

# France's african policy in transition: disengagement and redeployment

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This essay is an inquiry into the nature and substance of current French policy towards Africa. More specifically, it is an attempt to answer the following question: is France's African policy truly in transition between old-style neo-colonial and patrimonial type of policies characterized by intimate and quasi-familial relations between the French and francophone African elites –variously referred to as *le village franco-africain*,<sup>1</sup> or *la Françafrique*<sup>2</sup> – and a new policy in which

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1. See Antoine Glaser & Stephen Smith, *Ces messieurs Afrique 1: Le Paris-village du continent noir* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1992); and A. Glaser & S. Smith, *Ces messieurs Afrique 2: Des réseaux aux lobbies* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1997).

2. François-Xavier Verschave, *La Françafrique: le plus long scandale de la République* (Paris: Stock, 1998). The term of *Françafrique* has now gained wide currency through frequent usage, notably in the *Dossiers noirs de la politique africaine de la France* published at regular intervals by the French non-governmental organization advocating a new African policy, Agir ici-Survie.

francophone Africa is subsumed within a broader Third World policy, thus becoming normalized (*normalisée* and *banalisée*)? In other words, is France resolutely moving away from its traditional policy of *domaine réservé* and *chasse gardée* toward a politico-diplomatic, military and economic and financial disengagement from, and redeployment in Africa? In brief, are we truly witnessing a decolonization of Franco-African relations?

A number of symbolic events clearly show that a new French African policy is currently taking shape, leading to a progressive divorce between France and francophone Africa. At the same time, built-in structural factors tend to favor a status quo policy. Thus, while some observers point to a genuine French disengagement and redeployment, others stress France's tendency to preserve the *status quo*. After an overview of the historical context and main characteristics of Franco-African relations, this paper argues that France's African policy is truly at a transitional stage in which clear signs of change and new orientations co-exist with old habits and *status quo* policies. It concludes that the extent to which real change shall take place in Franco-African relations depends on the political will of the various actors involved, as well as on Africa's "new leadership" tendency to exclude France and favor purely African solutions to African problems.

## The Historical Context and Main Characteristics of Franco-African Relations<sup>3</sup>

### 1. The historical context of Franco-African relations

In the aftermath of World War II, French policymakers initiated a process of decolonization from above in Africa as they

3. This section draws heavily on my earlier work: Guy Martin, "Francophone Africa in the Context of Franco-African Relations," in John W.

came to realize that the loss of formal control would not necessarily be accompanied by a loss of real power and influence on the continent. Shortly after assuming power as the first president of the Fifth French Republic (June 1958), General Charles de Gaulle translated his personal conception of *France-Afrique* into his project of a Franco-African community that would grant autonomy and internal government to the African colonies while France retained control over essential areas such as defense, foreign affairs, and economic, monetary, and strategic minerals policy. People throughout French Africa –except in Sékou Touré's Guinea– voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Franco-African community in the September 1958 referendum. However, the movement toward independence proved irresistible. Following the independence of the short-lived Mali Federation (Senegal and Mali) in June 1960, practically all former French African colonies became independent by August 1960. Thus the Franco-African community, as originally envisaged by de Gaulle, became still-born.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the independence of the African territories in 1960 was more the result of French goodwill and magnanimity than of the pressure of African nationalist movements. This peaceful transfer of power demonstrates that the francophone African elites overwhelmingly opted for a gradual process of decolonization rather than a revolutionary break with the past;

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Harbeson & Donald Rotchild (eds.), *Africa in World Politics: Post-Cold War Challenges* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1995), pp. 163-188 (166-9 for this particular section).

4. See Patrick Manning, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880-1995* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1998), pp. 133-179; Keith Panter-Brick, "Independence, French Style," in Prosser Gifford & Wm. Roger Louis (eds.), *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfer of Power, 1950-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 73-104; Claude Wauthier, *Quatre Présidents et l'Afrique: de Gaulle, Pompidou, Giscard d'Estaing, Mitterand* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), part I: "Charles de Gaulle," pp. 17-179.

it also explains the emphasis placed on such values as moderation and compromise in the francophone African states' foreign policies. The transition from colonization to *coopération* was smoothed before the formal granting of independence by the negotiation of comprehensive bilateral agreements between France and each francophone African state, covering such areas as defense and security; foreign policy and diplomatic consultation; economic, financial, commercial, and monetary matters; strategic minerals; and technical assistance. Through the linkage established between the accession to international sovereignty, the signing of model cooperation agreements, and the wholesale adoption of the French constitutional model of the Fifth Republic, France managed to institutionalize its political, economic, monetary, and cultural preeminence over its former African colonies, which thereby –and for the next three decades– remained excessively dependent on the motherland.

## *2. France's African policy: exclusivity, stability and continuity*

France's African policy is characterized by exclusivity, stability, and continuity. During the heyday of imperial expansion, France's economic dynamism and level of industrial development never quite matched that of its major European competitors (Britain and Germany). This explains why protectionism and autarchy were systematically applied to France's African empire and continued to shape its colonial and postcolonial policies. France's heavy reliance on explicit legal instruments is codified in the form of a highly normalized set of binding documents (the cooperation agreements), supported by a number of multilateral agencies (such as the franc zone and Franco-African summits). During the Cold War era, francophone Africa was perceived as belonging to the French sphere of in-

fluence by virtue of historical links and geographical proximity, and it was seen as constituting a natural French preserve (*domaine réservé*, or *pré-carré*), off limits to other foreign powers, whether friends (e.g. the U.S.) or foes (e.g. the former Soviet Union). Indeed France has, on a number of occasions, shown a deep suspicion of the motives and actions of these power in Africa, as illustrated by the recent Franco-American rivalry in central and southern Africa, and in the Great Lakes region.<sup>5</sup>

Because they are based on historical links, geographical proximity, and linguistic and cultural affinity, relations between France and francophone Africa are particularly close and intimate, almost familial (*le village franco-africain*, or *La Françafrique*). And although family feuds may occasionally erupt, differences are never such that they cannot be quickly reconciled within the informal, warm, and friendly atmosphere of Franco-African institutions. This explains the extraordinary resilience and stability of Franco-African relations over the past four decades.

One of the most striking features of France's African policy is its continuity throughout the various political regimes of the Fifth French Republic, from 1958 to the present. There is no doubt that an autonomous and permanent policy exists, transcending the traditional political cleavages, the various regimes, and individual political leaders. The successive governments of Charles de Gaulle, Georges Pompidou, and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing have initiated and nurtured this African policy. In spite of his reformist intentions, François Mitterand was left to man-

5. On Franco-American rivalry in Africa, see in particular Peter J. Schraeder, "France and the Great Game in Africa," *Current History* (May 1997), pp. 210-1; P.J. Schraeder, "The U.S. and France in Africa: Competition or Collaboration?" Paper presented at the 42<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Philadelphia, PA (11-14 November 1999).

age, rather than to radically transform, this inheritance.<sup>6</sup> Paradoxically, the two periods of government cohabitation during which Mitterrand was forced to share power with a rightist parliamentary majority and prime minister (Jacques Chirac, 1986-88; Edouard Balladur, 1993-95 ) revealed the broad agreement that exists across party lines on the substance of France's African policy.

### Towards a New French Policy in Africa? Six Symbolic Events

A new French African policy is currently being shaped by various symbolic events, leading to a Franco-African malaise. In a changing world environment characterized by the end of the Cold War and globalization, French policy towards Africa is no longer determined by politico-diplomatic and geo-political factors but by purely economic and financial considerations, namely the search for new African and Third World markets, and a renewed focus on European integration.

Six separate (though interrelated) events are symbolic of France's new African policy: the passing away of Houphouët-Boigny and Foccart; the *La Baule* doctrine; the Abidjan doctrine and the devaluation of the CFA franc; French setbacks in the Great Lakes region; the Zaire/Democratic Republic of the Congo/DRC *débaçle*; the Franco-South African *rapprochement*; and French immigration policy. Each of these shall be briefly examined in turn.

6. See Claude Wauthier, *op. cit.* See also Jean-François Bayart, *La politique africaine de François Mitterrand* (Paris: Karthala, 1984), who asserts that "The real continuity actually starts with Mr. Mitterrand [when he was minister for Overseas France in 1954] and was passed on to General de Gaulle and to his successors" (p. 52).

1. *The death of Houphouët-Boigny and Foccart: The End of an Era?*

The passing away of two key figures of the Franco-African family (*La Françafrique*), Félix Houphouët-Boigny (December 1993) and Jacques Foccart (19 May 1997) truly signaled the end of an era in Franco-African relations.

When he died in early December 1993, Félix Houphouët-Boigny had been president of Côte d'Ivoire since August 1960 and was unquestionably the *doyen* of francophone Africa and a key ally of France in the region. His close personal ties with several generations of French leaders were reflected in the level and size of the French delegation to his state funeral in Yamoussokro (February 1994), which included the late president Mitterand, then prime minister Balladur, former president Giscard d'Estaing, six former prime ministers, and more than 70 other dignitaries. As the *New York Times* envoy then remarked, "Houphouët-Boigny's death is not only the end of a political era here, but perhaps as well the end of the close French-African relationship that he came to symbolize."<sup>7</sup>

Jacques Foccart was the personal embodiment of continuity in Franco-African relations. A trusted adviser on African affairs and close confidante of the founder of the Fifth Republic, Charles de Gaulle and of his successor, Georges Pompidou, Foccart was called back to duty by president Jacques Chirac in May 1995, and remained active until his death on 19 May 1997.

As he himself reveals in his memoirs, he carefully nurtured close personal (even familial) relations with the francophone African élite, and through a closely-knit network of public, private and occult individuals, organizations and interests (*les réseaux*), single-handedly managed to determine and control

7. Kenneth B. Noble, "Ivory Coast Buries its Father of Freedom," *The New York Times* (8 February 1994), pp. A1, A5.

France's African policy in what he perceived to be France's best interest.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, a close associate of Foccart, Fernand Wibaux, retains, since 1995, an office at 14, rue de l'Élysée which duplicates that of the "official" adviser to the Presidency on African affairs located at 2, rue de l'Élysée (Michel Dupuch).

## 2. *The La Baule doctrine*

In the early 1990s, France observed with some trepidation a process of democratization –which it had not anticipated and over which it had no control– unfold in its former African colonies. However, France soon realized the inevitability of that process and promptly initiated a policy of political conditionality that established an explicit linkage between the provision of economic and financial assistance and the adoption of political reforms leading to liberal, multi-party democracy. Thus, at the June 1990 Franco-African summit meeting of La Baule in western France, the late president Mitterand stressed the link between democracy and development and declared that "French aid will be lukewarm towards authoritarian regimes and more enthusiastic for those initiating a democratic transition"<sup>9</sup>. However, a review of the evidence suggests that official pronounce-

8. Philippe Gaillard (entretiens avec), *Foccart Parle* (Paris: Fayard/Jeune Afrique); vol. 1 (1995); vol. 2 (1997); Jacques Foccart, *Tous les soirs avec de Gaulle 1* (Paris: Fayard, 1997). For a concise and informative overview of Foccart's role and legacy in *Françafrique*, see Kaye Whiteman, "The Man Who Ran Françafrique," *The National Interest* no. 49 (Fall 1997), pp. 92-99. For another perspective on Foccart, see Pierre Péan, *L'Homme de l'Ombre* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

9. Quoted in Christian Casteran & Hugo Sada, "Sommet de la Baule: l'avertissement," in *Jeune Afrique* (27 June- 3 July 1990), p. 15 [translated from the French by the author, as elsewhere in this paper].



ments have not been followed by appropriate policy measures, and that France has continued to steadfastly support its authoritarian and corrupt friends in Africa.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. *The Abidjan doctrine and the devaluation of the CFA franc*

Formally adopted in January 1994, the “Abidjan doctrine” states that henceforth French economic aid and financial assistance to the francophone African states is conditional upon the conclusion of stand-by agreements between the latter and the international financial institutions (IFIs: International Monetary Fund and World Bank). Similarly, the 50 per cent devaluation of the CFA franc on 12 January 1994 –which signals the demise of the Franco-African preferential monetary and trading area known as *la zone franc*– falls within the same strategy of de-linking between France and francophone Africa. Indeed, as Albert Bourgi cogently remarked at the time, “the devaluation of the CFA franc will ultimately have a cathartic effect, that of mentally decolonizing the African leaders in their relations with France, thus finally cutting the umbilical cord which, for more than three decades, has tied them to their former metropole.”<sup>11</sup> In a recent study, Philippe Hugon argues that a degree of Franco-African monetary cooperation will subsist in spite of the fact that the CFA franc has, since January 1999, been formally linked to the euro in the context of the European monetary integration

10. These would include Rwanda's Juvénal Habyarimana and Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko until their demise and death; Cameroon's Paul Biya; Chad's Idriss Déby; Côte d'Ivoire's Henri Konan Bédié, Gabon's Omar Bongo and Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma.

11. Albert Bourgi, “Dévaluation, émancipation....,” *Jeune Afrique* (20-26 January 1994), pp. 46-7.

process to be completed by January 2002.<sup>12</sup> The reality is that in a context of increasing globalization of the world economy, of relative French economic decline, and of deeper and broader European integration, France no longer has the financial wherewithal and political will to pursue an autonomous African policy distinct from that of its Western partners. Hence the increasing multilateralization of French official development assistance (ODA) through the IFIs and the European Union's European Development Fund (EDF).

#### 4. French policy setbacks in the Great Lakes Region

From the October 1990 military intervention to rescue the Habyarimana regime to the *Opération Turquoise* (14 June-21 August 1994) designed to allow the *forces armées rwandaises* (FAR) to retreat into Eastern Zaire, it has now been established that France has provided continued diplomatic, military, technical and financial support to the *génocidaires* extremists of the Hutu Power (*Interahamwe* and FAR) who, in April 1994, planned and executed the genocide of some 850,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda. As François-Xavier Verschave has noted, "In Rwanda, France has backed a racist regime intent upon moving towards a 'final solution'. As acknowledged in the final report of the French Parliamentary Information Committee on Rwanda [*Mission d'information parlementaire française sur le Rwanda*] published on 15 December 1998, France has largely contributed to finance, train and arm the military and security units which later executed the genocide."<sup>13</sup>

12. Philippe Hugon, *La zone franc à l'heure de l'euro* (Paris: Karthala, 1999), pp. 219-228.

13. François-Xavier Verschave, *Complicité de génocide? La politique de la France au Rwanda* (Paris: La Découverte, 1994), p. 7; see also Agir ici-Survie,

As Jean-François Bayart has remarked, this has considerably tarnished French prestige in Africa: "Having been unable to prevent the RPF's [Rwanda Patriotic Front] victory, France became alienated from one of the major regional actors who later played a key role in the Zaïre/DRC crisis, discredited itself as an honest broker in the region and found itself compromised in the genocide. The resulting net loss of influence is enormous."<sup>14</sup> The replacement of Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaïre –which France supported until the bitter end – by Laurent-Désiré Kabila's Democratic Republic of the Congo– supported by Rwanda's Kagame and Uganda's Museveni – on 17 May 1997 further aggravated French loss of influence in the subregion and exacerbated France's "Fachoda syndrome" of an Anglo-Saxon plot to permanently evict it from its central African *chasse gardée*.<sup>15</sup> The fact that France proved unable to put together a

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"Rwanda: la France choisit le camp du génocide," [Dossiers noirs de la politique africaine de la France no. 1] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), pp. 7-64; Agir ici-Survie, *La sécurité au sommet, l'insécurité à la base* [Dossiers noirs de la politique africaine de la France no. 12] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), pp. 121-142. On the genocide, see Colette Braeckman, *Rwanda: histoire d'un génocide* (Paris: Fayard, 1994); and Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). On *Opération Turquoise*, see G. Prunier, *op. cit.*, pp. 281-311. Agir ici-Survie reveals that as early as 1992, the French state bank *Crédit Lyonnais* acted as collateral for a \$6 million Rwandan arms purchase from Egypt and that on the day following the outbreak of the genocide (8 April 1994), a heavily armed French brigade (*Amaryllis*) landed in Kigali, one of its planes carrying ammunition for the FAR (Agir ici-Survie, Dossiers noirs no. 12, *op. cit.*, pp. 206-7). See also: *Rapport de la Mission d'information parlementaire française sur le Rwanda*, 15 décembre 1998 [Pierre Brana & Bernard Cazenave, Rapporteurs].

14. Jean-François Bayart, "Bis repetita: La politique africaine de François Mitterand de 1989 à 1995," Colloque sur *La politique extérieure de François Mitterand à l'épreuve de l'après-guerre froide*, Centre d'études et de recherches internationales (CERI), Paris (13-15 May 1997), p. 20.

15. On recent developments in central Africa, see Colette Braeckman, *L'Enjeu Congolais: L'Afrique centrale après Mobutu* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

coalition for a “humanitarian” intervention in eastern Zaire in late 1996, the fall of Mobutu two months after Foccart’s death and France’s impotence in the face of the upheaval in early June 1997 in Brazzaville (where French troops simply evacuated French nationals) were all symptomatic of a major loss of French power and influence in central Africa.

5. *France and South Africa: towards a new engagement in Africa?*

Coming in the wake of French foreign affairs minister Hubert Védrine’s one-day visit to Cape Town (9 October 1997), French president Jacques Chirac’s state visit to South Africa (26-28 June 1998) and other Southern African countries (Angola, Mozambique and Namibia) was meant to demonstrate France’s resolve in opening a new chapter in Franco-African relations while resolutely turning a page in the neo-colonial relations that have traditionally characterized its relations with its former colonies in Africa. As France progressively disengages politically, economically and militarily from francophone sub-Saharan Africa, it can only view favorably South Africa’s parallel involvement in France’s former *domaine réservé*.

Thus, South Africa’s diplomatic involvement in the final stages of the DRC/Zaire crisis, South African firms’ active involvement in gold mining in countries such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger, or South African farmers’ new northern *Trek* to Congo-Brazzaville or the DRC which would have never been allowed by *La Françafrique* are now tolerated (if not actively encouraged) by France. In search of new trading partners and new outlets for both public and private investments in Africa, France increasingly looks up to South Africa as an ideal intermediary and power-broker to penetrate Southern African markets which have for many years been firmly situated within South Africa’s traditional sphere of influence.

With the end of apartheid, economic relations between France and South Africa have progressed steadily. Thus in 1997, the sale of French goods on the South African market increased by more than 27 per cent in real terms compared to 1996, reaching a record U.S. \$1 billion in value. South Africa has since then become France's main trading partner in Sub-Saharan Africa, before Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. Altogether, the French market share in South Africa has increased to nearly 3 billion rands since 1994. Over 125 French firms now have a subsidiary in South Africa (a three-fold increase since 1993). In 1997, French development aid to South Africa amounted to 230 million francs, and French cultural, educational and scientific aid (governed by a special protocol since February 1995) reached 42 million francs.<sup>16</sup>

Following the visit to South Africa of French foreign affairs minister Hubert Védrine, a formal agreement setting up a *Franco-South African Forum for Political Dialogue* –conceived as a permanent mechanism for consultation in international affairs– was concluded between the two governments on 9 October 1997. Other signs of Franco-South African *rapprochement* include vice-president Thabo Mbeki's participation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Franco-African summit meeting in Paris (26-28 November 1998); the inclusion of South Africa's in France's newly-defined *Zone de solidarité prioritaire* for purposes of French aid; and France's allocation of FF 3.5 million to SADC's *Blue Crane* war games conducted in April 1999 in South Africa. Thus while officially South Africa would prefer –for historical and political reasons– not to be seen as too closely associated with France, considerations of *realpolitik* dictate that it agrees to a marriage of convenience with France while the latter acknowledges the

16. Economic and financial data provided by the Economic & Trade Development Office [*Poste d'expansion économique*], French Embassy in South Africa, Pretoria (May 1998).

former's status as an ascending subregional power with budding continental ambitions, as evidenced by its vocal advocacy and active promotion of a pan-African policy of *African Renaissance*.

#### 6. French immigration policy

During the *cohabitation* régime in which a socialist president (François Mitterand) co-existed with a rightist government (with Charles Pasqua as minister of home affairs) –between 1986 and 1988, and between 1993 and 1995–, France enacted extremely restrictive immigration policies specifically targeting francophone Africans (including *Maghrébins* from north Africa). Taking various despicable forms –drastic reduction in the delivery of entry visas in France; multiplication of administrative obstacles and extreme bureaucratization of the visa issuance process; forced expulsion on charter planes of “illegal” immigrants in degrading conditions; forced expulsion of the African protesters at *Église Saint-Bernard* of Paris–, this policy succeeded in antagonizing many francophone Africans (including students, businessmen and politicians) and further contributed to a significant degradation of France's image in Africa. This led some observers to remark that France actively promoted a policy of *Francophonie* while at the same time busily engaged in chasing the *francophones* away from France.<sup>17</sup>

#### How “new” is France's New African Policy? Between a Second Decolonization and Maintaining the *status quo*

Two opposing viewpoints of the evolving Franco-African relationship currently tend to prevail. According to the first view,

17. Mentioned in Philippe Marchesin, “La politique africaine de la France en transition,” *Politique africaine* no. 71 (October 1998), pp. 93-4.

we are now witnessing a real French disengagement from francophone Africa and a simultaneous redeployment of French politico-diplomatic, strategic and economic interests away from francophone Africa and into new territories in Africa (Nigeria, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa) and other Third World countries (Brazil, India, Vietnam etc.). The second view argues that this decolonization policy is a mere smoke-screen behind which the traditional *status quo* policy of *La Françafrique* is actually maintained. These two viewpoints shall be briefly examined below.

*1. A new African policy of disengagement and redeployment: towards a second decolonization?*

While direct French presence had always been a hallmark of French cooperation policy in Africa, one observes a significant decrease in the number of both civilian and military technical assistants in Africa. Thus, the number of French civilian *coopérants* in Africa has decreased from 7,669 in 1988 to 2,919 in 1998 while that of their military counterparts decreased from 954 to 570 during the same period.<sup>18</sup> This trend clearly indicates a move away from what the French call a *coopération de substitution* (aid substituting for local manpower) to a medium to long-term, project-based type of assistance.

Its renewed European focus, its economic and financial crisis, and setbacks experienced in the Great Lakes region have led France to completely reassess its security policy in Africa. This new French security policy in Africa is characterized by military disengagement (from 8,000 to 5,600 troops over the period

18. Data provided in the French National Assembly parliamentary financial committee's report on foreign affairs and cooperation for 1998 [A. Adevah-Poeuf, rapporteur], quoted in P. Marchesin, *art. cit.*, p. 97.

1997-2002); concentration of these troops in only five locations (Abidjan, Dakar, Djibouti, Libreville and N'Djamena), and closure of two bases (Bangui and Bouar, in the Central African Republic/CAR); financial, material and logistical support to subregional and pan-African peace-keeping forces (in cooperation with Britain and the U.S.); and relocation of military training from France to four subregional training centers in Africa (Thiès in Senegal; Koulikoro in Mali; and Bouaké in Côte d'Ivoire, where the Zambakro subregional peacekeeping training center was inaugurated on 7 June 1999).<sup>19</sup>

A distinct French disengagement from Africa is taking place at the economic and financial levels as well. Following the general trend of "donor fatigue", French ODA has decreased from FF 42.1 billion in 1995 to FF 34.7 billion in 1998 while the budget of the ministry of cooperation was reduced from FF 8 bn. in 1993 to FF 6.4 bn. in 1998.<sup>20</sup> Following the above-mentioned *Abidjan doctrine* of 1994, this French disengagement also takes the form of a gradual process of multilateralization of French ODA whereby the provision of French aid to francophone African states is henceforth made conditional to the conclusion of agreements between the latter and the IFIs. Clearly, France no longer has the means to pursue an ambitious African policy.

## 2. *Defending La Françafrique and maintaining the status quo*

At the official level, various recent pronouncements by key *décideurs* of France's African policy (notably president Chirac

19. See Jean-Dominique Geslin, "Quels gendarmes pour l'Afrique?" *Jeune Afrique* (15-21 June 1999), pp. 27-8, which notes that the Zambakro training center is financed by France to the tune of 15 million francs.

20. French National Assembly, *Adevah-Poeuf Report*, 1998, pp. 9, 23; P. Marchesin, "L'aide publique au développement en 1997," *Observatoire permanent de la coopération française*, Rapport 1997 (Paris: Karthala, 1997), p. 17.



and foreign minister Védrine) tend to clearly indicate that France does not intend to change its African policy, let alone to disengage from Africa, and that it remains faithful to its traditional African allies. As for the observable signs of change, they are rationalized as being a mere adaptation to changing circumstances.<sup>21</sup>

Looking beyond the official discourse emphasizing continuity in Franco-African relations within the *longue durée*, one may observe the survival of certain attitudes and of various individuals, networks, firms and institutions who have a vested interest in preserving *La Françafrique* for a few more years. These would include: a cross-section of the French political and military elite; the *cellule africaine* at the *Élysée* Palace, manned by two *Foccartiens* (Michel Dupuch and Fernand Wibaux); the French oil major *Elf Aquitaine* (recently bought by *Total-Fina*) which, for years, has conducted its own autonomous African policy in its central African *chasses gardées* (notably Gabon and Congo); the francophone African political and military elite from the core countries of *Françafrique* (Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Senegal, and Togo), linked to their French counterparts through various official and occult networks, such as the freemasons;<sup>22</sup> various firms, experts and consultants who benefit from French ODA; and some non-governmental organizations benefitting from the provision of humanitarian assistance to Africa.

The brief exposé of these two conflicting perspectives actually points to a defining moment in Franco-African relations.

21. For a representative sample of such French official pronouncements, see P. Marchesin, "La politique africaine de la France en transition," *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

22. On the resilience of Franco-African freemason networks in Africa, see in particular Claude Wauthier, "L'étrange influence des francs-maçons en Afrique francophone," *Le Monde diplomatique* (September 1997), pp. 6-7.

What the preceding overview seems to indicate is that France's African policy has, indeed, entered a **transitional phase** in which clear signs of change co-exist with *status quo* policies. Thus, while the edifice shows some cracks, it still stands. As we review below the concrete manifestations of France's "new" policy in Africa, we must keep in mind the fact that in the grey areas of policy, new orientations may very well co-exist with old habits for some time.<sup>23</sup>

3. How "new" is the new French African policy? Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose...

What is really "new" in France's African policy? Not much, as a closer examination of that policy reveals.

*a/ French military and security policy in Africa*

The restructuring of the French military announced in mid-1997 which resulted in the reduction and redeployment of French forces in Africa is in fact the logical outcome of a strategy of intervention from bases located in France (through a 44,500-men strong *Force d'action rapide/FAR*) –as opposed to a strategy of direct military presence– which was initiated in the late seventies.

Thus, while the actual number of troops based in Africa is being reduced (from 8,000 to 5,600 between 1997 and 2002), their capacity to intervene shall be maintained and even improved. Furthermore, as Albert Bourgi rightly observes, "In spite of the reforms undertaken, French military presence in Africa

23. This point is eloquently made by P. Marchesin, "La politique africaine de la France en transition," *op. cit.*, p. 101.

retains a colonial character, as demonstrated by the decision to maintain bases in countries considered as strategic for the perpetuation of French political, economic and strategic influence on the continent, namely Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon and Chad." . And he adds: "French military presence in Africa appears more than ever as the symbol of an outdated imperial policy which is meaningless in the post-Cold War world..."<sup>24</sup>

In the same way, one can view the new French policy of assistance to multinational and subregional peace-keeping forces in Africa within the context of continuity in French military policy in Africa. Thus, the *Mission interafricaine de stabilisation à Bangui* (MISAB) set up by France in the CAR in the Spring of 1997, while made up of African contingents, has been armed, equipped, trained and managed by France. Similarly, the new French military policy of RECAMP (*Renforcement des capacités africaines de maintien de la paix*) was tested during the *Guidimakha* inter-African military war games conducted in Senegal in early 1998, which benefitted from significant technical, logistical and financial support from France, as well as from a symbolic assistance from the U.S. and Great Britain. Thus, in spite of an official French military policy of disengagement and redeployment, African technical, logistical and financial military dependency on France persists.

#### b/ *The management of the 1997 crisis in Congo-Brazzaville*

Throughout the civil war in Congo-Brazzaville which opposed the forces of incumbent president Pascal Lissouba to those of former president Denis Sassou-Nguesso (June-October 1997),

24. Albert Bourgi, "La fin de l'épopée coloniale?" *Jeune Afrique* (13-26 August 1997); A. Bourgi, "Centrafrique: la tentation impériale." *Jeune Afrique* (15-21 January 1997), p. 15.

French officially maintained an attitude of strict “neutrality” excluding any military intervention (except for the evacuation of French nationals in June 1997) and actively supporting the mediation effort initiated by president Omar Bongo of Gabon.

However, in this case, French official neutrality was quickly superseded by the “benevolent neutrality” of the French state, notably the military establishment, the *Elysée* Palace and *Elf Aquitaine*, all of which, in effect, actively supported Sassou-Nguesso, who fought his way back into power on 25 October 1997 with the assistance of Chadian troops backed by French logistical support. *Elf* appears to be the common denominator of the assistance which Sassou-Nguesso got from Angola and Gabon in his re-conquest of power. Indeed, in the Spring of 1998, *Elf* agreed to provide him with \$310 million as the cost of the re-scheduling of Congo’s debt. President Chirac continues to support his old friend Sassou-Nguesso, and General Jeannou Lacaze – former Chief-of-staff of Mitterrand and Mobutu – now serves as adviser to the Congolese army.<sup>25</sup>

The management of the Congolese crisis clearly reveals a tension between the *anciens*’ policy of “benevolent neutrality” (in fact of active support), and the *modernes*’ official posture of non-interference and strict neutrality (as advocated by prime minister Lionel Jospin), resolved to the benefit of the former.

### *c/ The reform of the French cooperation system*

Initiated by prime minister Lionel Jospin in February 1998 with the full backing of the *Elysée*, the reform of the French cooperation system is an attempt to adapt ageing institutions to a

25. See Agir ici-Survie, *La Sécurité au Sommet, l’insécurité à la base* [Dossiers noirs de la politique africaine de la France no. 12] (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998), pp. 81-112.

changing world environment characterized by globalization and the multilateralization of ODA. The former secretariat of state for cooperation becomes a unit within the ministry of foreign affairs (*le Quai d'Orsay*). Henceforth, the minister of foreign affairs is responsible for all aspects of France's external relations.

The new system revolves around two pillars: the *Quai d'Orsay* and *Bercy* (the ministry of economy and finance), who jointly supervise a new structure, the *Comité interministériel de la Coopération internationale et du développement* (CICID). The CICID determines the cooperation policy and its geographical priorities. The renamed *Agence française de développement* (AFD) has overall responsibility for the management and disbursement of French ODA. In order to maintain a degree of consistency between French ODA and unofficial assistance, a *Haut Conseil de la Coopération Internationale* (HCCI) with consultative status, which brings together representatives of NGOs, municipalities, academic, researchers and experts, has been set up.

Henceforth, the main target of French ODA is a "solidarity priority area" (*Zone de solidarité prioritaire*: ZSP) made up of the least developed countries falling within the purview of the deputy-ministry of cooperation (basically all the African, Caribbean and Pacific states signatories of the Lomé Convention, plus South Africa).

In the final analysis, does this structural reform represent a substantive change in France's cooperation policy? For some observers, this reform is merely an administrative rationalization rather than a structural transformation.

Thus, president Bongo of Gabon alluded to a mere semantic change when he remarked: "I don't care whether you call the person in charge of cooperation minister, secretary or messenger; what matters is that the cooperation policy is maintained."<sup>26</sup>

26. Quoted in Philippe Gaillard, "Feu la 'Coopé'," in *Jeune Afrique* (10-16 February 1998), p. 9.

Indeed, the *Elysée* maintains its *cellule africaine*; the military cooperation agreements are still in force; the ZSP includes all the 36 countries of the former *domaine réservé* (*pays du champ*); and deputy-minister of cooperation Charles Josselin takes part in cabinet meetings, which constitutes a real advantage in the eyes of the francophone African heads of state. Ultimately, this reform perfectly illustrates the transitory nature of France's African policy.

## Conclusion

This essay has shown that France's African policy is currently in a transitional phase in which clear signs of change and new orientations co-exist with old habits and *status quo* policies. Ultimately, the extent to which real change shall take place in Franco-African relations depends on two main factors. The first is a genuine political will for change among the main actors involved: the French and African political, military and business elites; representatives of key NGOs; and French and African citizen's organizations.

The second factor is the increasing tendency of Africa's "new leadership" – such as Uganda's Yoweri Museveni and Rwanda's Paul Kagame – to reject French presence and intervention in Africa – particularly in central Africa and the Great Lakes region – in favor of purely African solutions to African problems within appropriate regional (e.g. Organization of African Unity/OAU) or subregional (e.g. Southern African Development Community/SADC) institutional frameworks. Almost 40 years after independence, the time has really come for Africa's "second decolonization" to take place and for Franco-African relations to be truly decolonized. As eloquently stated by the CFA coalition (*coalition Citoyens France Afrique*), "what we do not want is an African policy devoid of any democratic control and fo-

cused on short-term political and economic interests (...) African democratic aspirations must become a key component of renovated Franco-African and Euro-African relations built on the principles of equity and reciprocity.”<sup>27</sup>

27. Agir ici-Survie, *Jacques Chirac et la Françafrique. Retour à la case Foccart?* [Dossiers noirs de la politique africaine de la France no. 6] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), pp. 108, 111.