating the emerging powers, and allowing for the peaceful long term coexistence of the West and the Muslim world.

The main obstacle to deepening the US-France relationship, the Consul General explained, is managing a relationship that is asymmetric by its very nature, given the differences in size between the two nations. The rationale for a strong partnership exists, he explained, but the US, which might have a tendency to view their allies as supporters rather than partners, needs to rethink the way it handles its relations on a broader strategic level.

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To conclude, Consul General Boissiere stated that “there is a wealth of potential for the US and France”. He then explained that a strengthening of political ties requires not only stronger personal ties between the leaders, but also a better mutual understanding of the two societies and a thorough and open review of each other’s goals and strategies regarding world affairs.