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EDITORIAL

What France Can Do

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President Nicolas Sarkozy of France got nearly everything he could have hoped for from his visit to the United States this week. Now he needs to return the favor by significantly increasing French combat strength in Afghanistan.

Coming off low poll numbers and a regional election drubbing, Mr. Sarkozy needed a boost. And he was welcomed as an old and trusted friend in Washington. He and his wife, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, were treated to a private dinner with the Obamas, which is sure to play well in Paris. He also got a presidential promise of a “free and fair” trans-Atlantic bidding process for the Air Force’s new tanker. And President Obama and his aides graciously made no public mention of France’s failure to contribute its fair share of troops to fight a common enemy in Afghanistan.

Mr. Sarkozy scored additional political points by telling a Columbia University audience that America needs to “reflect on what it means to be the world’s No. 1 power” and be a country “that listens.”

That is true. And France needs to be a country that does more than lecture.

When Mr. Obama ordered 30,000 more American troops to Afghanistan, he rightly expected significant increases from European NATO members as well. In particular, he looked to France, with one of Europe’s most modern and effective military forces, to send another 1,000 or more troops to the 3,750 it currently has there. That would have added useful military punch and underscored the multinational character of NATO’s presence.

Instead, Mr. Sarkozy has offered only 80 more military trainers. Thousands more trainers are needed to transform Afghanistan’s underperforming Army and corrupt and brutal National Police into forces capable of maintaining order and legitimacy in areas reclaimed from the Taliban. But while a number of NATO members can provide qualified trainers, France is one of the few that can provide robust and effective combat forces.

Mr. Sarkozy repeatedly declares that he strongly supports the NATO effort in Afghanistan. He said so again this week. The best way to prove that support would be to send more French combat troops.