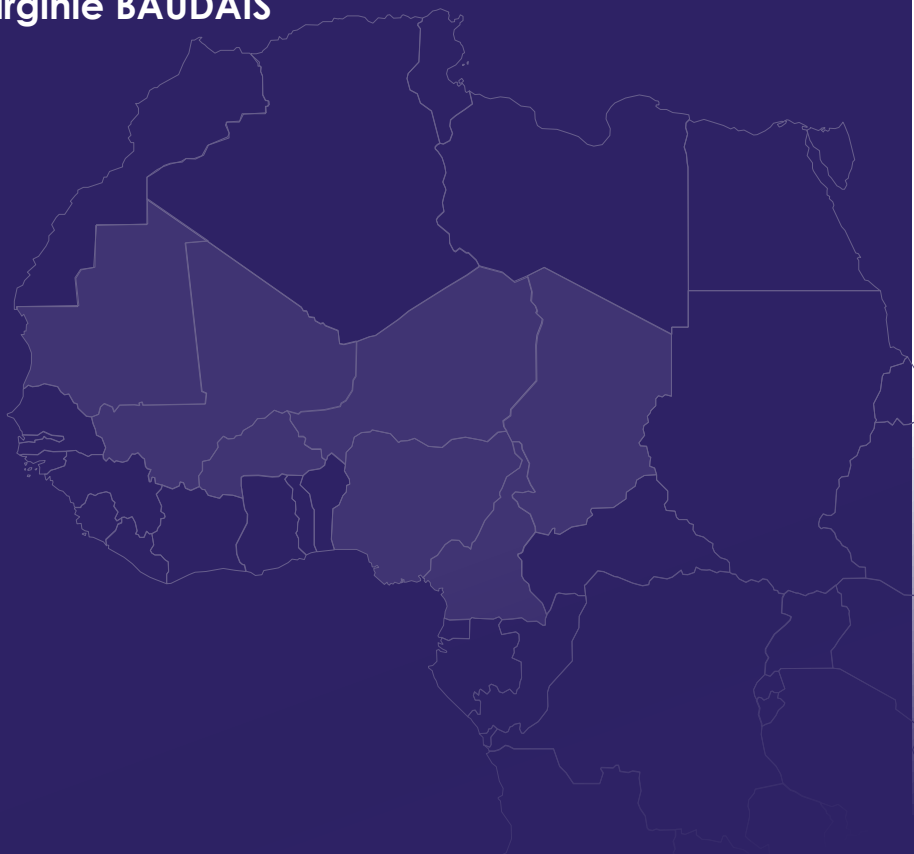


# Possible approaches to address deteriorating France-Africa relations

18 novembre 2024

Public

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**Please quote this work as follows:**

Virginie BAUDAIS (18 November 2024), Possible approaches to address deteriorating France-Africa relations, Plateforme d'Analyse du Suivi et d'Apprentissage au Sahel, Production Pasas.

<https://pasas-minka.fr>

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[Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad]

[Françafrique, Decolonization, Diplomacy, Security, Cooperation, Governance]

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Since 2020, France-Africa relations have been the subject of intense discussion, unleashing passions and resentment, turning populations against France's policy on the African continent, and provoking major diplomatic breakdowns. Relations between France and the countries of the central Sahel – Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger – have been particularly strained in recent years, but there have also been tensions with countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

France's relations with Africa are linked to its colonial past on the continent. All African countries have, at one time or another and for varying periods of time, been under the yoke of European colonialism, with the exception of Ethiopia. This colonial history remains an 'ever-present past'<sup>1</sup> and continues to hinder the establishment of balanced partnerships.

Relations between France and Africa have traditionally been described under the term 'Françafrique', which dates back to 1945 and reflects the intertwined relationship between France and the African continent, between a former colonising country and its former colonies. This idea of community was long symbolised by Jacques Foccart (General de Gaulle's own 'Monsieur Afrique'),<sup>2</sup> the introduction of the CFA franc, and the installation of French military bases, but also by corruption, scandals involving 'ill-gotten gains', the financing of political parties in France, the overthrow of presidents, and other cases of electoral manipulation to suit French interests.<sup>3</sup>

For decades, France built its African policy on the basis of its 'privileged' relations with its former colonies. However, this approach went hand in hand with forms of paternalism and arrogance that are no longer accepted – a situation which now makes it necessary to rebuild links between Africa and France on an equitable and decolonised basis.<sup>4</sup>

The need to break with the model of 'Françafrique' is a refrain repeated by many French presidents, including Emmanuel Macron. In November 2017, six months after his election, Macron claimed that France's African policy no longer existed. He announced a 'change of method' and replaced the term 'African policy' with 'African strategy'.<sup>5</sup> However, despite this constant desire for reform, the actual changes have been unconvincing.

A series of actions and situations have led to a marked deterioration in relations between France and Africa in recent years: the French military intervention in Côte d'Ivoire, the overthrow of Gaddafi, which contributed to the lasting destabilisation of the Sahel region, French influence in Kidal, its support for President Déby, the 'summons' to a summit in Pau, controversial migration policies, tensions with Rwanda, Algeria, and Morocco... Furthermore, this deterioration has accelerated and worsened since 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> Conan, E., Rousso, H., Vichy, an ever-present past, Hanover NH, Dartmouth College Press, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Jeune Afrique, Françafrique: Jacques Foccart, le prince des ténèbres, 15 September 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Verschave F.-X., La Françafrique, Paris, Stock, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Mignolo, W.A., Parce que la colonialité est partout, la décolonialité est inévitable, Multitudes, 84(3), 2021, 57-67.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/11/28/discours-demmanuel-macron-a-luniversite-de-ouagadougou>

French troops left Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, French ambassadors were expelled from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger,<sup>6</sup> and demonstrators in Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and Senegal targeted French buildings.<sup>7</sup> On the other side of the continent, questions regarding France's role in the genocide in Rwanda (1994) are straining relations between France and Rwanda, with repercussions for relations with the DRC.<sup>8</sup> Relations with Burundi have finally resumed after years of suspension.<sup>9</sup> In North Africa, a (new) diplomatic crisis emerged between Algeria and France in August 2024 related to France's support for Morocco's proposals for the disputed territory of Western Sahara.<sup>10</sup>

Although the desire to rebuild relations between France and Africa has been reaffirmed many times, it seems to be easier said than done. This policy brief aims to address: (i) the need to transform practices, with a particular focus on diplomacy and securitised policy approaches; and (ii) the need to deconstruct established relations, stressing the need to embrace changes towards a balanced and decolonising approach to relations between Africa and France. This brief takes into account the most recent events, especially the crisis connected to the states of the new 'Alliance of Sahel States', and focuses on the states of Francophone Africa.

## 1 - FRANCE-AFRICA RELATIONS: TOWARDS A (REAL) TRANSFORMATION OF PRACTICES

France's relations with the African continent differ depending on whether we are talking about North Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa, West Africa or East Africa, or Francophone or Anglophone countries. Above all, these relations take on a distinct, supposedly 'privileged' form when it comes to former French colonies. The expressions 'Françafrique' or 'pré-carré' (referring to the consolidation of power within one's national sphere of influence) are indicative of a special relationship, as is the case, for example, between France and Algeria or France and Senegal. However, these relations have changed considerably in recent years, with a diversification of influences and partners, whether in the economic, cultural, or military spheres. Although 'Françafrique' was symbolised for a long time by the extensive hold on power of the 'Bongo clan' in Gabon and by the (still continuing) longevity of Paul Biya's presidency in Cameroon (1982-), the election of Diomaye Faye in Senegal (2024), who presented himself as the 'candidate of change', is an important symbol of hope for a young continent. This 'change' refers to a desire to break with French policy. It also reveals one of the major paradoxes of relations between France and Africa: that the use of a variable-geometry diplomacy, one based on double standards, is detrimental to France's interests and influence. The reconfiguration of the French military presence is, as we shall see, a consequence of the deterioration in relations, and therefore of the policy pursued on the continent.

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<sup>6</sup> The rift is largest in Niger, with the closure of the French school, the Franco-Nigerian cultural centre and the French Embassy.

<sup>7</sup> France Inter, Au Burkina Faso, des institutions françaises prises pour cible sur fond de coup d'état, 2 October 2022; France Info, Coup d'état au Niger: pourquoi la France a été prise pour cible par des manifestants, 31 July 2023; VOA Afrique, Manifestation contre la France au Tchad: cinq cadres de l'opposition incarcérés, 16 May 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Philippe Bolopion, La normalisation des relations entre la France et le Rwanda ne devrait pas se faire sur le dos des victimes du M23, op-ed published in Le Monde, 29 June 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/06/29/la-normalisation-des-relations-entre-la-france-et-le-rwanda-ne-devrait-pas-se-faire-sur-le-dos-des-victimes-du-m23\\_6179770\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/06/29/la-normalisation-des-relations-entre-la-france-et-le-rwanda-ne-devrait-pas-se-faire-sur-le-dos-des-victimes-du-m23_6179770_3212.html).

<sup>9</sup> Le Monde, France-Burundi: une reprise de coopération qui fâche, 30 July 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Jeune Afrique, Entre Alger et Paris, la crise diplomatique s'accroît, 8 August 2024.

## 1.1 - Breaking with variable-geometry diplomacy

In Ouagadougou in 2017, a few months after his election, Macron announced the end of France's African policy. Many expectations were raised of a break with old practices, especially as this announcement came from a young president for whom 'the crimes of European colonisation are indisputable and part of our history'.<sup>11</sup> However, Macron's attitude in announcing (again) in March 2023 the end of *Françafrique* during a visit to Gabon (the most explicit symbol of *Françafrique*), or in attending the funeral of Idriss Déby in April 2021 (the only European head of state to do so) the day after one of Déby's sons had taken power, or in failing to condemn the military regime in Chad, in contrast to the hard-line stance adopted towards Niger in July 2023, are indicative of France's variable-geometry stance, both in its desire to break with the past and in its condemnation of military regimes.

After France's former colonies gained independence, France's 'African policy' consisted of supporting – especially militarily – 'friendly regimes' in exchange for their loyalty on the international stage. A major change in policy occurred in 1990, symbolised by the 'La Baule speech' given by President François Mitterrand at the sixteenth Franco-African summit (19 to 21 June 1990), attended by African Heads of State and Government and the President of the French Republic. Mitterrand's speech emphasised the need for democratisation, which would become a condition for the granting of French aid, and concluded by saying that freedom 'will be your best friend'.<sup>12</sup> France was quickly followed in this approach by other European countries<sup>13</sup> and the European Union.<sup>14</sup> A few months later, the French policy became more nuanced, as each country was encouraged to proceed at its own pace.<sup>15</sup>

In 2024, a variable-geometry approach is also apparent in France's respect for democratic principles, which contributes to weakening its message about respect for human rights and 'universal values'. This impression has recently been reinforced by France's responses to military coups. The return of praetorianism in Africa has been particularly pronounced in certain countries with which France is closely involved (Mali, Niger, Gabon), and several coups d'état in these countries came as a surprise to political authorities in France, notably the President, the Ministry of the Armed Forces, and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.<sup>16</sup>

The variable reactions to coups d'état suggest that France has relations with some military regimes and not with others. France only timidly condemned the coup d'état against Ibrahim

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/11/28/discours-demmanuel-macron-a-luniversite-de-ouagadougou>

<sup>12</sup> 'France will link its entire contribution to the efforts that will be made to move towards greater freedom', *Le Monde*, 22 June 1990; 'It is clear that France's usual aid will be more moderate towards regimes that behave in an authoritarian manner without accepting the evolution towards democracy, and more enthusiastic towards those who take this step with courage', *Le Monde*, 23 June 1990. See also Bayart, J.-F., *France-Afrique: la fin du pacte colonial*, *Politique Africaine*, (39), 1990, 49-53.

<sup>13</sup> From 2 to 4 July 1990, a conference bringing together 46 African countries was held in Maastricht.

<sup>14</sup> At the Third Lomé Convention, a clause was added relating to human rights.

<sup>15</sup> In the 'Chaillot speech' delivered by the French President at the Francophonie summit in Paris in November 1991, François Mitterrand recommended that African presidents embark on the road to democratisation 'at their own pace', which was interpreted as a concession to those who were most reluctant to move in this direction. In 1995, Prime Minister Alain Juppé attempted to bring about a reform to cooperation that 'ultimately got bogged down'. As a result, 'the conduct of France's African policy has largely fallen back on traditional networks', Bayart, J.-F., Ellis, S., Hibou, B., *La criminalisation de l'Etat en Afrique*, Brussels, Complexe, 1997, p. 10; Young (C), « The Heritage of Colonialism », in Harbeson (J. W.), Rothchild (D), Eds., *Africa in World Politics: Post Cold War Challenges*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1995, pp. 23-42.

<sup>16</sup> Vircoulon, T., *Le recul de la France en Afrique : une perte de crédibilité mondiale*, 15 novembre 2023, <https://theconversation.com/le-recul-de-la-france-en-afrique-une-perde-de-credibilite-mondiale-217735>

Boubacar Keïta, with whom relations had become very difficult.<sup>17</sup> It was only when the civilian president and prime minister were ousted in May 2021 that France condemned the coup more firmly and suspended its military assistance.<sup>18</sup> The most immediate reaction to a coup d'état is to cease working with regimes that come to power by force. France, like the European Union and other European partners, suspends budgetary support to such governments more or less immediately, but the way in which this is done varies from one context to another. France suspended its cooperation with Niger on 29 July 2023,<sup>19</sup> whereas it did not suspend cooperation with Chad or Gabon, whose two ruling military leaders have also been received at the Élysée Palace.<sup>20</sup>

These differences in reaction to the coups in Mali, Chad, and Niger send mixed messages and show that Françafrique has not yet been completely abandoned. French reactions were more limited in the case of the overthrow of Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta than in the case of President Bazoum, and non-existent in the case of the coup led by Mahamat Déby, who, the day after his father's death, dissolved parliament and the government, suspended the constitution, appointed the members of a provisional parliament, and took over both legislative and executive powers.<sup>21</sup> These differences in reaction also show that France is failing to take into account the deep-rooted causes of democratic disenchantment, even while it proposes a return to the status quo ante, such as the reinstatement of the overthrown president or a return to constitutional order.

These variable-geometry reactions have also been widely commented on in the Sahel region, helping to discredit France's commitment to democracy. In Mali, it is common to hear ministers or the prime minister recalling the devastating effects of NATO's intervention in Libya in the presence of representatives of the diplomatic corps and the international community, and criticising the impact of French decisions in particular on the lives of the people of the Sahel.

With regard to respect for the rule of law, it is difficult to work with authorities who have come to power through force, but furthermore, the increasing number of such authorities shows the extent to which, despite economic, political, and military investment, the forms of influence available to France – and to Western countries in general – are limited. France's strategy also affects its partners. Within the European Union, France's position has often been disapproved of, particularly its intransigence towards certain states: 'some European Union countries that previously disapproved of France's African policy in silence are now criticising it in hushed tones or even openly'.<sup>22</sup> The coup d'état in Niger exposed the disunity among EU Member States and some other partners: in particular, while France maintained an intransigent position, supporting

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<sup>17</sup> RFI, Mali: comment la France a tourné la page IBK, 28 August 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200828-mali-comment-la-france-a-tourne-la-page-ibk>

<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the US suspended its military assistance after the coup d'état as early as 22 August 2020. Anadolu Ajansı, Washington suspend sa coopération militaire avec le Mali suite au coup d'Etat, <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/washington-suspend-sa-coop%C3%A9ration-militaire-avec-le-mali-suite-au-coup-d-etat/1950314>

<sup>19</sup> France Info, Coup d'état in Niger: France suspends all cooperation with the country, 30 July 2023, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/niger/coup-d-etat-au-niger-la-france-suspend-toutes-ses-cooperations-avec-le-pays\\_5980115.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/niger/coup-d-etat-au-niger-la-france-suspend-toutes-ses-cooperations-avec-le-pays_5980115.html)

<sup>20</sup> Le Monde, Gabon: à Paris, Emmanuel Macron et le général Oligui Nguema affichent leur bonne entente neuf mois après le putsch, 1 June 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/06/01/au-gabon-emmanuel-macron-et-le-general-oligui-nguema-affichent-leur-bonne-entente-neuf-mois-apres-le-putsch\\_6236663\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/06/01/au-gabon-emmanuel-macron-et-le-general-oligui-nguema-affichent-leur-bonne-entente-neuf-mois-apres-le-putsch_6236663_3212.html); Interview with Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, President of the Republic of Chad, Élysée Palace, 3 October 2024, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/10/03/entretien-avec-mahamat-idriss-deby-itno-president-de-la-republique-du-tchad>

<sup>21</sup> Carayol, R., Backmann, R., Tchad: comment la France a avalisé un coup d'état, Médiapart, 29 April 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Vircoulon, T., Le recul de la France en Afrique : art. cit. (note 16).

a threat of armed intervention by ECOWAS, the US and Germany tried to stay involved before also being spurned in 2024, and Italy managed to maintain its cooperation with the country.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the presidential election held in Chad on 6 May 2024 had no other purpose than to 'civilianise' the military regime and legitimise Mahamat Déby's seizure of power. While the European Union adopted a cautious stance following the publication of the provisional results of an election marred by fraud – the opposition's appeals were all rejected – on 17 May the French President congratulated Mr Déby on his victory.<sup>24</sup>

France – like other European countries – emphasises its respect for democratic procedures and human rights. This is not the case with other partners. The Africa-France and Europe-Africa Summits are paralleled by the Africa-China Cooperation Forum and the summits organised by Russia, where the focus is on economic and military partnerships. Burkina Faso has attempted to forge closer ties with the BRICs.<sup>25</sup> There is a great deal of competition, both in the military and economic spheres.

We can observe that, when Western countries and international organisations appeal to universal values, they do so without paying attention to how such appeals are received in the societies concerned. Many of these are rejected, as was the case in Mali in 2018 when Imam Mahmoud Dicko, then President of the High Islamic Council, opposed the drafting of a sex education school textbook and called for widespread demonstrations against the project.<sup>26</sup> There are many tensions around issues of gender, birth control, homosexuality, and demographic transition. Macron's comments on 'Africa's demographic problem', on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Hamburg (2017), provoked critical reactions.<sup>27</sup> These moral injunctions are often imposed through development projects (when they are imposed through the use of quotas, for example), but they generally fail to achieve the intended societal changes. The discrepancies between targets and results often stem from resistance on the part of the societies on which these injunctions have been imposed. As Gilles Yabi points out, 'all policies that can help to put an end to early marriages followed by early pregnancies, which permanently and sadly change the life trajectories of many girls, are to be strongly encouraged. [...] So no to external injunctions marked by insensitivity and a limited historical culture. But yes to public policies based on informed, dispassionate debate in African countries about the implications of demographic data'.<sup>28</sup> The expectations of international partners are often disconnected from reality and can have the opposite effects from those intended. Amnesty International has also pointed out that 2023 was marked 'by an explosion of discriminatory laws' against LGBTI people.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Baldaro, E., D'Amato, S., Un an après le coup d'État au Niger : la leçon que l'Europe n'a pas retenue, *The Conversation*, 29 July 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Africa Intelligence, Tchad. L'Union européenne en ordre dispersé après l'élection de Mahamat Idriss Déby, 10 October 2024. Elysée Palace, Telephone interview with Mahamat Idriss Déby, President of the Republic of Chad, 17 May 2024.

<sup>25</sup> APA News, Burkina: Prime minister calls for BRICS membership, 23 September 2024.

<sup>26</sup> VOA, Polémique autour d'un projet de manuel d'éducation sexuelle, 24 December 2018, <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/pol%C3%A9mique-autour-d-un-projet-de-manuel-d-%C3%A9ducation-sexuelle/4713942.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Le Monde, Après les déclarations de Macron sur la natalité en Afrique, que disent les chiffres, 12 July 2017.

<sup>28</sup> RFI, Démographie africaine: non aux indécrites injonctions extérieures, oui aux politiques publiques réfléchies, 22 July 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Amnesty International, Afrique. Un barrage de lois discriminatoires attise la haine à l'égard des personnes LGBTI, 9 January 2024.



## 1.2 - Breaking with the securitised approach

*Private property and the exercise of power are inalienable attributes of the people, and a government that claims to represent the will of the people should take no pride in having to resort to external support to guarantee the security of the people. This is tantamount to a failure on its part, and leaves open the possibility of interference, not to mention the risk of incidents caused by the presence of the two forces.*

This excerpt from a Niger diplomatic note (16 May 1974)<sup>30</sup> calling for the departure of French troops a month after the coup d'état led by Seyni Kountché (14 April 1974) is still highly illustrative of the current situation. The presence of foreign troops is often experienced as humiliation or domination. However, this perception and the desire of populations to rely on their own armed forces is not taken into account. The perception of the security provided by the presence of foreign troops is obviously not perceived in the same way by local populations as it is by international actors.<sup>31</sup>

Since France's African former colonies attained independence (1958-1960), France's policy in Africa has essentially been centred on security. This securitised approach has served the needs of both its political diplomacy (supporting 'friendly' regimes whose position in power was no longer limited by fixed-term mandates) and its economic diplomacy. As J.-P. Bat points out, the security of African states was a major issue in the decolonisation process.<sup>32</sup> However, although France has long presented itself as 'Africa's policeman', it can no longer continue to play this role. The failure of the approach exemplified by France's 'Operation Barkhane' (2014-2022) should encourage a thorough reconsideration of French military doctrine in Africa.<sup>33</sup>

In 2013, President Hollande was cheered in the streets of Bamako and Timbuktu after the success of the Serval intervention. He announced that he wanted to withdraw French troops and said that 'the support of the local population' seemed to be the best guarantee against the expansion of jihadist groups.<sup>34</sup> In 2022, French soldiers left Mali and Burkina Faso. In 2023, French troops were driven out of Niger against the backdrop of a coup d'état and the deployment of Russian flags. French troops thus remained in Mali for 10 years, and the manifest failure of France and the international community to stabilise the country has left lasting traces. The military response failed to put an end to the actions of armed jihadist groups, and 'for Mali, because of the importance that the Barkhane force had taken on, the failure is naturally blamed on that force'.<sup>35</sup> Other events have aggravated tensions, such as the events in Bounti, where the French army killed 19 civilians at a wedding.<sup>36</sup> Its refusal to acknowledge the facts has

<sup>30</sup> Van Walraven K., Operation Somme: The French Connection and Seyni Kountché's coup d'état in Niger, April 1974, *Politique Africaine*, 134(2), 2014, 133-154.

<sup>31</sup> Baudais, V., *Military Entrenchment in Mali and Niger: Praetorianism in Retrospect*, Stockholm, SIPRI Report, October 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Bat J.-P., *Le rôle de la France après les indépendances Jacques Foccart et la pax gallica, Afrique contemporaine*, (235), 2010, 43-52.

<sup>33</sup> Bansept, L., Tenenbaum, É., *Après Barkhane: repenser la posture stratégique française en Afrique de l'Ouest*, *Focus stratégique*, (109), Ifri, May 2022.

<sup>34</sup> ITélé, *François Hollande au Mali, les points forts*, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xx8f61>, accessed 2 October 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Olivier de Sardan, J.-P., *L'enchevêtrement des crises au Sahel*, Paris, Khartala, 2023, p. 162.

<sup>36</sup> *Le Monde*, *L'armée française aurait bien commis une bavure au Mali, selon un rapport de la Minusma*, 31 March 2021.

strained relations with Mali. Russian propaganda then used its networks to accuse the French army of abuses following the discovery of a mass grave in Gossi (in the Timbuktu region).<sup>37</sup>

According to members of the armed forces, 'strategic inconsistency' and the constant reduction in resources are partly responsible for France's loss of influence in Africa.<sup>38</sup> While the Serval intervention was a success in terms of its objectives, Operation Barkhane demonstrated a different reality 'when the conditions for success were out of reach: over-ambitious objectives for regional stabilisation'.<sup>39</sup> However, the French military's lack of knowledge of the Sahel context and its attitude towards its African counterparts must also be counted as factors that contributed to the failure. The presence of international forces in their secure headquarters creates a physical and symbolic distance between the international and national forces. As in other contexts, 'the passage between these spaces [the headquarters of the international forces and the headquarters of the national forces] materialises relations of domination'.<sup>40</sup> Studies of the European interventions or Operation Barkhane often mention calls for change in this respect, but the change came too late, when Operation Barkhane was finally redeployed to Niger. In Mali, relations between representatives of the Malian army and their international partners have often been marked by tensions, in which 'those involved tend to portray their Malian counterparts as incompetent, corrupt, passive and in need of help, while Malians see foreign aid as authoritarian, paternalistic and self-serving'.<sup>41</sup> Although, immediately after the coup, the French military claimed that 'relations that were changing for the better', arguing that they were better able to talk to the military who had taken power than to the deposed president,<sup>42</sup> this ability to work together did not last, and political tensions with the junta, particularly after the ousting of the civilian president and prime minister, increased tensions with France, until they finally broke down. Despite plans to place the French Operation Barkhane under Nigerien command, and to take greater account of the needs and priorities of partners,<sup>43</sup> the development of this new approach came too late to prevent the withdrawal of French troops from Niger.<sup>44</sup>

The redeployment of the French Operation Barkhane and the European Union's Takuba Task Force from Mali to Niger has led to tensions with certain communities and civil society organisations. President Bazoum had obtained parliamentary approval for the deployment of foreign

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<sup>37</sup> France Info, Mali: l'armée annonce la découverte d'un charnier que la France attribue à des mercenaires russes, 23 April 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Prod'Homme, P., Quelle stratégie pour la France en Afrique? Revue Défense Nationale, 2023/HS13 special issue, p. 377.

<sup>39</sup> Prod'Homme, P., Quelle stratégie pour la France en Afrique? Revue Défense Nationale, 2023/HS13 special issue, p. 378.

<sup>40</sup> Baczko, A., Dorransoro, G., La souveraineté fragmentée: Intervention internationale et guerre civile en Afghanistan après 2001, Sociétés Politiques Comparées, 50, 2020, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Tull, D.M., Rebuilding Mali's army: The dissonant relationship between Mali and its international partners, International Affairs, 95(2), 2019, p. 419.

<sup>42</sup> Baudais, V., Maïga, S., The European Union Training Mission in Mali: An Assessment, SIPRI, Stockholm, April 2022.

<sup>43</sup> 'In line with the discussions I have had with my counterparts in recent weeks, this transformation will begin in the coming months on the very principle of co-construction, with a visible reduction in our numbers and, at the same time, an increase in the presence of our African partners in these bases. It presupposes that our African partners will formulate their military and security needs very clearly, and that we will then increase our offer of training, support and equipment to the highest level. This partnership will enable us to build a new model of intimacy and cooperation between our armies, which will result in an increased effort by France in terms of, as I said, training and equipment', Emmanuel Macron, Le partenariat Afrique-France: discours du Président à la veille de son déplacement en Afrique centrale, 27 February 2023, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/288411-emmanuel-macron-27022023-france-afrique>

<sup>44</sup> Bakayoko, N., What went wrong in Mali? The future of France's presence in the Sahel, ISPI, 7 April 2022, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/what-went-wrong-mali-future-frances-presence-sahel-34515>

forces in Niger in April 2022.<sup>45</sup> However, the opposition and civil society organisations denounced the growing influence of foreign forces.<sup>46</sup> This move also lacked support from the population. During the redeployment in November 2021, a French army convoy was blocked by demonstrators. Two people were killed and 12 injured.<sup>47</sup> In July 2022, the M62 Movement (M62: Sacred Union for the Safeguard of the Sovereignty and Dignity of the People) was created by a coalition of civil society organisations in reaction to the presence of Operation Barkhane. This political movement became the foremost opposition to the presidency of President Bazoum, and later supported the coup d'état.<sup>48</sup>

Russia is France's main competitor in the Sahel, and Russian initiatives are conducted in the political, economic, and diplomatic spheres. While disinformation has played a significant role in Russia's breakthrough on the African continent,<sup>49</sup> Russia's support for African regimes is based on an anti-Western and anti-colonial narrative. When France announced on 10 June 2021 that it was transforming its military presence in the Sahel, the Malian prime minister condemned the move as an 'abandonment in mid-air', taken without due consultation.<sup>50</sup> A few months later, in December 2021, Russian instructors arrived in Mali. This Russian support involved direct engagement alongside the Malian army on the ground – Russian soldiers patrolled with the Malian armed forces in the same vehicles – and air support, but as one analyst pointed out, 'the Russian mercenaries themselves have no experience of counter-terrorism and use brutal and unsuitable operating methods'.<sup>51</sup> The brutality of the operations carried out jointly by the Malian armed forces and their Russian 'allies' is increasingly condemned by the local population. However, the Russian presence is also intended to keep the military in power and prevent any backlash.

The French military presence in Africa is now limited in scope, following the departure of troops from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. France still has a presence – which will be reduced in terms of the number of soldiers – in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, and Chad. Its presence in Djibouti, a strategically placed country on the mouth of the Red Sea, will remain unchanged. Nevertheless, France remains one of the main arms suppliers to the region: 'there were, however, notable decreases in the import of arms from both China (–23%) and Russia (–44%) between 2014–18 and 2019–23. Of the other top five global arms suppliers France accounted for 11%, the US for 4.6% and Germany for only 0.4% of arms exports to SSA in 2019–23'.<sup>52</sup>

The challenges encountered in the Sahel and the competition with Russia in terms of military support have shown the limits of a securitised approach that is no longer adapted to reality.

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<sup>45</sup> Studio Kalangou, Le parlement nigérien autorise le redéploiement de Barkhane et Takuba, 23 April 2022, <https://www.studiokalangou.org/71024-parlement-nigerien-autorise-redeploiement-barkhane-takuba>

<sup>46</sup> RFI, Le Niger autorise la présence de forces étrangères sur son territoire, 23 April 2022, <https://rb.gy/uu8ptn>

<sup>47</sup> France 24, Un convoi militaire français bloqué par des manifestants au Niger, 27 November 2021, <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20211127-un-convoi-militaire-français-bloqué-par-des-manifestants-au-niger>

<sup>48</sup> BBC News Afrique, Coup d'état au Niger: M62, le Mouvement nigérien appelant à l'expulsion des forces françaises, 16 August 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-66510969>

<sup>49</sup> Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Mapping a Surge of Disinformation in Africa, 13 March 2024, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mapping-a-surge-of-disinformation-in-africa/>

<sup>50</sup> Le Monde, Le Mali reproche à la France un 'abandon en plein vol' dans la lutte contre les djihadistes au Sahel, 26 September 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/09/26/le-mali-reproche-a-la-france-un-abandon-en-plein-vol-dans-la-lutte-antidjihadiste-au-sahel\\_6096029\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/09/26/le-mali-reproche-a-la-france-un-abandon-en-plein-vol-dans-la-lutte-antidjihadiste-au-sahel_6096029_3212.html)

<sup>51</sup> Guiffard, J., Une solution providentielle surestimée: dissiper le mirage de l'offre sécuritaire russe en Afrique et ailleurs, Institut Montaigne, 15 September 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/09/26/le-mali-reproche-a-la-france-un-abandon-en-plein-vol-dans-la-lutte-antidjihadiste-au-sahel\\_6096029\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/09/26/le-mali-reproche-a-la-france-un-abandon-en-plein-vol-dans-la-lutte-antidjihadiste-au-sahel_6096029_3212.html)

<sup>52</sup> Wezeman, P., The Complex Trends and Patterns in Arms Transfers to Sub-Saharan Africa, ISPI, 90, 30 September 2024.

The French strategy, which was changed too late in Niger, should be based on genuine cooperation with national armies, taking account of their priorities and needs. Knowledge of the terrain and local contexts is essential in the fight against the armed jihadist groups that have established themselves in the Sahel region. It is therefore important to devote efforts to supporting national armies and giving them the means to fight, but also to continuing to train them to respect human rights. The brutality of Russian (and Belarusian) forces in Mali is terrorising rural populations. It is essential to work with the armed forces and local populations, while avoiding paternalistic approaches that arouse anger and indignation and have caused rifts with Sahelian populations.

## 2 - FOR A DECOLONISING APPROACH TO FRANCE-AFRICA RELATIONS: A NECESSARY BREAK WITH THE PAST

We are undoubtedly at a turning point – the *kairos*, as the Greeks would put it – at which it has become essential for France to rethink its relations with Africa. There is no choice but to undertake the work of decolonisation, in the sense of the deconstruction of the colonial legacy that continues to weigh heavily on relations between France and Africa. The consequences of that legacy are long-lasting and deeply permeate power structures and relations of domination. Breaking with the Western-centric vision of relations between France, Europe, and Africa is a prerequisite for cooperation based on an equal partnership and mutual respect, and in which attention is paid to the plurality of contexts and local knowledge. When changes in strategy and reforms are announced, they should be implemented in concrete terms, thus demonstrating the genuine desire for change.

### 2.1 - Assuming responsibility for changes in strategy and reforms

'Look at us differently, not with a paternalistic gaze, but considering us as partners'.

This remark by President Tshisekedi to President Macron during the latter's 'African' tour in March 2023 sums up the feeling shared on the continent about France's attitude.<sup>53</sup>

International aid has been identified as having 'contrasting effects'.<sup>54</sup> Economic and financial dependence, the involvement of international forces in national security, and the exploitation of natural resources by transnational corporations are increasingly seen as violations of national sovereignty and symbols of French domination.<sup>55</sup> Long-standing economic and security dependence on international partners and the former colonial power has weakened the legitimacy of successive governments while fuelling widespread distrust in the ruling classes and the international community. International partners have long ruled the political arena, but the way in which development cooperation is perceived has changed. Sovereignist rhetoric is used not only by elites, but also by civil society organisations, who criticise the way aid is delivered and argue that it often fails to meet local needs precisely because of insufficient under-

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.radiookapi.net/2023/03/04/actualite/politique/felix-tshisekedi-macron-regardez-nous-a-tretement-en-nous-considerant>

<sup>54</sup> Moss, T., Pettersson, G., van de Walle, N., An aid-institutions paradox? A review essay on aid dependency and state building in sub-Saharan Africa, Working Paper no. 74, January 2006; Lavigne, D.P., Tidjani, A.M., Niger: The contrasting effects of international aid, GREP, Collection Débats et controverses, 5, (November 2011); Bergamaschi, I., The fall of a donor darling: The role of aid in Mali's crisis, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 52(3), September 2014, 347-78; Dorransoro, G., Baczkó, A., Une révolution bureaucratique avortée: Les énarques et l'État au Mali, *Politique Africaine*, (167), 2022, 75-96.

<sup>55</sup> Blamangin, O. et al., De quoi le rejet de la France en Afrique est-il le nom? Une recherche-action dans six pays d'Afrique francophone, *Tournons La Page*, to be published in October 2024.

standing of contexts. This growing discourse has contributed to a rejection of the West – particularly France in the central Sahel – and of international military operations, whose failures are not limited to this part of the world.<sup>56</sup>

With regard to cultural issues, the announcement of the restitution of works of art, in a speech given in Ouagadougou in 2017, remains limited in its implementation. At the end of 2020, a law was passed by the French Parliament putting an end to the principle of the inalienability of public collections. In November 2021, the presidents of Benin, Patrice Talon, and France, Emmanuel Macron, signed a deed transferring ownership of works to the Republic of Benin, allowing them to be moved from the Musée du quai Branly in Paris to the Musée d'Abomey in Benin. However, the vote on a framework law, in line with the recommendations of the report on the return of African heritage to the countries of origin, is still pending.<sup>57</sup> Very few works of art have been returned, and over 90% of Africa's heritage remains outside the continent. In November 2022, an article in *Le Monde* summarised the situation as follows:

Five years after the Ouagadougou Declaration, the results of the restitution are mixed. Out of seven requests officially submitted by Benin (in 2016), Côte d'Ivoire (2018), Ethiopia (2019), Chad (2019), Senegal (2019), Mali (2020), and Madagascar (2020), only two have been successful as a result of the adoption of the law on 24 December 2020: those of Benin and Senegal. The requests from Antananarivo and Abidjan have been met with a favourable response, but are still awaiting the adoption of a law to make this a reality. The other three are still pending. They are all calling for the adoption of a framework law to speed up the process and extend it across the continent.<sup>58</sup>

The National Assembly's report on relations between France and Africa highlighted missed opportunities in the reform of France's African policy, even though 'Monsieur Afrique' and the 'cellule africaine' had been replaced by an official Africa adviser and a Presidential Council for Africa.<sup>59</sup> Having listed the actors involved in defining and implementing France's African policy – the Élysée Palace, the Ministry of the Armed Forces, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Secretariat for Cooperation – the report mentions 'a lack of balance and coherence between very diverse actors'. Above all, the report highlights the 'imbalance' in the influence of the various actors and 'the relative sidelining of diplomats in favour of the military in the Sahel crisis'. France's African strategy was in fact defined primarily by the Ministry of the Armed Forces, which effectively sidelines the role of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.<sup>60</sup>

Generally speaking, international actors pay little heed to what the affected populations think and how they perceive their environment, and the effects of their actions are rarely evaluated directly by the beneficiaries. The presence of military counter-terrorist operations with immense resources compared with those of national armies has never won the approval of local popu-

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<sup>56</sup> Dorronsoro, G., Afghanistan: Such a predictable defeat, *Defis Humanitaires*, 2 August 2021, <https://defishumanitaires.com/en/2021/08/02/afghanistan-such-a-predictable-defeat-2/>

<sup>57</sup> Sarr, F., Savoy, B., Report on the restitution of African cultural heritage. Towards a new relational ethic, November 2018. Les controverses de Mines Paris, La restitution des biens culturels africains par la France Vers un bouleversement des politiques de restitution?, 2024, <https://controverses.minesparis.psl.eu/public/promo23/PC3-Restitution%20biens.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> *Le Monde*, Les défis posés par la restitution à l'Afrique des biens culturels pillés durant la colonisation, 27 November 2022.

<sup>59</sup> This council was created in 2017 and abolished in 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Assemblée nationale, Rapport d'information déposé en application de l'article 145 du règlement, par la commission des affaires étrangères, en conclusion des travaux d'une mission d'information sur les relations entre la France et l'Afrique, no. 1841 (PDF), tabled on 8 November 2023, published online 14 November 2023, p. 56-58.

lations. Despite the resources deployed, these operations have been accused of failing to intervene in the event of attacks and failing to protect populations, and the deterioration in the security situation has undermined their legitimacy. As J.-P. Olivier de Sardan points out, although Operation Barkhane was a 'highly professional military operation that was technically among the best in the world', its lack of knowledge on the ground was one of the reasons for its failure.<sup>61</sup> Institutional organisational habits are an obstacle to policy change.

The widening rift between the Sahel and European countries, France in particular, highlights the importance of understanding contexts. We have moved from strategies that prioritised the state to strategies that now prioritise the local level. There were often good reasons for bypassing the state, notably because of the corruption of elites and the misappropriation of aid funds, but, as we have seen in the context of decentralisation, the corruption of elites at the local level has also led to disaffection with local politicians.<sup>62</sup> The claim that one's values are universal takes too little account of the history of the countries in which the programmes are implemented.<sup>63</sup>

The creation of the Sahel Alliance in 2017 proves that France and its European partners have become aware of the need to change approaches, to reform, and to adopt approaches based on local realities so that cooperation strategies meet the needs of local communities. The political changes that have taken place have had a significant impact on bilateral and multilateral cooperation, but a framework for dialogue remains essential if international actors are to pool approaches and initiatives, and 'Europeanise' development cooperation. The very legitimacy of aid is at stake.<sup>64</sup>

## 2.2 - For a decolonising approach and an end to a European-centric vision of relations with Africa

The need to decolonise relations with Africa has been widely discussed, based on the principle that the world system still bears the marks of colonisation in its very structures. Decolonisation<sup>65</sup> relates to the historical and geographical conditions under which knowledge and practices are produced. It involves bringing an end to the Western-centric version of the universal, and a focus on the local production of knowledge.

Inequalities and relations of domination are deeply rooted in relations between Europe and Africa. France's colonial past has had a lasting impact in certain parts of the continent (although other European countries play a comparable role in other parts of the world). This weighs heavily on relations, including among younger generations who did not live through the colonial period. Support for civil society organisations on the African continent is a 'classic' area of cooperation: there are a great many civil society organisations working on gender issues, access to justice, elections, etc. 'All "technical and financial partners" (TFPs) have a "civil society" dimension to their discourse and practices'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Olivier de Sardan J.-P., *L'enchevêtrement des crises au Sahel*, Paris, Khartala, 2023, p. 124.

<sup>62</sup> Blundo, G., Olivier de Sardan, J.P., *La corruption quotidienne en Afrique de l'Ouest*. Politique africaine, N° 83(3), 2001, pp. 8-37. <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.083.0008>.

<sup>63</sup> Olivier de Sardan J.-P., *La revanche des contextes*, Paris, Karthala, 2023.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/lalliance-sahel/>

<sup>65</sup> Mignolo, W.A., *Parce que la colonialité est partout, la décolonialité est inévitable*, *Multitudes*, 84(3), 2021, 57-67.

<sup>66</sup> Courtin C. *et al.*, *Les sociétés civiles au Sahel: cartographie raisonnée: de la connaissance des contextes à l'accompagnement du changement social*, Plateforme d'Analyse du Suivi et d'Apprentissage au Sahel, PASAS production, Paris, AFD, 112, p. 72.

However, alongside these actors who are regularly called upon by aid agencies, citizens' movements have sprung up, mobilising mainly young urban people, and criticising the domination of states by corrupt elites. Although their voice is political, these movements place themselves outside the political arena and the sphere of the discredited political classes. The movements 'Y'en a marre' (Senegal), 'Balai citoyen' (Burkina Faso), 'Yerewolo-Debout sur les Remparts' (Mali), 'Filimbi or la Lucha' (Congo-Kinshasa) and 'Tournons la Page' (several countries) all call for far-reaching changes. The people mobilised in these movements are young people whose hopes are limited by gerontocracy, unemployment, insecurity, and a lack of economic opportunities. They adopt a political register based on the values of sovereignism and independence, denouncing current problems but also drawing on the sovereignism and pan-Africanism of the post-independence years, and identifying with figures such as Kwame N'Krumah (President of Ghana, 1960-1966) or Thomas Sankara (President of Burkina Faso 1983-1987).<sup>67</sup>

These movements are often committed to democratic principles and governance, and fight for the democratisation of their state institutions. Some pan-Africanist figures present on social networks, such as those associated with Kemi Seba and Nathalie Yamb, fuel anti-French sentiment, accusing France of domination and the exploitation of natural resources. France, with its stronger military, economic, and political presence, is a lightning rod for such criticism.<sup>68</sup> This rhetoric, massively disseminated via social networks, represents a mobilising force that has been widely used by the perpetrators of military coups. Although France's paternalistic attitude and colonial past have played a role in this rejection, it has been accentuated in recent years by social networks and Russian-led disinformation campaigns. There is now common ground between citizen and pan-African movements in adopting such discourses and criticisms, and the members of these groups are often put in danger, arrested, and threatened. In this sense, Russian propaganda based on an anti-colonial, anti-France, anti-UN (etc.) narrative can appeal both to West African military juntas and to a section of the youth. In the absence of democratic legitimacy, the authorities are motivated to gain popular support by basing their rhetoric on the notion of regained sovereignty, national independence, and respect for that country's choices. Accordingly, in Mali, 14 January has become the 'National Day of Regained Sovereignty'.<sup>69</sup>

In 2020, the Coalition citoyenne pour le Sahel (Citizens' Coalition for the Sahel), a group of civil society organisations, focused its action on four priorities: the protection of populations, the root causes of conflict and insecurity, the humanitarian emergency, and the fight against impunity.<sup>70</sup> In April 2021, the Appel pour une refondation de la politique sahélienne de la France (Appeal for an overhaul of France's Sahel policy) called for a paradigm shift based on the failure of France's policy in the Sahel.<sup>71</sup> In October 2021, the Africa-France summit held in Montpellier sought to reinvent, 'together', the relationship between France and 'Africa'. The aim was to 'take a fresh look at the relationship between Africa and France in order to offer new generations a new framework for reflection and action'. Calls for renewed relations or the 'end of Françafrique' have regularly been announced by French presidents, often at the start of their term of office, but have rarely been followed by actual changes.

We know what needs to be changed, and we also know who the actors are who are prepared to support these changes. However, discriminatory measures, particularly against young people, have had and will continue to have harmful effects on the future of relations between

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<sup>67</sup> Polet, F., *Afrique: des mobilisations citoyennes aux mobilisations néopanafricaines?*, AOC, 10 January 2024.

<sup>68</sup> Blamangin, O. et al., *De quoi le rejet de la France en Afrique est-il le nom? Une recherche-action dans six pays d'Afrique francophone*, Tournons La Page, October 2024.

<sup>69</sup> <https://sgg-mali.ml/fr/actualites/90/journee-nationale-de-la-souverainet-retrouve.html>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.sahelpeoplescoalition.org/>

<sup>71</sup> *France-Sahel, l'heure de rebattre les cartes, Manifeste pour la refondation de la politique de la France au sahel*, 11 March 2022.

France and Africa. Contrary to the announcements made in the 2017 speech on mobility, the French government brought about an increase in tuition fees for foreign students in November 2018.<sup>72</sup> Compounding these difficulties, the new immigration law (November 2023) has further hindered the mobility of African students, tightening residence conditions and preventing exemption from registration fees.<sup>73</sup>

Relations are damaged not only by France's migration policies, but also by the way it treats students and war veterans.<sup>74</sup> The refusal to grant visas can be seen as a humiliation, and turns both students and business leaders away from France and Europe, whereas China, India, and Russia all have more welcoming policies.<sup>75</sup> Yet, as N. Wilén points out, 'Africa's demographic boom will make the continent the world's largest market, with more than a quarter of the world's population in just 30 years' time [...]. In diplomatic terms, the region [...] represents one of the largest regional voting groups with 28%. The current global competition for power and Africa's growing strategic importance are propelling the continent to the centre of the world order'.<sup>76</sup>

Remembrance work is another important aspect of French diplomacy. In 2019, in accordance with the commitments made during President Kagamé's visit to Paris in 2018, the Duclert Commission was set up to draw on French archives in order to analyse France's role in the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda (1990-1994). The report concluded that France bore 'heavy and overwhelming responsibility'. In 2022, a commission of French and Algerian historians, led by B. Stora, was set up to work on French colonisation and the Algerian War of Independence. However, the results of these two commissions have been mixed. There have been genuine efforts towards improving relations with Rwanda, but these relations are still far from being cordial, and the situation in eastern Congo forces France to maintain a precarious diplomatic balance. In May 2024, Algeria submitted a list of assets that France should return, in particular property belonging to Emir Abdelkader, who resisted French colonisation.<sup>77</sup>

China, Turkey, India, Russia, and Iran are all now major economic and military partners for the region. The vision of cooperation can thus not remain exclusively Western-centric. It is essential to give priority to younger generations, with policies aimed at reducing the obstacles to their mobility (visas, registration fees) and promoting more inclusive exchanges. Africa is a young continent. France should gain the trust of these young people by adopting fairer migration and education policies, thereby avoiding the marginalisation of these people to the benefit of other partners. It also needs to acknowledge the legacy of the past, however burdensome that may be.

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<sup>72</sup> CUEJ.info, Strasbourg: Les étudiants étrangers dénoncent la hausse des frais d'inscription, 28 September 2023; <https://cuej.info/web-en-continu/strasbourg-les-etudiants-etrangers-denoncent-la-hausse-des-frais-dinscription>

<sup>73</sup> Le Monde, Loi 'immigration': des étudiants africains toujours plus entravés dans leur mobilité, 23 December 2023.

<sup>74</sup> GISTI, Les anciens combattants étrangers demandent justice à l'État français, 10-11 November 1996; Le Figaro, Pensions militaires: Français et Africains enfin à égalité, 12 July 2010.

<sup>75</sup> 'In 2021/2022, there were more than 27,000 African students in Russian universities. In 2022/2023, there will be 34,000', *BBC Afrique*, Que sont devenus les anciens étudiants africains diplômés en Russie?, 12 June 2024.

<sup>76</sup> Wilén, N., L'Afrique dans le grand jeu mondial, *Le Rubicon*, 11 January 2023.

<sup>77</sup> TV5 Monde, Quels sont les biens que l'Algérie réclame à la France?, 2 June 2024.



### 3 - RECOMMENDATIONS: CHANGING THE DISCOURSE AND TRANSFORMING PRACTICES

Contradictions are inevitable in the politics and diplomacy of countries seeking first and foremost to protect their own interests. The fact remains, however, that these contradictions give rise to misunderstandings and mixed messages, particularly for those who encourage respect for democratic and human rights principles.

- France's loss of legitimacy on the African continent is all the more significant given that, since Brexit, France is now the only EU Member State with a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. The abstention of 16 African states from the vote against Russian aggression in Ukraine (May 2022) reveals the fragility of the EU's position, with major consequences in terms of influence on the international stage and responses to Russian attacks on Europe and its values. This seat on the Security Council could be a means to consolidate an EU position in relation to Africa.
- France's strategy of encouraging countries to hold elections should not be used as a tool for legitimising the seizure of power by force of arms. On the contrary, it should involve support for civil society organisations, especially citizens' movements, and for political parties working to create the conditions for political renewal and democratic change, in a post-Françafrique era.
- The securitised approach has shown its limits. France's military strategy needs to be re-conceived with three elements in mind: basing cooperation on equal partnerships, strengthening understanding of local contexts, and supporting regional initiatives. France could thus limit its direct interventions and concentrate on development projects. The lack of economic opportunities remains the main reason why young people join non-state armed groups.
- Reforms to development aid must continue. France needs to restore confidence with its partners and prove, through actions, that it is implementing the reforms it has announced, whether in the context of the restitution of cultural works, the reform of the CFA franc, or the recognition and commemoration of the past.
- Economic and security dependency has been criticised for weakening rather than strengthening institutions and undermining the legitimacy of states. Aid must serve to restore confidence between states and their populations. It is imperative to avoid imposing uniform approaches, and instead to take account of local contexts and work with what J.-P. Olivier de Sardan calls 'reformers from within'. Interventions must also be evaluated directly in cooperation with the beneficiary populations.
- It is also important to reassert the role of diplomats in France's 'Africa' policy, since this has come to be embodied mainly by the President of the Republic, relying on a small entourage. On the contrary, a long-term presence and in-depth knowledge of the context are essential for defining this policy. In particular, it is crucial to restore the balance of influence between civilian and military approaches, an imbalance that has been exacerbated by the security crisis in the Sahel, but which must be readdressed given the limited results on the ground of current strategies. Rejection of France's African policy should not be confused with an anti-French sentiment, which remains rare.

France-Africa relations need to be decolonised so that they can, in the future, be based on a relationship of balanced partnership. Recognising the historical legacy is an essential step, providing assurances to younger generations that real change is on the way. The acknowledgement of the colonial past should lead to reconciliation with these legacies. The restitution of cultural works would be an important symbol of this.

# PASAS

PLATEFORME D'ANALYSE,  
DE SUIVI ET D'APPRENTISSAGE  
AU SAHEL



PORTÉ PAR



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Ce rapport a été élaboré dans le cadre d'un financement du Fonds Paix et Résilience Minka.

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