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FRANCE AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN THE POST-COLONIAL ERA

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article
abstract

THE ARTICLE EXAMINES THE HISTORY OF RELATIONS BETWEEN FRANCE AND ITS FORMER COLONIES IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA AFTER INDEPENDENCE, AND THE FRANÇA-FRIQUE AS A NEO-COLONIAL PHENOMENON AND A SPECIFIC GAULLIST INSTRUMENT OF GREAT POWER POLITICS. THE AUTHOR STUDIES THE MAIN TRENDS IN FRANCE'S AFRICAN POLICY, ITS OBJECTIVES, POSTURES AND BOTTLENECKS, AND HE TRIES TO ANSWER WHY THESE LOST ITS EFFICACY IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA. THE ARTICLE SHOWS HOW FRANCE'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ROLE IN AFRICA GRADUALLY DIMINISHED IN THE 1990s - 2000s, AND PROPOSES A POSSIBLE SCENARIO FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FRANCE AND AFRICAN COUNTRIES FOR THE NEAR AND MEDIUM TERM.

keywords

FRENCH AFRICAN POLICY, COLD WAR, FRANÇA-FRIQUE, COOPERATION, MUTUAL DEFENSE PACTS, DEVELOPMENT AID, MILITARY INTERVENTION, RWANDAN GENOCIDE, IVORY COAST, FOREIGN TRADE

The attitudes and policies of the former colonial powers (Great Britain, France, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, and Spain) towards their former colonies in Africa were one of the most difficult issues in international affairs in the post-1960 period, and they stood out among the many other North-South relationships.¹ The primary difficulty lay in the enduring importance of the colonial legacy. On the one hand, there were historically close political, economic and cultural ties between former colonial centers and peripheries, which could become a solid basis for the positive development of their relationship and cooperation on new and more equitable principles. On the other, the African peoples' collective memory of colonial oppression and humiliation, as well as the vitality of the old principles of colonial policy and the desire of some political elites of the former metropolitan countries to reproduce them in slightly modified forms in the new international and regional conditions could pose a serious obstacle to this development.

To what extent have the former colonial powers managed to maintain their former influence on the African continent after the collapse of the colonial system? And did they have any chance of success? I'll try to answer this question, taking as an example (perhaps the most indicative) the history of France's policy towards its former dependencies in Africa in the Cold War and post-Cold War eras.

The vast majority of the French colonies in Africa was located in its western and equatorial parts; today there are fourteen independent states, which were often labeled as the French backyard. This label was not accidental. It reflected the general attitude towards the historical fate of the former French Africa, which, during the dissipation of the colonial system, turned out to be in a quite different position than the African areas that slipped out of the control of other colonial powers. In contrast to Britain, which after Harold Wilson's 'East of Suez' decision (1968) and the fall of the Ian Smith's regime in Southern Rhodesia (1980) virtually lost interest in the 'Dark continent,' and unlike Portugal, which withdrew from its African colonies in the wake

¹ Davidson 2006: 3-21; Rouvez 1994: 363-364; etc.

of the Carnation Revolution of April 1974, France tried to maintain a tight grip over the former area of its sway in the postcolonial period. In the context of the collapse of the old imperial-colonial political model and the failure of alternative projects in late 1950s to establish an institutionalized community led by France, French president Charles de Gaulle and his entourage came to the conclusion that it is necessary to build a new system of informal control and patronage over the former colonies through the strengthening of economic, political, military and cultural relations between them and the former metropolis. From the view of the Gaullist political and intellectual elites, France should continue its ‘civilizing mission’ in sub-Saharan Africa to stimulate change and progress in the young African states, that will guarantee adoption by them of French economic and political models and their orientation towards French political and cultural values; France and its former colonies were to form a kind of unified space, a commonwealth, advantageous for both. The implementation of this project resulted in the rise of the network of client states in Western and Central Africa.²

“ THE SLOGAN FRANCE IS NOTHING WITHOUT AFRICA HAD ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Such a system responded on de Gaulle’s main goal — to ensure national security and sovereignty of France and to maintain its great power status. The slogan France is nothing without Africa had economic and geopolitical implications. In economic terms, maintaining its spheres of influence in sub-Saharan Africa has provided France with access to strategic raw materials abundant in the region — primarily to oil (Cameroon, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville) and uranium (Gabon, Niger, CAR3) — that guaranteed its energy security; besides, French business obtained a privileged position to penetrate into its former colonies’ economies and markets. In geopolitical terms, the existence of the group of vassal states increased France’s great-power status in the international arena; in the UN Paris positioned itself as a leader of its own political camp. This gave France the opportunity to carry out an independent foreign policy, detached from global confrontation between two superpowers and their great blocs: it would seem that France offered its former colonies an alternative to dependency on one of the superpowers — a kind of “non-alignment” with a French slant. And finally, as the leader of the French-speaking African countries France continued to pose as a great cultural power that could resist the Anglo-Saxon cultural expansion. In this

2 Bourgi 1980.

3 The Central African Republic.

context, the relationship with Africa turned out to be the essential element of French grandeur. This system was built on the old imperial vertical model, on the basis of bilateral relations between France and African countries, rather than horizontal ones (multilateral or regional), that further consolidated.

FRENCH INFLUENCE

This policy, of which the true architect was Jacques Foccart, de Gaulle’s chief adviser on African affairs,⁴ was called “policy of cooperation: “the zone of French influence in Africa was at the same time an aid zone. The Ministry of Cooperation became its organizing center. The cooperation was carried out in various fields.⁵ Political cooperation aimed to ensure political stability in the countries of the backyard, primarily through promoting the formation of political and legal institutions on the French model and through the establishment of mechanisms to prevent internal and interstate conflicts. For all that in the 1960-1970s French policy makers were guided by the principle stability is more important than democracy — they justified their support for authoritarian regimes in Africa by the need to prevent leftist forces from coming to power. In interstate relations France urged the states of the backyard to adhere to the principle of the inviolability of post-colonial borders.

Military cooperation aimed to transform the backyard into a kind of rear base of France and a testing ground for its new weapons. This cooperation was based on a direct French military presence (in the 1960s — about 60,000 troops) and autonomous military infrastructure (various military installations); it was legalized by bilateral mutual defense pacts that provided not only military assistance in the event of external aggression, but also (according to secret articles) intervention to restore the internal political order — thereby military cooperation was closely related to the political one. Besides, bilateral technical military aid accords provided French assistance in establishing local military and police forces (French instructors, training of African military personnel in France, military supplies).

Economic cooperation aimed to promote the development of industrial, commercial and transport networks in African countries, generally through providing government loans and funding for special projects; French companies gained advantage in the process of awarding the lucrative contracts, which in turn stimulated the economy of the former metropolitan

4 Pean 1990.

5 Francophonie 1987; Chaigneau 1984; etc.

country. The economic cooperation was based on France's currency control over the states of the backyard, which have entered the Franc Zone.

Finally, cultural cooperation aimed to incorporate the Africans into the French cultural and linguistic space and to propagate European political and humanitarian values by creating numerous French schools and cultural centers in the backyard, training French-speaking African students in France, etc. Gaullist policy in Africa was developed first of all as 'domestic': its circulatory system consisted of personal contacts and ties between French and African leaders. Therein its main fault lurked, because the partnership between France and African countries very quickly turned into cooperation between their elites. In the states of the backyard the French financial aid and military presence were used primarily to consolidate the position of the authoritarian regimes and to enrich the ruling groups. France's development aid, particularly direct budget support, helped to maintain patron-client networks, on which the power structure in African countries is based; the military cooperation allowed to strengthen security forces. The secret articles in the mutual defense pacts and French military presence guaranteed rapid French intervention to save the regime. On the other hand, some groups ("Foccart's networks"), consisting of the members of political, military, business elites and special services, arose in the Hexagone itself; they were closely connected with French African policy and profited from it (contracts under the development aid, arms traffic, funding of French political parties, etc.). Moreover they strongly affected both France's policy and the governmental decisions in the countries of the backyard. The most glaring example — the state oil company "Elf" (now "Total"), which heavily influenced on French policy in Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville and was deeply involved in the Biafra conflict (1967–1969) and in the Congo-Brazzaville civil war (1997–1998).⁶

However, such a model of relationship between France and its former African colonies, which was often called *Françafrique*,⁷ a substitute of the French colonial empire, was doomed to collapse like any system tending towards self-isolation. It didn't consolidate, but gradually eroded the connections between France and client states. Striving to assist 'friendly African leaders' to stay in power, French policy in the region contributed to the conservation of authoritarian regimes, hampered democratic development, increased alienation between the state and its ruling elite and the masses and intensified hostility of the latter to France: many Africans believed that the independence of their countries was 'fictitious' and the former colonial power

⁶ Vallée 2000.

⁷ Verschave 1998.

continued to oppress them, using its native political henchmen; in their eyes, it was France that became the main obstacle both to democratization and economic progress in Africa.

At the same time the *Françafrique* system contributed to putting the bulk of French entrepreneurs out of African economies, because in their relations with the local officials they were generally devoid of political support, having no influential patrons in Paris. Small and medium-sized businesses that were the framework of the French economic presence in Africa turned out to be the most vulnerable. An important factor in their decline were nationalizations and excessive *étatization* of many sectors of the economy, especially in West Africa. As a result, the total number of French expatriates in the former African colonies of France dropped from 150,000 in 1960 to 120,000 in 1986 (including 100,000 in West and Central Africa). In 1958 there were over 15,000 expatriates from France living in Guinea, but under Sékou Touré (1958–1984) they almost completely disappeared from this country. In Senegal their number decreased in the 1960s and 1970s from 60,000 to 20,000. In these decades only two countries in the backyard saw a growth of the French population — Gabon (from less than 10,000 to 30,000) and Ivory Coast (from 15,000 to about 50,000) — thanks to more favorable business conditions the local authorities created for French entrepreneurs. The geography of French business activity in Francophone Africa also changed significantly. The French mostly have left the African hinterland, small provincial towns and old trading posts and since then lived concentrated in the capitals, large port cities or some mining centers.⁸

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THE NEED FOR A GEOPOLITICAL NICHE IN A BIPOLAR WORLD, WHICH BOTH FRENCH AND AFRICAN ELITES FELT IN THE 1960s – 1980s, PROVED OUT TO BE AN ANACHRONISM IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

Nevertheless, in terms of the Cold War the *Françafrique* as a Gaullist way to preserve the French empire in the post-colonial era proved to be very tenacious. Both African elites and France were interested in doing so: The former because this system guaranteed them a certain degree of material prosperity and political security, the latter because it provided some international advantages. After all, the backyard was an important element of the post-WW2 global politics, a geopolitical niche to be reckoned with.

⁸ Biarnès 1987: 424-425.

Of course, the obvious defects of the *Françafrique* periodically induced Paris to undertake some attempts to reform it. Under the first non-gaulliste president of the Fifth Republic — Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974–1981) — the rise of tiermondist ideas encouraged French elites to rethink France-African relations in the context of the North-South problem: the belief spread that the rich nations of the North, the former colonial powers, ought to help to uplift the 'backward' nations of the South, as it was the colonialism that became the main cause of their 'backwardness' (the concept of 'France's guilt').⁹ That is why France during Giscard's tenure sought to play the role of mediator between the North and the South, making financial and technical assistance to developing countries the core of its African strategy.

On the other hand, the Soviet expansion on the Black continent, particularly in Angola and the Horn (after the collapses of the Portuguese colonial empire and the Ethiopian monarchy in 1974) and Libya's intervention in Chad made Paris to increase its political and military activities in Africa (for instance Operation Tacaoud in Chad in 1978–1980). Maintaining the orientation on the backyard in its African policy, France at the same time began to pay more attention to its relations with some of the former Portuguese colonies — not only with Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, whose elites were rather French-speaking, but also with São Tomé, Mozambique and oil-rich Angola. This new intention of Paris to expand its sphere of influence in Africa into the non-Francophone parts of the continent was meant however to pursue the old aim — to secure its status of a great power, as opposed to both superpowers, and to increase the geopolitical niche beyond the field of their rivalry.¹⁰

The goals of the African policy of socialist François Mitterrand, who became president in 1981, were similar to those of Giscard's. Under him France's great power strategy acquired increasingly 'progressive' overtones without changing its nature: France's mission is to lead the developing nations in their movement towards economic and political modernization; as for Africa, its aim is to spread French influence across the continent, seeking to bring in its orbit the leftist regimes, from which the Fifth Republic tended to stay away before. Such an ambitious project quickly encountered many challenges, especially the lack of sufficient financial resources, that is why the Socialists were forced soon to revert to the old emphasis on the backyard.¹¹

9 Blanchard, Monnet, Schlesinger 2003.

10 Biarnès 1987 : 374-391.

11 Under Giscard d'Estaing the countries of the *backyard* have received 85% of French *development aid*, in 1986 they've got almost the same share (83%), while Mozambique, Angola and Nigeria — only 2% (Biarnès 1987 : 406).

In Francophone Africa Paris strengthened relations with the 'progressive' regimes like those of Mathieu Kérékou in Benin, Denis Sassou Nguesso in Congo-Brazzaville and Didier Ratsiraka in Madagascar, but this couldn't stop the close cooperation of France with its traditional 'friends' — Abdou Diouf (Senegal), Félix Houphouët-Boigny (Ivory Coast), Ahmadou Ahidjo and his successor Paul Biya (Cameroon), Omar Bongo (Gabon), Gnassingbé Eyadéma (Togo) and Mobutu (Zaire). Mitterrand's administration partly changed the model of the assistance to the backyard — it significantly reduced the number of French advisers in Africa (*coopérants*) and concentrated its resources on supporting targeted short-term projects. However Paris maintained development aid as the basis of cooperation, which proved out to be a specific way to bribe the local elites and bureaucracy and to provide political stability; adjustment loans to support structural reforms (in fact, to sustain inefficient and largely unprofitable state-owned enterprises) played an important role in the mechanisms of corruption.¹²

So, despite some modifications, the traditional Gaullist approach continued to dominate the African policy of France under Gaullists, liberals and socialists until the late 1980s. This approach conformed to the Cold War logic. For French policy-makers the feeling that France remained a great power, whose opinion was taken into account by the other nations, which enjoyed broad international support and respect and which provided its own military and economic security, compensated for all the defects of the *Françafrique* — and the crimes of 'friendly' African regimes, and the omnipresence of corruption, and the squeezing of French companies out of the 'Dark continent,' and the growth of anti-French sentiment among the Africans.

On the other hand, the existence of the *Françafrique* was possible only in the context of the uncertainty that dominated the African countries in the first three decades after independence, when the modern political and economic institutions were not yet fully formed, the social-class structure remained largely undifferentiated and ethnic identity played a notable role rather than social class or civic one. Patrimonialism and patron-client relationships, closely connected with French 'family policy' and 'Foccart's networks,' were eating away like a cancer the very fabric of weak African economic and political systems.

However, the situation began to change after the end of the Cold War. Africa has ceased to be an area of confrontation between the two superpowers,

12 Biarnès 1987: 374-425.

and France's role as a champion of a 'third way' for African nations lost its meaning. The survival of the *Françafrique* as a pseudo-imperial project was caused by a number of external threats — from Soviet or leftist to American or Anglophone; when some of them disappeared and others became weaker, this project was increasingly delegitimized.¹³ The need for a geopolitical niche in a bipolar world, which both French and African elites felt in the 1960s – 1980s, proved out to be an anachronism in a globalizing world.

The economic difficulties encountered by African countries in the 1980s contributed to the disappointment in the *Françafrique*, especially as its defects in the new context became more evident. That is why more and more Africans interpreted France's policy toward their continent as 'neocolonialist,' as motivated by the desire to maintain existing inequality between the North and the South and perpetuate the domination over its former African colonies. Many people even in the most prosperous countries of the backyard — Ivory Coast and Gabon — thought that the real independence had never been achieved. Wherever in Africa the French forces were located, they were viewed by native population as colonial garrisons of the early 20th century.

The real economic relationships between France and the backyard increasingly weakened and the low effectiveness of development aid became more obvious. Africa's share in world trade continued to decline,¹⁴ while in Eastern Europe the collapse of Communism opened up new markets and provided new investment opportunities for French capital. In such circumstances an important part of the Hexagon's political and business elites began to doubt about the validity of the old Gaullist axiom that "the fate of France is inextricably linked to that of Africa." From their point of view, Paris has to make a choice in favor of European integration. In other words, France can't maintain its position in world politics, trying to sustain a modified version of its former colonial empire; instead France should coalesce with other European countries into strong community able to compete effectively with the key centers of economic power in the new globalizing world.

Mitterrand seemed to have made the decisive choice in favor of new African policy in June 1990 at a Franco-African summit at La Baule, where he declared to the leaders of the backyard that "from now on France will link its aid to the efforts of those heading toward more freedom."¹⁵ Thus, keeping 'friendly' regimes in power, whatever they were, as a way to maintain France's geopolitical influence, was no longer a suitable foreign policy instrument for Paris.

13 Smith 1997 : 57.

14 From 10% to 2% over the last 20 years.

15 Emmanuel 2008: 23.

The devaluation of the franc CFA¹⁶ by 50% in January 1994 became the landmark event; it was interpreted by many observers as a true "withdrawal of France from Africa" — Paris ipso facto acknowledged that France had no longer the desire or resources to maintain 'special relationships' with the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. In fact this decision meant also that France left the Franc zone which French diplomacy so actively formed in the previous decades and exchanged the close financial and economic ties with the backyard for European integration, because 'unbounding' the French franc from its African counterpart facilitated the establishment of monetary union and a single currency in Europe. On the other hand, this decision further weakened the French economic presence in its former African colonies, undermining the basis of French expatriates' business activity, especially in the small scale industry sector.¹⁷

France, however, departed from this trend during the Rwandan civil war of 1990–1994. Paris provided direct military and diplomatic support to the Hutu dominated regime of Juvenal Habyarimana (1973–1994) and indirect to Jean Kambanda's interim government (April–June 1994), driven by fear of the takeover of Rwanda by the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front, seen by Paris as an instrument of Anglo-Saxon expansion in the Great Lakes region. That diplomacy contributed much to the outbreak of the large-scale genocide against Tutsis. Despite urging from human rights groups, the French privately continued to supply arms to the genocidal regime until the end of May 1994, and then tried by diplomatic means to compel the RPF to stop its march towards Kigali. It led to the biggest political and moral defeat of France in Africa after 1960.¹⁸ Paris couldn't prevent the PRF victory, completely lost its influence in Rwanda and appeared as an accomplice to genocide in the eyes of the entire world.

The failure in Rwanda hastened the fundamental African policy change that was initiated by Mitterrand at La Baule. Even neo-Gaullist Jacques Chirac's victory in the 1995 presidential election couldn't stop that. The old African strategy was finally discredited by the futile attempts of Paris to save the crumbling regime of Mobutu in Zaire in 1997. According to the influential newspaper *Le Monde* France suffered there the "triple failure — of an ambition, of a method and of a morality."¹⁹ That is why Chirac's

16 "Franc des Colonies françaises d'Afrique" — "Franc of the African French Colonies," special currency introduced in Western and Central French Africa after 1945 to spare those countries a stark devaluation. The acronym has received various other meanings over time. By 1994 it was translated as "African Financial Community." (Editor's note – JvdB)

17 Dembélé 2004.

18 Marchesin 1998: 93.

19 *Le Monde* 1997.

administration was forced to continue the «strategy of abandoning.» Already in 1996, he told his ministers that the era of unilateral intervention of France in Africa has ended.²⁰ France's development aid fell from 42.1 billion francs in 1995 to 34.7 billion in 1998; government spending on cooperation was reduced from 8 billion in 1993 to 6.4 billion in 1998.²¹ After the Socialist party's victory in the 1997 parliamentary elections, the new government, headed by Lionel Jospin, took further steps to reform the mechanisms of cooperation with Africa and to put an end to the *Françafrique*. The Ministry of Cooperation was abolished; France reduced the number of its troops in Africa from 8,000 to 5,000 and of its military bases to only five. Ivorian and Senegalese leaders had to exert considerable diplomatic efforts to persuade Paris to maintain French military presence in their countries. In 2001 during his visit to South Africa Jospin declared: "Africa of zones of influence and inappropriate intervention is a thing of the past."²² France renounced its previous bilateral approach to Africa and began to promote regional integration, especially in the field of defense and security (the Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capacities program). Officially Paris observed strict neutrality during the 1997 civil war in Congo-Brazzaville. The share of credits to African countries in France's external government credits fell from 56% in 1997 to 52% in 1999. Financial aid to sub-Saharan Africa decreased by 3.5 billion francs, especially to Cameroon, Gabon and Madagascar. Credit policy was gradually reoriented from Francophone countries toward Southern and Eastern Africa. On the other hand, Paris increasingly tended to provide assistance through international mechanisms, especially through UN and EU channels.²³

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IN THE EYES OF MANY AFRICANS, FRANCE — THE ONLY FORMER COLONIAL POWER THAT CONTINUED TO MAINTAIN ITS MILITARY PRESENCE ON THE CONTINENT — HAS PLAYED IN NOVEMBER 2004 A ROLE OF THE IMPERIALIST PREDATOR

By the 21st century, Africa — with its strategic position in the international military balance, with its raw materials, with its influence in

20 French 1996.

21 Marchesin 1998: 98.

22 Champin 2001.

23 Marchesin 1998 : 91–106; Alibert 1999; Raafat 2001; Adjovi 2002 : 426-437; Leymarie 2002: 18-19.

the UN — has lost much of its former importance to France. French ruling circles concluded that huge sums destined to promote the development of Africa have been embezzled or wasted and so there was no further need to spend French money on this. The description of Africa as a “hopeless continent” and a “bottomless pit” of violence and catastrophe, “impossible to get under control,” became increasingly popular. The Whites — the military, business people, missionaries and even charitable aid groups — were leaving Africa. François Soudan wrote in January 2002: “the divorce between what was a metropolis with a universal vocation and scattered confetti of its former empire seems have already happened.”²⁴ Since then the backyard ceased to be the most crucial element of the French-speaking world for France.

In the very beginning of the XXI century the policy of “abandoning Africa” seemed to be all but irreversible. However, the outbreak of the civil war in Ivory Coast in September 2002 woke up old demons.²⁵ The rapid advance of the rebel New Forces toward Abidjan, the economic capital of the country, forced President Laurent Gbagbo to appeal for French military assistance, and the officials in Paris — Chirac and the new center-right government of Jean-Pierre Raffarin — made the fateful decision to intervene. This departure from a “new African policy” seems to have been motivated by “the unique status of Ivory Coast... that still maintained strong economic, cultural and military links with France after independence in 1960, including allowing a permanent French military presence.”²⁶

French troops arrived in Ivory Coast, stopped the rebel advance and saved Gbagbo's regime. But when Paris tried to find a political solution to the conflict, inviting Gbagbo to share power with the rebels (Linass-Marcoussis Agreement), the regime began to incite anti-French sentiment. Pro-government media led an ultranationalistic campaign against France, which they accuse of backing the rebellion and of preventing the nation to achieve real political and economic independence.

In early November 2004 Gbagbo launched an offensive against the rebels, and when it failed, he arranged a large-scale provocation. On November 6 government planes bombed a French military base in Bouaké, killing nine French soldiers and an American citizen. In retaliation, the French destroyed the entire Ivorian air force and took control of Abidjan airport. This provided Gbagbo's partisans an opportunity to portray France

24 Soudan 2002: 1.

25 Rueff 2004.

26 Richburg 2003.

as a direct participant in the civil war.²⁷ The ‘young patriots’ (pro-government youth group), assisted by the military and policemen, organized in Abidjan and others towns a «hunt for Whites, »especially for the French, beating them, looting their homes and shops, raping women, burning down French schools and cultural centers. France was forced to introduce its troops in Abidjan and to conduct on November 10–17 a mass evacuation of about 14,000 foreign (mostly French) citizens. Dozens of Ivorians were killed or injured in clashes with French soldiers.

The position of France in Ivorian economy was hit hard by these events, which dealt a heavy blow mainly to French small and medium-sized enterprises (over 600), about 150 of which were completely destroyed.²⁸ But they also further harmed the relationship of France with Africa, especially with the countries of the backyard. In the eyes of many Africans, France — the only former colonial power that continued to maintain its military presence on the continent — has played in November 2004 a role of an imperialist predator, whose military action very much resembled an expedition of the colonial epoch.²⁹

It became evident that the *Françafrique* was completely outdated and the attempts to revive the old Gaullist policy were doomed to failure. Official Paris could not find a common language with neither African public opinion, nor the new generation of African leaders like Gbagbo and Paul Kagame who combined authoritarian tendencies with nationalist hostility toward the West. That is why after 2004 Chirac and his successor Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–2012) played it safe and tended to avoid direct intervention in internal affairs of African countries; in 2008 Sarkozy launched the process of closing some of French military bases in Africa (Senegal etc.).

At the same time the Hexagon’s positions in the region’s economies and foreign trade continued to deteriorate. Already in 2001–2004 French export volumes for Africa have fallen by almost 40% and the import volumes by roughly 30%. France’s share of overall imports into Africa fell to 8.9% in 2010 from 16.2% in 2000, while China’s rose to 12.5% from 3.4%. Now France is only Africa’s sixth largest trading partner (in 2005 the second). In 2012 French exports to sub-Saharan Africa fell by 4%. Sub-Saharan Africa account for only a tiny share of the French market — 2.75% of exports and 2.36% of imports (2012).

27 Notre voie 1994.

28 Bazler 2004.

29 Diop 2005: 9; Krivoushin 2007: 15-16.

France’s economic ties with the backyard weakened particularly markedly. If previously its economic and commercial relations with sub-Saharan Africa were almost entirely limited to its former colonies, in 2012 its main trading partners in the region were Nigeria, South Africa, Equatorial Guinea and Angola. In 2011 2/3 of French imports from sub-Saharan Africa was provided by Nigeria (36%), Ghana (11%), Angola (11%) and South Africa (8%); more than 30% of exports went to South Africa (18.5%) and Nigeria (12%). In 2012 the key suppliers of oil — the main product imported by France from sub-Saharan Africa — were Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea and Angola. In that year France’s exports to French-speaking Benin declined more than 3 times; on the contrary, its imports from Spanish-speaking Equatorial Guinea rose 4.5 times.

In the 1960s France completely dominated the foreign trade of its former sub-Saharan colonies, but now the situation has changed. The imports from these states lost its importance for the Hexagon, except of some raw materials, especially hydrocarbons and uranium. For none of the countries of the backyard France is the number one client. France yielded that place to China, India, USA, Turkey, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Nigeria. French imports from Benin, Togo, Mali, Chad and CAR are very trifling. In 2012 oil accounted for 95% of France’s imports from Congo-Brazzaville and uranium for 99.1% of its imports from Chad.

The Hexagon rather more interests in the backyard as a market for its products. However France continues to remain a main supplier only to its five former sub-Saharan dependencies — Senegal, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Niger and Mali. And even in these countries France’s role as a trading partner is reducing. In 2000–2012 the share of imports from France to Senegal dropped from 37% to 15%. In Congo-Brazzaville, France’s position is threatened by the growth of imports from China and especially from Brazil. Sub-Saharan Africa’s share of all France’s bilateral aid is further decreasing. In 2010 it fell to 45%. In 2012 total aid to sub-Saharan countries declined by 17.15%, below its 2004 level.

The results of France’s African policy were so deplorable that François Hollande, elected president in May 2012, has tried to overcome the trend. France again became the main investor in Africa (17.9% of all foreign direct investments). In early December 2013 the president announced his goal to double trade with Africa. But the ‘new’ approach Hollande vows to push through proved to be the old one. In 2013 France launched two military interventions — in Mali (Operation Serval) and the CAR. Now more than 5,300 French soldiers deployed in the continent, in nine states of the backyard

— CAR, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Senegal, and Chad. The ghost of empire comes back.

This shows how difficult it is for France to depart from its long-standing military and political role in Africa. And this also demonstrates how hard it is to build and maintain constructive relationships between the former colonial center and its periphery, between the metropolis and dominated countries after an empire has fallen. Any attempt to maintain some forms of economic, political or cultural control over former dependencies that could be successful in the early independence period, when young nations have not yet chosen the models of their economic and political development, in the long term was doomed to failure, primarily because such an attempt inevitably came into conflict with these nations' historical memory, the memory of colonial rule. This memory continues to influence the political attitudes and values of various segments of the African society who are inclined to treat any action of a former metropolitan country as a sign of the rebirth of its old policy of oppression and exploitation. That is why the desire of the French to "preserve their Africa" inescapably led to a "loss of Africa", especially under globalization, which gradually destroyed all the geopolitical niches that existed inside the bipolar-structured world system, where economically, politically or psychologically marginalized nations could find shelter and survive. "Any other, but not France" — such is the current state of the public mood in the backyard.

At the same time the United Kingdom which refused to play by the rules of imperial logic in the relations with its former African colonies, has achieved much greater success in maintaining its influence on the 'Dark continent', by using the mechanisms of the Commonwealth or Commission for Africa set up in early 2004 by the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair³⁰. But it is the countries which in the eyes of the local population are not associated with colonialism, the white race or the Western world as a whole — South Korea, India and especially China — that have the most favorable opportunities for economic and political penetration in Africa. The Africans, having failed to find their place in the new globalizing world, turn away from the West seen as the culprit who caused all their misfortunes and prefer to seek other partners. Future importance of France in Africa depends on the ability to radically revise its political priorities and renounce its old imperial illusions. It is obvious that France will not be able to reduce or reverse the negative trend in its trade and economic relations with Africa, to restore its leading position, to challenge China's domination and to effectively resist the expansion of its other rivals; French role will continue to diminish. As regards

30 Girard 2005.

the political and military dimensions of bilateral relationships, it should be expected that the pursuance of the old policy of direct military intervention will lead to new failures, particularly in such unruly African states as the CAR. The most likely scenario through the near and medium terms is the further weakening of the position of France as a crucial and independent actor on the regional scene and probably the ultimate rejection of the policy of direct intervention. In its relationship with the 'Dark continent' Paris will increasingly not be acting alone, but in conjunction with other members of the European team, choosing African sub-regional organizations such as ECOWAS (CEDEAO) rather than individual states as its main partners. France will progressively use the mechanisms of the EU to provide financial and economic assistance to Africa and to build common policies and political initiatives, especially in the event of a major regional crisis. As for the backyard, Paris will inevitably continue to change its regional priorities and to expand cooperation (both economic and cultural) not only with its former colonies, but with all the Francophone countries in Africa: the relations with the backyard will completely lose their previous importance and strategic value for France.

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