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The Chaotic French African Policy

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Abstract:

Africa is organizing itself to finally lead Africa's voice to the international stage, trying to free itself from the heavy tutelage of the former colonial powers and international institutions. But it will be difficult to erase the footprints left by the former colonial powers. France and Africa are closely related. French African policy remains one of the major concerns of the French government. For good reason: Africa plays a leading role in the international influence of France, economically and politically. Africa is its strength. But clearly, the French's policy regarding Africa is chaotic, mindless and dangerous in the light of its importance to France.

Keywords: France, Africa, Policy, French African policy

1. Introduction

Africa gets organized to finally leads its voice to the place it belongs on the international stage, trying to free itself from the heavy tutelage of former colonial powers. Under the benevolent eye of the international institutions, it acquired means of cooperation (committee, Pan-African Parliament, peace and security council) regrouped under the African Union (AU¹), and means of development, as NEPAD (the New partnership for the development of Africa²). Africa moves forward towards an international recognition as a united mainland, stable, politically and economically, being able to offer some real African solutions to Africa's challenges.

While in The Hague (Netherlands) the trial of Laurent Gbagbo for crimes against humanity has just opened, sued by the International Criminal Court (ICC), in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) Chadian Idriss Déby Itno is officially named president of the African Union (AU), calling the African leaders to put an end to crises «by diplomacy or by force, according to their nature³» (Idriss Déby, 2016). These two events show us that if Africa as a consistent whole of African states, a symbol of a continental entity, really gets ahead on the way of an international recognition at any levels, it will be complicated to erase the footprints left by the former colonial powers. Indeed, difficult not to see in Laurent Gbagbo and Idriss Déby the results of an African policy of a foreign power: The French one.

France which supported Alassane Ouattara facing Laurent Gbagbo in Ivory Coast, driving to the arrest of the former president in 2011. France which, in Chad, saved the unpopular government of the president Idriss Déby twice: in 2005 and especially in 2008.

France and Africa are closely related. French African policy remains one of the major concerns of the French government. For good reason: Africa plays a leading role in the international influence of France, economically and politically. Africa is its strength. But clearly, the French policy regarding Africa is chaotic, mindless and dangerous in the light of its importance to France.

2. Africa: The Motor of the French Development

We often think that Africa needs France to support and to develop its economy, to strengthen its stability, to manage constant crises and to engage African States in the way of human rights. But they quickly forget what France owes to Africa.

2.1. Strength and Muscles. (Williams, 1968)

The links between France and Africa were forged in the French Old Regime by the slave trade. The labor force represented by slaves allowed France to develop in the Antilles: Guadeloupe, Martinique and especially Santo Domingo, and to reinforce its presence within

¹ AU: created in 2002 to succeed to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), dissolved the same year. Its institutions were established in 2003.

² NEPAD: has been formed in 2001 through a merger between Omega Plan and Millennium Africa Recovery Plan attached to the supervision of AU in 2007.

³ Original sentence in french : "par la diplomatie ou par la force, selon leur nature." (translation by the author).

the Caribbean to compete with English and Spanish development. On the other hand, it remains difficult to know the impact of the slave trade in French economy.

Did the slavery enrich France? It is difficult to know, so much data is contradictory. On the one hand, pro-slavery economy gives France at the end of the Ancient Régime about 35 % "external" trade of. On the other hand, a growing part of the colonial products is re-exported in Europe without being transformed on the national territory. The State spends also a lot on colonies: bonuses are allocated to the slave traders; the maintenance of a war fleet to defend islands costs a lot. Besides, the rivalry maintained with Great Britain regarding colonial question drove to the intervention of France in the war of American independence from 1775, which digs widely the deficit of the State⁴. (Pétre-Grenouilleau, 2010).

2.2. *An Economic Manna*

Following decolonization, France negotiated with its ancient colonies to close agreements favoring French interests to the detriment of other countries - and to the detriment of new independent African states. France has not only a priority right in the resources of its ex-colonies, but also in the attribution of public procurement process and public services, favoring French companies.

France has the first right to buy any natural resources found in the land of its ex-colonies. It's only after France would say, "I'm not interested", that the African countries are allowed to seek other partners.

In the award of government contracts, French companies must be considered first, and only after that these countries could look elsewhere. It doesn't matter if the African countries can obtain better value for money elsewhere. As consequence, in many of the French ex-colonies, all the major economical assets of the countries are in the hand of French expatriates. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, French companies own and control all the major utilities – water, electricity, telephone, transport, ports and major banks. The same in commerce, construction and agriculture. (Koutonin, 2014).

Also, thanks to agreements of technical military aid and of logistical support, France takes precedence to give in African states «equipment, consulting, service and logistical support⁵» (Dulait, Hue, Pozzo di Borgo, Boulaud, 2006, p. 09), also opening markets of defense sector to the French firms.

2.3. *A Financial Manna*

France and 15 countries of sub-Saharan Africa signed economic agreements of cooperation supposed to favor growth and financial stability, under the direct management of the Bank of France. That is named "La Zone Franc".

[...]national monetary reserves are centralized by the African States to their central banks and these are required to deposit at least the half (100 % for the Comoros) of these assets to the French Treasury, on a count of operations⁶. (Banque de France, 2015).

Sum of the assets deposited to the French Treasury by African States is estimated, in 2005, at about 72 thousand million euro according to the economist KakoNubukpo, Togolese ex-minister of forecasting. (Mbog, 2015). The Bank of France uses these foreign monetary reserves to reinvest them to the Paris Bourse, the market of the Paris Stock Exchange, in its own name.

2.4. *Africa Showcase of French Military Power*

Further to agreements of defense signed with its ancient colonies, France supports one of the most important military present in Africa. She has 3 permanent military bases there: in the Senegal, in the Gabon and in Djibouti - with also a permanent mission in Ivory Coast. Besides, with agreements of cooperation signed with different African States, France enjoys a military access to all Western Africa. With its permanent base of Djibouti, France "takes control" of the African continent. It gives to France not only a big easiness of intervention to answer African crises and to protect its interests, but to reinforce its status of great power within the international community.

⁴Original sentence in french : "L'esclavage a-t-il enrichi la France ? Il est difficile de le savoir tant les données sont contradictoires. D'un côté, l'économie esclavagiste fournit à la fin de l'Ancien Régime près de 35 % du commerce « extérieur » de la France. D'un autre côté, une part grandissante des produits coloniaux est réexportée en Europe sans être transformée sur le territoire national. L'État dépense également beaucoup pour les colonies : des primes sont attribuées aux négriers ; l'entretien d'une flotte de guerre pour défendre les îles coûte cher. De plus, la rivalité entretenue avec la Grande-Bretagne à propos de la question coloniale conduisit à l'intervention de la France dans la guerre de l'indépendance américaine à partir de 1775, laquelle creuse largement le déficit de l'État." (translation by the author).

⁵Original sentence in french : "matériels et équipements, l'assistance conseil, la maintenance et le soutien logistique" (translation by the author).

⁶Original sentence in french : "les réserves de change sont centralisées par les États africains auprès de leurs banques centrales et ces dernières sont tenues de déposer au moins la moitié (100 % pour les Comores) de ces avoirs auprès du Trésor français, sur un compte d'opérations." (Translation by the author).

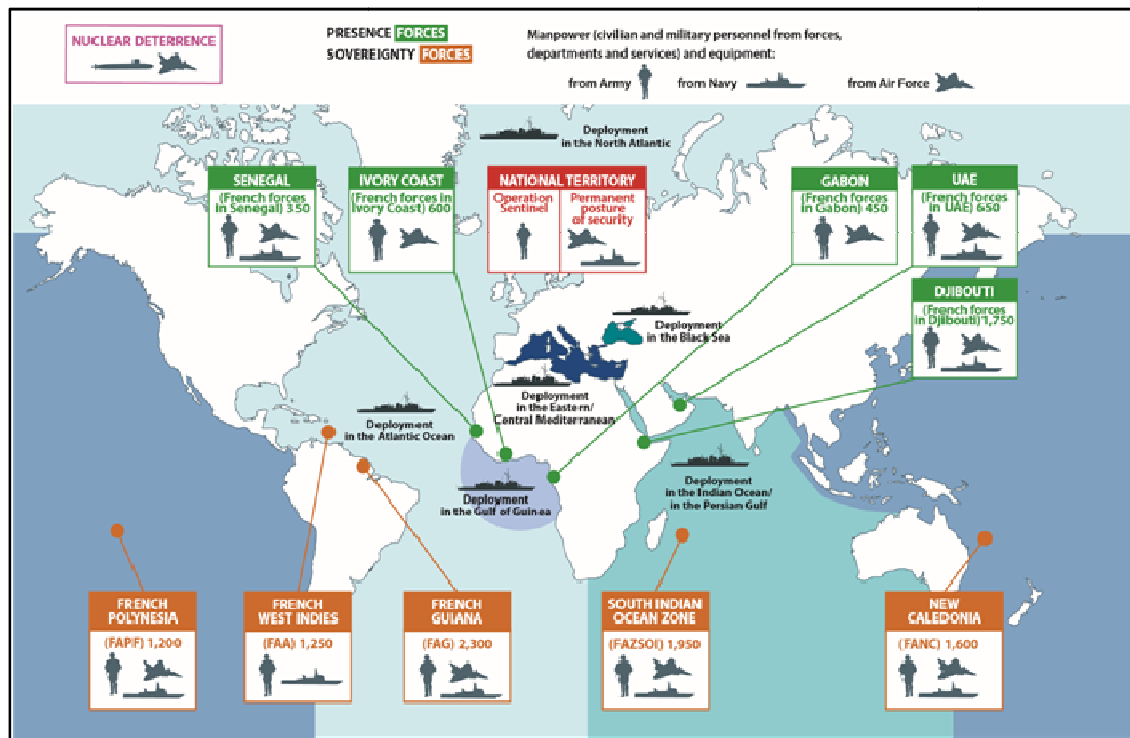


Figure 1: French Permanent Missions (2015) – French Ministry of Defense

2.5. The Francophony

The power of a country can't be measured just on its economic development or military power. But on the capacity to promote its culture out of its borders, to spread its values and language, all those elements contribute in an important way to increase the international influence of a State. In that, France benefits from the support of many African States.

Unlike other colonial nations, as England, France set up assimilation politics. By imposing on the colonies its vision of the world, its culture and even more: its language; France intended to make its subjects citizens being able to take a role within the French Republic. (Gentili, 2012).

After decolonization, many African states remained French-speaking, several keeping French as official language. Besides, Alain Bouithy notes that the French-speaking world Africanizes. The rate of French speakers in the countries of Africa does not cease growing over four last years, what makes Africa regroups about 55 % of the French speakers in the world today. (Bouithy, 2014).

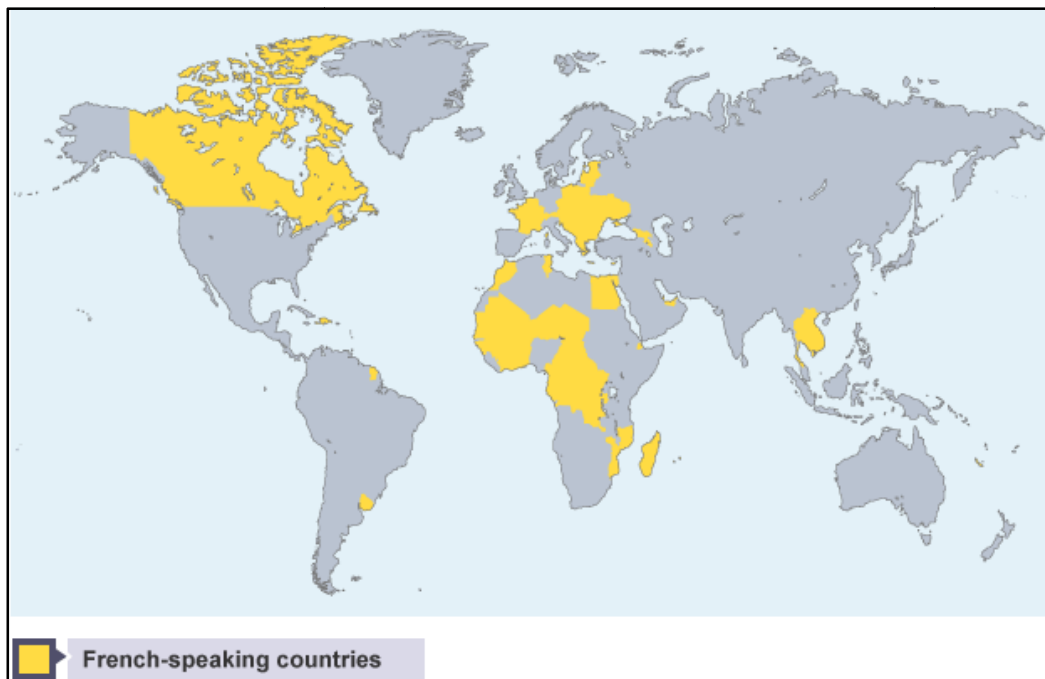


Figure 2: The Francophony, French-speaking countries in the world – bbc.co.uk

So, without the number growing by French speakers in Africa, the cultural influence of France worldwide would lose irrefutably of its haughtiness.

2.6. Africa as a Support for the French Political Voice in Worldwide

As admitted Jacques Godfrain, Minister of State to Minister of Foreign Affairs during the first years of the presidential office of Jacques Chirac, if France can have an influence on decisions of the United Nations, it is especially because the relations France maintains with some African countries. More widely, African States are going to be the fellow travelers of the Vth Republic, not only at the national policy level - networks of influence which constitutes the so-called "Françafrique", but also at the level of major international organizations, France is benefiting very often from the support of African States to adopt its resolutions to the UN (Dozon, 2003).

If France holds its rank as a major power State on the international stage, both at economic level and politics, it is irrefutably thanks to Africa. What will make Jacques Chirac say that without Africa, France will sink at the level of a third world country (Leymarie, 2008). Relationships between France and Africa are so strong that in 2013 African military troops and French soldiers marched together on Champs Elysées during celebrations of the French revolution of July 14th.

While the French government mentions relations France / Africa as an example of mutual advantageous cooperation, speaking even about "afroptimism", a report of the Foreign Affairs committee of the National Assembly introduced in August 2015 adopted a much more critical perspective in the African policy of France, highlighting its inefficiency and its lack of vision (Baumel, 2015).

Considering a partner of such importance for France and its future, it is impossible not to be surprised that France is not capable of developing and implementing a true, a viable African policy in long term, beneficial to both parties. Reality shows it's necessary to reinvent the French African policy.

2.7. Africa: French Misunderstood and Underestimated Issue

2.7.1. French Vision of Africa

The French vision of Africa remains a retrograde vision. France continues seeing and thinking of Africa through its own cultural values without considering the African cultures. From western imagination, Africa is not the cradle of the humanity but a land of people without stories, the panacea of faulty states, blows of states, of nepotism and of corruption, of war and death (Rojas, 2013).

This vision is really affecting the installation of an efficient, viable, equitable policy. How is it possible to build healthy, lasting relations, benefiting in the biggest number without taking into consideration specificity and needs of a different culture? Especially since colonization completely disintegrated developed societies in Africa, as Malian empire for example (Rojas, 2013). Also, Africa suffered the division of its States, its "Balkanization" sometimes performed with the help of the African governments themselves, as it was the case in Ivory Coast with Felix Houphouët-Boigny. France, as other Western powers, frees itself from its responsibility and still consider African crises as a result of bad policies of the African governments.

The end of colonization does not mark the end of Western domination. It just has taken a new form.

2.7.2. The "françafrique"

The "Françafrique" is the symbol of the French African policy since decolonization. A symbol with a really pejorative connotation of which France can't get rid of it, in spite of the promises repeated by the successive French presidents.

The time of Françafrique is past: there is France, there is Africa, there is partnership between France and Africa, with relations founded on respect, clarity and solidarity⁷. (Hollande, 2012).

Françafrique represents the worst of politics: vote-catching relations, constitution of networks allowing to use the money of African states to finance the French political parties (Hugon, 2010), French political support to African's government practicing nepotism, both France and Africa's leaders searching for their personal interests.

François Mitterrand wrote in 1957 that France needed Africa, without Africa it would not have history in the XXIth century (Mitterrand, 1957). But when he was elected at the presidency in 1981, his African politics was only the resurgence of the archaic vision he instituted in 1950s during his passage to the ministry of France's overseas. (Marchesin, 1995)

And Françafrique is not a relic of the past. It's still omnipresent in the African policy of France. Still, it has been seen under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy who is suspected of having received 50 million euro from Muammar al-Gaddafi to finance his presidential campaign of 2007.

As long as France will not send a strong signal to break these practices up, it will be impossible to the policy to bypass the mistrust that African people are feeling.

2.7.3. Vicious Circle of French African Policy

Since many years, the French African policy has locked itself in a vicious circle which the French leaders continue to perpetuate. It is constituted of two different vectors which feeds themselves mutually and plunge slowly Africa into a major crisis.

→ The Disengagement

⁷Original sentence in french : "Le temps de la Françafrique est révolu : il y a la France, il y a l'Afrique, il y a le partenariat entre la France et l'Afrique, avec des relations fondées sur le respect, la clarté et la solidarité." (Translation by the author).

French disengagement is at first a financial disengagement. It affects in an important way the French supports in development and economic strengthening of many African States. The level of French investment dedicated to the Development Aid (ODA) reaches its lowest level since 2001. France is very proud about its generosity and the level of the funds dedicated to the foreign aid. In fact, even if it seems considerable regarding to announce sums - net 8.5 thousand million euros declaring for year 2013 - the total effort France dedicates to this public policy is in constant fall for several years⁸ (Baumel, on 2015).

Not only France lowers the level of its assistance but furthermore this one is considered "incoherent" and "ineffective". France poured out hundreds million euro on Mali since decolonization and this state collapsed in 15 days. And however, negligence is perpetuated: it seems that the first emergency of the new authorities was to buy a presidential airplane, said Baumel (Naudet: 2015).

Financial disengagement also reaches a very sensitive problem to France: education. While France claims education is one of the major priorities of its foreign policy aid, "A choice of solidarity", "a strategic choice"⁹ basic education receives only 10% of what France declares to dedicate to education in its development aid. The United States, financing basic education in a distinctly upper way in countries as Mali, Senegal and especially Democratic Republic of Congo, defends better the French-speaking world than France (Baumel, 2015 pp. 118 - 120).

A disengagement of political order is then noticed. Rwandan genocide pushed France to review its African policy (Campbell, 2013). France could not content itself with applying a bipolar policy anymore: interference or indifference. In general, with the increasing power of the European Union (EU), and the increasing necessity to leave to the African States the management of problems of Africa, EU took over a part of African policy from former colonial powers. But EU took only a partial relay, further to the widening of Europe in countries without colonial past and, since the fall of the Berlin wall, the reorientation of its interests towards Eastern Europe (Hugon, 2010).

In front of difficulties of the international institutions to overcome their divergences, from now it is regional leaders who are going to impose their strategy and put the international community in front of provocative crises and wars favoring the rise of terrorism in Africa. It is just what the international community tries to fight for many years.

According to a report published in January, ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Blowhole Data Project) counted 4523 terrorist attacks in 2015 in Africa, in 44 of 54 African countries. Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, president of the Pan-African Institute of Strategy confirms that Africa is becoming the worldwide epicenter of terrorism (Wuilbercq, 2016).

The reduction of the development aid which France grants to Africa weakens directly the whole African society: education, health, economic perspectives. How can France hope to stabilize African states when in the same time, it cracks their foundations leading some areas of Africa sinking in violent crises and the French answer to African crises is mostly the military intervention.

→ The militarization of the African policy of France

This is the second vector of the vicious circle of the French African policy. Since the end of colonization, France carried out more than hundred military interventions on the African continent (Campbell, on 2013). It's THE French answer in a crisis event in Africa. Safe in Rwanda, what drives the African people to think that France acts only according to its interests

However, a military intervention is not a guarantee for an incoming peace. Successive military interventions do not bring by themselves a definitive peace. Under international pressures peace agreements gave birth to fragile solutions (Baumel, 2015).

As military intervention became a constant in the expression of French African policy, and security a major concern within the international community, the representatives of the French army are the only interlocutors Africans leaders could speak with. Even in France people are considering that Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian is taking the place of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. If the topic of the security actuality puts the representatives of the army in front of the stage, "we observe that others actors of French African policy don't travel to Africa"¹⁰. (Baumel, 2015 p. 138). Politicians and military need to work together to find a sustainable solution about African crises.

3. Conclusion

"Africa is our future"¹¹, claimed MM. Lorgeoux and Bockel in a report written to the French Senate in October, 2013. Nothing but the truth. Question is not anymore to know if Africa needs France. The debate today is to know in what way France is dependent on Africa. The African continent was, is and will be a major issue for France. In this context, French African policy is outdated.

France follows a straight line of conduct: react to crises. Such politics led France to lose its field of expertise of Africa. France cannot anticipate anymore. A policy without projection is surely doomed to failure. It does not take in mind the specificity which Africa offers to create a necessary, inseparable partner of the future of France. On the contrary, it seems that the only change in African policy instituted by the French leaders is a vocabulary change. The time of "Françafrique" is past. Except perhaps for the political party of the candidates for presidential elections.

France needs to invent a new, real, and a long term efficient policy that allows Africa to become the continent it should be. Stable and strong economically. Simply because Africa will grow like India or China did and it will benefit to France and Europe.

⁸ After reaching 0,5 % in 2010, the development aid of France represents no more than 0,37 % of its GDP in financial year 2014, reducing not only in percentage but also in volume.

⁹ Original sentence in french : "choix de solidarité", "choix stratégique" (translation by the author).

¹⁰ Original sentence in french : "on constate également que les autres acteurs de la politique africaine française se déplacent moins". (translation by the author).

¹¹ Original sentence in french : "L'Afrique est notre avenir". (translation by the author).

Task is arduous. What can France or Europe do when even the UN confesses its helplessness on cases like the Burundi? (Bensimon, 2016).

The French African policy must come out the other side of its wait-and-see attitude and take back initiative in Africa. Because after 60 years of independence, Africa cannot content itself with crumbs of other countries anymore nor let Africa provide for ancient colonial states. Africa is going to take its place in the world; its growth rate (more than most of the European countries) points it out. It is the best interest of France to become its partner.

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