

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

COMMENTARY

Let Us Be Partners

By MICHELE ALLIOT-MARIE

March 8, 2005; Page A20

When President Bush was in Europe, he made it quite clear that he wanted to revitalize the trans-Atlantic partnership and work with the European Union. The message was well received and is helping to create a new atmosphere on both sides of the Atlantic. This is important because a fresh ambience will facilitate the dialogue and cooperation we particularly need today.

We face a whole raft of complex problems that can only be resolved through close consultation between Americans and Europeans: terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the growing number of regional conflicts, not to mention the environment, population movements and pandemics that lie outside the realm of defense.

As President Bush and President Chirac both emphasized, Europe and the United States have a privileged partnership by virtue of their history, common values, strong interdependence and shared risks. They must however have better dialogue with each other. Given our capabilities, we have a special responsibility in world stability, and by pooling our efforts we have a chance to achieve our common objectives.

What are these objectives today? The most immediate are clearly: to ensure the Mideast peace process succeeds, promote stabilization in Iraq, prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction (particularly in Iran and North Korea), prevent destabilization in Africa and develop a responsible partnership with Russia and China. Of course, these are quite distinct aims but they are obviously linked. One can't ignore the fact that events in the Middle East have repercussions in Iraq and Iran, and vice versa. Russia's role in the Middle East and Asia must not be underestimated. It is in our own interest to engage in dialogue with China to ensure stability and prosperity in Asia. We have a shared responsibility to prevent the collapse of many states in Africa.

It is vital for Europeans and Americans to hold in-depth strategic dialogue on all these issues to prevent a repeat of past errors and to allow us to act in coordination. Each of us has strong points and weaknesses in relations with certain parts of the world. If we work together, that diversity will be an asset. If we allow our differences to be exploited by others who do not share our objectives, we shall lose. How we play our complementary strengths in Iran seems to me emblematic of this new, indispensable approach between us.

At their dinner on Feb. 21, President Bush and President Chirac emphasized the common ground between France and the United States: Both countries are the founding fathers of democracy and human rights. We have a special responsibility as permanent members of the Security Council and we have a "universal vision" of the world. We want to combat terrorists and prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the world.

I strongly believe that to deal with the crises and threats confronting us, we need both the military stick and the diplomatic carrot.

France has a glorious military tradition and has troops serving in the field in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Africa and Haiti. In Kosovo, 3,000 French soldiers are deployed side by side with 1,800 American soldiers; in Afghanistan, our forces are also operating side by side as are our ships in the Gulf of Oman and reconnaissance aircraft in Djibouti. Our intelligence services and special forces also cooperate closely and appreciate working together.

France is a driving force in European integration and in strengthening European defense. It is encouraging its partners to do more and better in assuming their responsibilities for security issues in Europe and the world. It is making an exceptional effort regarding its own defense budget.

Its vision is that of a strong Europe, contributing to world stability alongside the United States. The development of "Defense Europe" will strengthen NATO's capacities and benefit the trans-Atlantic link. We are not in competition. We complement each other.

I am convinced that this message is being better understood on this side of the Atlantic. The statements by President Bush in Brussels, Condoleezza Rice in Paris and Donald Rumsfeld in Nice show it. The ground is now ready for a new partnership between the United States and Europe to which France will actively contribute. I will do my part in this.

Ms. Alliot-Marie is defense minister of France.