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French Relations with Sub-Saharan Africa Under President Sarkozy

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African perspectives. Global insights.

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1990s France has framed its approach to Africa as a debate between reform and adherence to the old ways. President Nicolas Sarkozy came to power in 2007 promising change. In many ways he represents a new relationship with Africa and he is free of the baggage of his predecessors. However, in his rise through the Gaullist movement Sarkozy developed ties with some of Francophone Africa's long-standing and authoritarian leaders. The result has been oscillation and ambivalence in French policy towards Africa. Military relations are a case in point. France has initiated extensive and important reform, including renegotiating all military and defence agreements and moving towards a reduction in French troop presence. However, the French military continue to intervene in a variety of settings and will remain present in at least two large bases on the continent. Equally, Africa continues to be of strategic importance to France, especially for oil and uranium. However, change in France's relations with Africa is occurring, and is more dependent on developments in individual Francophone African countries than on the reform debate in Paris. Côte d'Ivoire is an important example. Despite the decisive role played by the French military in April 2011, the relationship has for some years been driven by Côte d'Ivoire's fluctuating crises, rather than by French policy decisions, and by perceptions of France's role, often coloured with conspiracy theory. This prevalence of conspiracy theory in African perceptions of France is driven in part by a continued lack of transparency on the French side. It is also a product of an ambivalence by the Francophone African elite towards renewal, which mirrors that of the French.

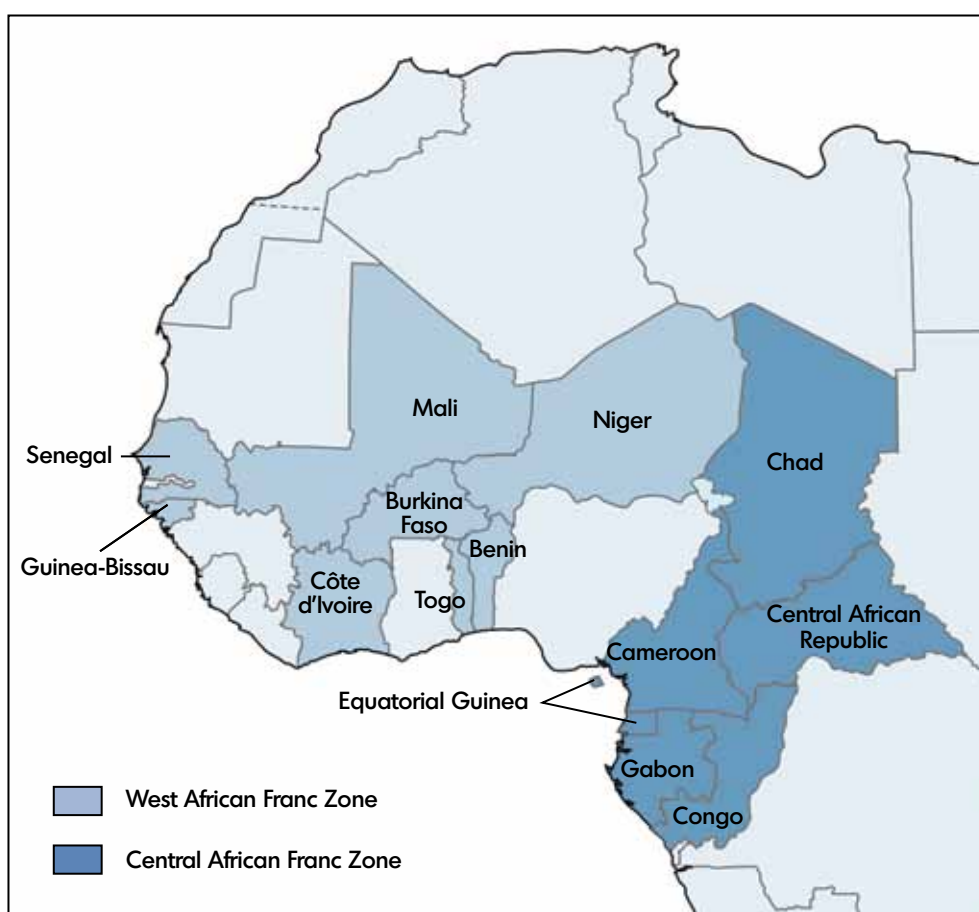
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AfD	Agence française de développement (French Development Agency)
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CFA	Communauté Financière d'Afrique (CFA franc)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RECAMP	Renforcement des capacités africaines de maintien de la paix (African peacekeeping capacity reinforcement programme)
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution

FIGURE 1: FRANCOPHONE AFRICA AND THE CFA FRANC ZONE



Source: Investir en Zone Franc, <http://www.izf.net/upload/Documentation/Cartes/zone.pdf>

Note: Map showing the Franc Zone countries, divided into the West and Central African currency blocks. They are equivalent to the two regional governments of French colonial sub-Saharan Africa. The West African Franc Zone, now grouped in the UEMOA (l'Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine) regional block, is the former West African colony, the AOF (Afrique occidentale française). The Central African Franc Zone, now grouped in the CEMAC regional block, is the old Equatorial African colony, the AEF (Afrique équatoriale française).

The three Guineas are exceptions to the match between the current Franc Zone and the colonial structures. Guinea Conakry is not part of the Franc Zone, having withdrawn from collective financial arrangements on independence in 1958. Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony, joined the Central African Franc Zone in 1985. Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony, joined the West African Franc Zone in 1997.

INTRODUCTION

Since President Nicolas Sarkozy's election in May 2007, France's often controversial relations with sub-Saharan Africa have undergone significant changes. Some have resulted from policy decisions made in Paris, whereas others are part of a more general evolution in Africa and of Africa's strategic and commercial position in world affairs. In the four years up to 2011, there have been a number of crises on the continent that have led to French military interventions, including in Côte d'Ivoire, Chad and in the West African Sahel. The crises have presented a serious challenge to French policymakers, who are tasked ostensibly with implementing a programme of reform, but who have to deal repeatedly with the legacy of France's long involvement in Africa.

Intended mainly for an Anglophone audience with limited knowledge of Francophone African affairs, the paper first examines the historical background of France's relations with sub-Saharan Africa, and discusses President Sarkozy's position on key issues before and after his electoral victory. These include commercial and aid relationships with both former colonies and with other, economically more important African countries; the fate of France's military presence on the continent; France's reaction to crises in its traditional sphere of influence; and a series of ongoing judicial issues involving France and Africa. Although events in North Africa are touched on, the paper covers sub-Saharan Africa (with 'Africa' or 'Francophone Africa' referring to sub-Saharan Africa, unless otherwise specified). The paper focuses on countries in Africa where relations are most dense, namely the former colonies in West and Central Africa, except where important relationships (especially commercial) are emerging elsewhere. Restrictions on space prevent coverage of relations with the Indian Ocean island states.

The paper then reviews Sarkozy's reform programme, with its many hesitations and ambivalences. It examines the reform of French military presence on the continent and France's role in the Côte d'Ivoire crisis. Although Parisian politics and bureaucracy are not ignored, emphasis is given to the perceptions and actions of Francophone Africans in this relationship, at both elite and popular levels. To this end, the paper's final sections consider popular perceptions of the French role, such as in elections in Gabon, riots in Cameroon and in Internet debates on events in Côte d'Ivoire. France's Africa policy is too disparate and complex for a single set of recommendations. However, the paper suggests that the long-term success of French objectives will depend on further and deeper efforts at transparency.

BACKGROUND – FRANCE IN AFRICA

The France–Africa special relationship

To those unfamiliar with the France–Africa 'special relationship', which lasted from independence in 1960 to the end of the Cold War, it has always seemed a curious beast. Far from the 'billiard ball' concept of international relations popularised in American universities during the cold war,¹ here was a set of interconnections, personal, institutional or even 'sovereign' (defence, currency), between independent nations, which defied most

standard interpretations. The strong ties and continued dependency on the former colony also belied the claims to independent statehood advanced by African leaders to boost their legitimacy in the early days.

The origin of this curious relationship lies in the former French president, Charles de Gaulle's determination that France would not lose its influence in sub-Saharan Africa, at a time when it had lost or was losing wars of independence in Algeria and Indochina. Sub-Saharan Africa was thereby called upon to help maintain France's rank in world affairs in the post-colonial era, and confirm its autonomy relative to the US. 'Decolonise in order to better remain' became the order of the day, and the density of relations continued in an upward trend that lasted from the First World War until the 1980s, regardless of the formal aspects of decolonisation. More French people lived and worked in Francophone Africa in 1970 than at independence 10 years earlier.

These ties covered three areas: commerce, development co-operation and finance; diplomacy; and the military.² Commercial and development ties and military ties, considered later in the paper, were both considered part of a bigger picture of influence. France was commercially dominant in Francophone Africa, and strategic minerals were of particular importance. It enjoyed a formal monopoly over oil and uranium in some countries, written into agreements that were signed on independence in 1960. France's military presence was used mainly to prop up allied governments threatened by internal dissent, and was accepted by France's allies as part of anti-Soviet Cold War strategic arrangements.

Personal ties between French and African politicians were of immense importance in cementing the system. Although de Gaulle himself delegated relations to his Africa advisor, Jacques Foccart – and never visited sub-Saharan Africa after independence – compliant leaders nevertheless found favourable treatment in Paris, and consolidated links forged in the 1950s with politicians of all parties in France. Whereas the attractions of French culture and language counted for some, for others ensuring French support against internal opponents was more important. Some of Francophone Africa's leaders, especially those who survived several decades, developed considerable influence in Paris (such as over diplomatic nominations and over aid flows), and in many respects inverted the relations one would expect from the neocolonial model of French power.³ President Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, for example, was instrumental in French diplomatic and military support for the Biafran rebels in the Nigerian civil war.

To understand subsequent evolutions, it is important to note that from the beginning France–Africa relations were marked by exceptionalism and secrecy. The density of ties and agreements, and their infringement on normally sovereign matters, especially military, led de Gaulle to create ad hoc structures in Paris, rather than allow them to be managed through normal diplomatic channels. Given that Africa was of vital strategic importance for de Gaulle's vision of France in the Cold War, many aspects were kept out of public or parliamentary view, and entrusted to de Gaulle's networks of acting and former army and intelligence officers.⁴

The France–Africa exception continued long after its founder's death in 1970. However, it became more fragmented and less controllable – a set of self-interested networks (often called pejoratively '*la Françafrique*') rather than coherent government policy. When the French Socialist Party gained power in 1981, many expected sweeping changes. They were disappointed, as President Francois Mitterrand, whose links to some of the continent's

long-standing leaders went back to the 1940s, continued in much the same vein as his predecessors.⁵ Many African leaders found they could wield considerable power even over their French counterparts, not least owing to their sheer longevity in office and their financial generosity towards French politicians. Meanwhile, the youthful population of Francophone Africa, suffering from the destructuring of Africa's economies in the 1980s, became increasingly alienated from their own political systems, and thereby from the French 'model' out of which their own countries had, in part, grown.

Crisis, change, and 'reform'

The French model, as it was exported to Africa, was one of stable authoritarianism, influenced by Gaullist views on the dangers of parliamentary democracy. It was therefore strongly challenged by the wave of democracy movements in Africa in the 1990s. Some countries made real democratic advances, but elsewhere authoritarian leaders were able to hang on. This phenomenon of 'authoritarian restoration' was not unique to Francophone Africa, but it was striking that the former colonial power, France, offered only tepid support to democratisation movements, and was sometimes downright hostile. This was despite the declaration by President Mitterrand at the La Baule France–Africa summit in June 1990 that France would support countries that made greater democratic progress. Whether because of a sincere belief in stability before democracy, or through self-interest, the French did not follow this policy through clearly. Many Francophone African leaders successfully exerted a stability blackmail ('if I go it will be chaos') to retain French support as they used and abused incumbency to hang onto power.⁶

France's failure to fully support democratisation in the 1990s has profoundly marked its image on the continent. As France's relations with Africa have fragmented, in some cases becoming violently contentious (such as in Côte d'Ivoire), the early 1990s can now be regarded as a lost opportunity for a genuine renewal of relations, and for some form of truth telling or reconciliation.

The special relationship came under severe strain in 1994. Just weeks after the death of Houphouët-Boigny, Francophone Africa's common currency, the CFA (Communauté Financière d'Afrique) franc, was devalued for the first time. In the context of sliding prices for the region's main exports, it was a clear sign that France could no longer protect its former colonies from the pressures of the world economy. Only four months later, the Rwandan genocide occurred. The French had provided diplomatic and military support to President Juvénal Habyarimana's genocidal regime, leading to a saga of recriminations over France's role that is still far from settled.⁷ A further major factor in the unravelling of the France–Africa relationship in the 1990s was the lengthy judicial investigation into the finances of the French oil giant, ELF, which uncovered a huge array of personal and political corruption.

Since this time, France's approach to the continent has oscillated between a desire to change and a desire to maintain the fragments of a system that many individuals, companies and political parties – in Africa as well as in France – still find comfortable.⁸ Unsurprisingly, the reform position is adhered to by most, at least in public. It can be characterised as follows.

- The desire to limit France's military engagements on the continent and to reduce interference in the internal affairs of African countries.
- The desire to limit the cost of France's engagement with Africa. This was initially the most important factor behind reform, and dates from the late 1980s and 1990s when increasing aid flows to indebted Francophone African countries conflicted with budgetary restrictions flowing from France's commitments to European monetary convergence. A significant lobby in the French finance ministry, associated with the then prime minister, Edouard Balladur, pushed hard to reduce French support to its former colonies.
- The desire to make France's Africa policy more transparent, and subject to the normal checks and balances built into French public administration. This should entail administrative reform doing away with the special status of Africa in France's diplomatic machinery. Although the reform debate is generally concerned with Parisian issues and politics, it is also believed that making French policy more transparent will encourage democracy in areas of strong French influence. Unlike the conservatives of the French Africa policy community, who often claim that Africa is not suited to democracy (Jacques Chirac openly expressed this view in February 1990), reformers tend to see democratisation in Africa as a good thing.
- The desire to forge closer working relationships with the whole of Africa. This would not only be potentially profitable for France given that the more dynamic economies of Africa lie outside France's traditional sphere of influence, but it would also help to dilute some of the more obscure and controversial aspects of the France–Africa relationship. Forging new working relationships with other African countries and with Africa's regional bodies has become particularly important in the area of peacekeeping and security.
- The desire to co-operate with other non-African powers, including other bilateral powers (the UK and the US), the EU and the UN. Again, this is viewed as a way of diluting the problematic relations with Francophone countries, possibly opening up the France–Africa relationship to more scrutiny, and sharing some of the risks and costs of French engagement. It has also been seen as a way of counteracting the idea that France competes with other Western powers for control of Africa, an idea which can take quite paranoid forms for some French.⁹

When the Socialist Party won the legislative elections in May 1997, the new prime minister, Lionel Jospin, who adhered to the reform agenda, used the atmosphere of public disgust with France's Africa policy following the crises of the early 1990s, to put in place some of these long-advocated reforms. The co-operation ministry was absorbed into the foreign ministry in January 1998. At the same time, France's aid-giving bodies were revamped by restructuring the French Development Agency (the Agence française de développement, AfD) to boost its role in French aid policy and make it a more technical and less politically oriented body. These measures partially ended Francophone Africa's special status in French diplomatic machinery. However, they did not affect the special role of the French presidential office (often called the Elysée after the presidential palace) in African policy, partly because Jospin's government did not hold all the levers of power in the context of 'cohabitation' with President Chirac.

The Ivorian crisis, which broke out with the successful coup of December 1999, was a further watershed in France's relations with the continent. The crisis divided French politicians and officials from the beginning. Many in the Gaullist movement, which was close to President Henri Konan Bédié, who was overthrown in the coup, supported a French military intervention to return him to power. However, this was vetoed by Jospin's government, partly owing to an awareness of Bédié's unpopularity in Côte d'Ivoire and partly owing to party political factors. These latter factors became even more important when Laurent Gbagbo, who was very close to important figures in the French Socialist Party, won elections in October 2000, amidst widespread violence and with his main rivals (Bédié and Alassane Ouattara) excluded from standing. Gbagbo was able to resist calls for the election to be rerun (including from the then UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan), largely owing to French diplomatic support emanating from the Socialist Party.

The battle between the 'reformers' and the 'old guard' raged on in Paris, across the various government changes of the 1994–2007 period. A distinction should be made, however, between the reform agenda in France's Africa policy, with all its infighting and hesitations, and the broader issue of change in France–Africa relations. Despite the reform debate dragging on, significant and more organic change has been occurring. This change is related to changes in Africa's position in world affairs and the increasing importance of new powers such as China, India and Middle Eastern countries. It is also related to the willingness on the part of Francophone Africans to forge a new kind of relationship with their former colonial power.

SARKOZY AND AFRICA – PROMISES OF REFORM, REALITIES OF POWER

Sarkozy's Africa background

Sarkozy's victory in the May 2007 presidential elections in France was met with mixed reactions in Francophone Africa. On the positive side, many hoped for the much-awaited renewal of France's Africa policy. He was, at least ostensibly, the first French president since de-colonisation in 1960 to have no close links to the *Françafrique* networks of backroom interests that had so dominated previous ties. Sarkozy's relatively young age and immigrant background appealed to watchful Africans.¹⁰ Furthermore, he gave prominent official positions to French of immigrant origin, and appeared willing to correct the marginal place that immigrant communities play in elite French life.

On the negative side, however, many Africans perceived Sarkozy as a symbol of France's ever-hardening immigration laws. As interior minister under Chirac, he had indeed been part of a vitriolic discourse on immigrants in France. He had overseen an increased securitisation of immigration policy, with police tracking down illegal immigrants and deporting them back to Africa on specially convened flights (commonly known as 'charters'), or on regular airlines.¹¹ Some Africans feared that, despite talk of renewal and opening, Sarkozy represented a parochial and xenophobic France, which fears and distrusts immigrants.¹²

The perception that Sarkozy was not linked to the networks of *la Françafrique* on his arrival in power requires further examination. On the one hand, it is true that he did not have the important personal links to Francophone African leaders that his predecessors had, and that Africa did not feature prominently in his earlier political career. In addition, the importance of the *Françafrique* networks in French political life had in any case declined.

On the other hand, such has been the density of links between African leaders and the French Gaullist movement, that it is highly improbable that anyone could rise through its ranks without some support from those connected to Africa. In Sarkozy's case, it came through Charles Pasqua, who, as minister of the interior and elected head of the Hauts-de-Seine department near Paris, forged significant ties with Omar Bongo of Gabon and Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Republic of Congo (more commonly and henceforth Congo-Brazzaville), and with various French business interests in Central Africa.¹³ As Pasqua faded from the French political scene Sarkozy maintained links with Africa through the lawyer and fixer, Robert Bourgi. Bourgi is a protégé of Foccart who, since Foccart's death in 1997, has acted as an informal channel of communication and influence between French politicians and African presidents, and is close to most of the key Francophone African heads of state.¹⁴ Bourgi is also close to Claude Guéant, who until recently was, as Sarkozy's general secretary, charged with relations with many African heads of state.

Speeches, policies, judicial cases

This dual heritage and consequent ambivalence is reflected in a series of speeches that Sarkozy gave on Africa during his campaign and in his first year in office. In Benin on 18 May 2006, he gave succour to supporters of reform by stating that 'we must definitively turn the page from this indulgence, these secrets and this ambiguity' in France's relations with Africa. He argued that France's role on the continent was already evolving far beyond the clichés of support for ageing dictators. Referring to the tendency for Francophone opposition movements to lay the blame for their country's ills at France's door, Sarkozy stated that 'France has neither the intentions nor the influence that people think'.¹⁵

Sarkozy gave his first speech on Africa as president in Dakar on 26 July 2007. If he had gained any credit among Francophone Africans in Benin, it was quickly undone here. Ostensibly intended as a contribution to the debate on African renaissance, the speech restated the stereotypes of a timeless and unchanging continent that had been used to justify colonial rule. It was replete with exoticism inspired by 18th- and 19th-century philosophers. Rousseau's idea of the noble savage was a clear inspiration, seen in repeated references to Africa's 'soul', and talk of the 'sacred ties that African men have forged for millennia with the sky and the land of Africa' and the 'powerful African myths flowing from the depths of time'. Africa, according to the speech's most notorious line, 'has not sufficiently entered history'.¹⁶

The speech provoked (perhaps deliberately, Sarkozy not being a politician who values his relations with intellectuals) an outcry from French and African intelligentsia, who saw in it confirmation of France's inability to face up to its own colonial past and accused President Sarkozy of using Africa to court the vote of the French far right.¹⁷ The reaction of African presidents was more mixed. President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal suggested that Sarkozy had been misled by his speechwriter; President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa

welcomed the contribution to the African renaissance debate; while President Gbagbo of Côte d'Ivoire dismissed it as of no political importance.¹⁸

The Dakar speech remains an important marker in Sarkozy's position on African issues. It is part of a strand of thinking on Africa that is prevalent on the French right. Often used as a justification for alliances with non-democratic leaders, it emphasises Africa's unchanging traditions, which only the initiated can understand. As Sarkozy said of Bourgi when conferring a medal of honour on him in September 2007, 'you have great knowledge of the "soul" of Africa'.¹⁹ Equally, the speech must be set in the context of the debate in France, launched by Sarkozy's government, over French national identity. This debate, which has been boycotted by many intellectuals and people on the left, is strongly coloured with a xenophobic view of France as properly belonging to white people of European origin. Not only does this have profound importance for French people of African descent, but it also resonates strongly in Africa through debates on the role and responsibility of France as an imperial power. This links to a further debate over whether imperial history can be seen, and should be taught, as part of French history, or as somehow outside it, again with evident implications for the position of ethnic minorities in France.²⁰ The Dakar speech has clear implications for this debate by positioning an exotic African other outside French history.

Further speeches on Africa, especially in Cape Town in February 2008 (considered later as regards defence policy) attempted to recover some of the credit lost in Dakar. Despite this, the overall impression remained one of oscillation between a discourse of renewal and support for the old ways. This impression was confirmed by policy decisions. The jockeying for position between the reformers and the old guard was evident from the very beginning of Sarkozy's term in office. On 27 May 2007, Liberian president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was the first to visit the Elysée Palace, at the instigation of Sarkozy's reformist Africa advisor, Bruno Joubert. However, she was followed the very next day by President Bongo, the personification of the old style *Françafrique*. Sarkozy subsequently visited Bongo in Gabon in July 2007 and in February 2008. Later, the France–Africa summit in Nice in June 2010 was another opportunity to present a reformed French position and mark a certain distance with Francophone African leaders, this time through an emphasis on continent-wide business links and a place of honour for then President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and President Jacob Zuma of South Africa, France's biggest trading partner on the continent and considered a symbol of France's new relations with the continent.²¹

The incident that many saw as a turning point away from the reform agenda was the dismissal of the co-operation minister, Jean-Marie Bockel, a former member of the French Socialist Party co-opted, like the foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, into Sarkozy's government. In January 2008 Bockel had attacked Africa's corrupt heads of state and publicly urged that France should stop giving aid and debt relief to countries that benefit from high oil production while their populations live in misery. Gabon's President Bongo, feeling targeted by such remarks and furious at revelations in the French media concerning his property assets in France, quickly activated his remarkable network of influence within the French Gaullist movement. Bockel was removed from his post on 17 March, and replaced by the far more conservative Alain Joyandet.²²

The continued ambivalence on the by now well-worn reform agenda in France's Africa policy may be interpreted on different levels.²³ On one level there are clearly a multitude

of personal rivalries in Paris and Francophone Africa in which the actors are pro- or anti-reform, or supportive of various versions of reform. Their fortunes fluctuate with those of their political sponsors. In addition there are a number of institutional rivalries, especially among the defence ministry (and its intelligence network), the foreign ministry and the presidential office. More subtle rivalries persist between those traditionally attached to Francophone Africa and the more technocratic and reformist officials, for example at the AfD. Many private French individuals profit from relations with authoritarian African governments as advisors, often laying claim to support from French authorities that they do not officially have. The politically connected writer and consultant, Patrick Balkany, is a prominent example.²⁴ Power relations vary according to the different issues concerned, and according to the coming and going of ministers and senior advisors. In Paris, the debate and rivalry between the reformers and the old guard has continued under Sarkozy. The former have taken succour from Sarkozy's stated positions, and correctly consider that longer-term trends favour their position. However, those in the latter camp, such as Robert Bourgi, have wielded considerable influence.

On another level, account needs to be taken of the sheer complexity of France's relations with the African continent, which Sarkozy inherited rather than created. In 2007 a significant number of major judicial cases concerning Africa were ongoing or under appeal in Paris. These included the investigation into the murder of a French investigating magistrate, Bernard Borrel, in Djibouti in 1995, which has implicated senior members of the Djiboutian regime (Djibouti houses the biggest French military base on the continent); the ongoing cases involving Rwanda (discussed below); the arms sales affair involving Angola known as 'Angolagate', which has largely been resolved since Sarkozy came to power; the judicial affair opened by the NGO coalition, Sherpa, in June 2007 concerning ill-gotten gains held in France by the presidents of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville and Angola;²⁵ the investigation into the death of Franco-Canadian journalist, Guy-André Kieffer, in Côte d'Ivoire in April 2004, which appears to implicate senior members of the former Ivorian regime; and a case involving a French soldier accused of having killed the Ivorian, Firmin Mahé, in Côte d'Ivoire in May 2005 and seemingly having benefited from the protection of his superiors.

This representative rather than exhaustive list demonstrates the consequences of decades of close French presence on the continent. It is also indicative of the growing involvement of the French judiciary, and their political independence, and indicates that French politicians may still run some risks relating to party political financing coming from Africa. African leaders do not always understand this independence, and see political manipulation behind judicial decisions. All these affairs have important political implications with countries with strategic or commercial importance for France, and present French policymakers with the dilemma of how to continue to wield influence while unravelling France's post-colonial entanglements.

Relations with Rwanda are particularly complex in this respect. Ongoing judicial cases include the extradition of suspected genocide culprits from France, and the indictment of nine senior Rwandan officials, accused by a French judge of shooting down the plane of President Habyarimana in 1994, thereby killing French nationals who were part of the crew. These latter indictments led Rwanda to break diplomatic relations with France in 2006. In 2007 Sarkozy was determined to normalise relations, arguing to his officials that there was no reason that he should be caught up in the controversies of his predecessors.

This normalisation process has been carried through relatively successfully, and the judicial dossiers have been defused, although not resolved, by some complex diplomatic manoeuvring. This culminated in the visit of President Sarkozy to Rwanda in February 2010, when he admitted to French ‘errors’ during the genocide, and a reciprocal visit of Rwandan president, Paul Kagame, to Paris in September 2011. Initially this normalisation agenda was driven in part by the then foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, who was close to the Rwandan regime. However, it does not seem to have been disrupted significantly by his replacement as foreign minister by Alain Juppé, despite the latter’s well-known hostile relations with the Rwandans, having been accused by them of complicity in the genocide when foreign minister in 1994.²⁶

On a further level is a clear incoherence in French government policy, and Sarkozy’s unwillingness to impose a coherent set of policy lines, often in his search for a quick favourable media headline. An example of the latter is his role in the Arche de Zoé affair in 2007 in Chad, which involved the arrest of six French members of a charity on child trafficking charges. Sarkozy alternated between professing respect for the Chadian justice system’s ability to conduct the trials, and his desire to gain domestic political plaudits by obtaining their release.²⁷ Furthermore, the coherence of French policy on the continent initially fell victim to the co-opting of former members of the socialist opposition into his government. Coming from outside the ruling party, their position and authority was always in doubt. This was most famously the case of Bernard Kouchner, foreign minister until December 2010. One of his close allies, Jean-Christophe Rufin, had left his post as ambassador to Senegal in June 2010 complaining that the foreign ministry was being marginalised in France’s Africa policy.²⁸

Alain Juppé’s return to the foreign ministry in February 2011 has to some degree changed the picture in Paris, and has certainly reinforced the role of his ministry. One of the conditions he set down when taking the job was that Sarkozy’s general secretary, Claude Guéant, be moved out of the Elysée and therefore cease to have a role in African issues (Guéant subsequently became interior minister). This has allowed Juppé to marginalise Robert Bourgi, who relied on his relations with Guéant to exert influence. Bourgi was, for example, excluded from the French delegation to the investiture of Alassane Ouattara in Côte d’Ivoire. Bourgi reacted to this by making highly publicised claims that he transferred money from African presidents to Chirac and to the foreign and future prime minister, Dominique de Villepin. Bourgi’s actions have been interpreted variously as an attempt to put pressure on Sarkozy, or as preparation for selling memoirs. What is clear, however, is that Bourgi, one of the few remaining actors unashamedly attached to old *Françafrique* ways, is burning his bridges and will certainly no longer be able to play the sort of backchannel role he played before.²⁹ In addition, there are other small but perceptible signs of change emanating from the foreign ministry, such as the lukewarm reaction to the re-election of President Paul Biya in Cameroon in October 2011.³⁰

Africa’s perception of change in France–Africa relations

As discussed, much of *la Françafrique* system, especially in its later years, was driven by the interests of the old guard of Francophone African presidents. It is clear that some of them – in particular Omar Bongo of Gabon – had leverage over the new French president

in 2007, and were able to extract concessions such as debt relief.³¹ Bongo's sheer longevity in power, like that of Cameroon's Biya and Congo-Brazzaville's Sassou-Nguesso, gave him a clear advantage in navigating the complexities of Franco–African relations. Bongo's son appears to have inherited some of this leverage on succeeding him after his death in 2009. However, such conservative forces are not able to hold back the tide, still less turn back the clock, and any analysis of France's role should not be limited to the lack of democratic credentials of its 'dinosaur' allies. At best, the old guard can hope to use relations with the French to bolster their domestic position, even as they seek out new allies and commercial partners.

In any event it is clear that the core area of influence of the *Françafrique* networks has shrunk to Central African states such as Gabon, Cameroon, Central African Republic and Congo-Brazzaville. Even there it is more fragile than the highly *protocolaire* relations with France may suggest. The recent upsurge in French relations with Côte d'Ivoire appears to buck the trend of relative French disengagement. Nevertheless, across all of Francophone Africa, presidents and populations continue to remodel their relations with their former coloniser in ways more suited to the times. Recent relations with emerging powers from Asia, the Gulf and Latin America are a very visible aspect of this relative shift of Francophone Africa's international relations away from France. However, they are only a part of longer-term cultural trends that are diluting French influence, such as the rapid spread of Pentecostal Christian churches, many with links to the US, at the expense of the Catholic church, which is more associated with French power.

In some cases this reassessment of relations has been relatively serene, even as Francophone countries have sought allies and financing in Asia and the Middle East. In countries such as Senegal and Benin the relative serenity of this renegotiation owes much to successful democratisation experiences (both countries have had peaceful regime changes since the early 1990s), which has helped to defuse relations with France, in contrast to countries such as Côte d'Ivoire. In other countries the tension between a pro-French leader and a more hostile population, such as Cameroon, may hint at future trouble for the French. In Francophone Africa, as elsewhere on the continent, France now has to play a far more competitive game in support of its interests. The most striking example of this during Sarkozy's time in office was in late 2007 when the French infrastructure company, Bolloré, which Sarkozy strongly supports, unexpectedly lost the contract to renovate and run the port in Dakar. The contract instead went to Dubai Ports World.

To return briefly to the distinction between reform and change, the French debate between *la Françafrique* and reform looks increasingly tired from an African perspective. Although it is clear that much is changing, the constant gap between rhetoric of reform and reality of policy is frustrating to most Francophone Africans. However, relations with France remain important for all countries of the region, not least given their high levels of dependency on outside support for aid and investment. So despite the changing terms of the relationship, Francophone African leaders often still remain attached, for pragmatic as much as emotive reasons, to relations with their former colonisers. Therefore, although the longer-term historical trend is towards less dense and less emotive relations, they frequently remain ambivalent in their relations with France, unwilling to distance themselves fully from their overbearing former coloniser.³²

FRENCH COMMERCIAL INTERESTS AND AID PRESENCE

Commercial interests

Despite declining relative influence on the continent, France retains considerable commercial interests, and President Sarkozy considers their promotion one of his priorities. Since colonial times these French interests have been divided among three distinct elements – rent-seeking, strategic and expansive.³³ In terms of rent-seeking, French companies of all sizes have benefited from the support and protection afforded by France's close relations with Francophone African states for many years. Plantation agriculture, infrastructure, public utilities and timber have all been important. Immediately after independence, much of this was formalised in the shape of trade agreements and other protection measures. As international agreements and deepening European integration eroded these mechanisms, French companies increasingly looked to informal diplomatic support.

However, even today, formal mechanisms such as the Franc Zone continue to benefit French companies, or allow informal influence to operate more effectively. The exchange stability it has provided has given French companies and investors a significant advantage over their potential rivals by reducing transaction costs and risks associated with currency fluctuations.³⁴ This is seen in the dominance of French banks in the Franc Zone, controlling 70% of the zone's banking activity.³⁵ In reality, French companies enjoy different kinds of advantages, varying according to the sector or country. Formal political support, language and culture, a similar commercial law, a strong development aid presence in Francophone Africa³⁶ and the advantages of a long presence in the region all count. Owing mainly to weak levels of competition, many French companies have been able to make very high profits.

Regarding the strategic element, oil and uranium continue to be of great importance to the French. The French nuclear power giant, Areva, obtained around 40% of its uranium supply from Niger even before the recent opening of the massive new mine in Imouraren.³⁷ Despite losing the monopoly it previously enjoyed over the country's uranium sector in 2007, the company managed to hang onto a major share of the market, amidst tense negotiations with then President Mamadou Tandja. The French were also able to ensure that these arrangements were unaffected by the coup that overthrew him two years later. The company is also prospecting in other countries, such as the Central African Republic.

Africa remains strategically vital to France's oil supply. However, there is a long-term shift from Francophone countries, such as Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville, to Nigeria (where French presence is growing) and Angola (which is France's fifth-largest oil supplier and where Total is the third-largest oil company). Overall, Total, by some distance France's biggest oil company, relies on Africa for 35% of its production.³⁸ Historically, this strong involvement in the African oil business has been an important factor behind many of the underhanded political interventions and opaque business dealings of *la Françafrique*, from support for Biafran separatists to corrupt involvement with the Angolan regime.

Finally, expansive French commercial interests include an array of major French companies looking to capture market share across Africa. Typically such companies have grown out of a protected base in Francophone Africa, but now have a significant

presence on the rest of the continent. The economic crisis of the late 1980s, which affected Francophone Africa strongly, has in part led them to look for markets elsewhere in Africa, although, paradoxically, they also benefited from the privatisations that resulted from the crisis. Examples of such companies include giants such as Air France and mobile phone company, Orange.

Infrastructure company, Bolloré, is expanding its Africa operations rapidly. In 2011 it won the contract for refurbishing and running the port in Conakry, ousting a rival company. Bolloré subsidiary, Euro RSCG, a communications company, advised Guinean president, Alpha Condé, during his recent electoral victory (a role it also played, less successfully, for Laurent Gbagbo in Côte d'Ivoire). The company ousted from the contract is taking the matter to court.³⁹ Bolloré's position in the West African port sector, which includes Lagos in Nigeria and Tema in Ghana, and virtually all Francophone African ports, is so strong as to be verging on monopolistic. Bouygues, another French giant, is also expanding, from a strong base in the public utilities. It signed a 15-year deal to run Côte d'Ivoire's water and electricity networks in October 2005, and the Bouygues family is developing a stake in the country's offshore gas fields.⁴⁰

Bouygues is at the forefront of a strong commercial relationship with South Africa, by far France's biggest trading partner south of the Sahara. It has a stake in the Gautrain project, in roads, stadiums and (with French company, Alstom, which it part owns) in power generation. The French nuclear industry, which has a historic stake in South Africa's nuclear industry, continues to court the country; Areva's director, Anne Lauvergeon, was on President Mbeki's International Investment Council. However, this has not produced any significant new deals, owing to South Africa's decision to concentrate on coal-fired power production.

President Sarkozy, who makes no effort to hide his pro-business approach in general, presents himself as close to the expansive aspects of French presence in Africa. He is certainly close to some of the major players, and has personal ties to the owners of both Bolloré and Bouygues. On his visits to Angola and South Africa in particular, Sarkozy has been accompanied by large business delegations. To fully grasp the French commercial position in Africa, it is important to consider its relative strength in Francophone Africa, where it enjoys the advantages discussed, and other African countries where they have to compete in a different context. Tables 1 and 2 (on page 18) provide a breakdown of France's 10-largest trading partners in Africa in 2010 for exports and imports of goods respectively.

The tables clearly show the importance of non-Francophone countries, although it is striking that some large economies, such as Kenya, do not feature in the top 10. Bigger Francophone countries still have an important trade relationship, particularly as a proportion of their own trade, although Africa as a whole remains a low percentage of France's overall trade. There is an imbalance in France's favour as regards non- or low oil-producing states (Cameroon, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire). Finally, they show the dominance of oil in terms of imports to France. Space does not permit a detailed historical comparison, but two points can be made. Firstly, overall the volumes of French trade with Africa have been growing at a steady, but not spectacular, rate over the past 10 years. Secondly, it is important to note that the shift to Anglophone Africa is not new, and is a structural response to the weaknesses of Francophone Africa's economy and shifting patterns of oil supply, rather than the product of specific events or policy shifts.

Table 1: French exports to its ten-largest trading partners in sub-Saharan Africa (\$ million), 2010

	\$ million
Sub-Saharan Africa total	15,000
South Africa	2,300
Nigeria	2,100
Côte d'Ivoire	1,000
Senegal	946
Angola	841
Cameroon	790
Gabon	750
Mauritius	420
Madagascar	309
Democratic Republic of Congo	226
World total	511,651 ^a

a Sub-Saharan Africa is approximately 3% of total French exports.

Source: UNCTADstat, <http://www.unctadstat.unctad.org/ReportFolders/reportfolders.aspx>

Table 2: French imports from its ten-largest trading partners in sub-Saharan Africa (\$ million), 2010

	\$ million
Sub-Saharan Africa total	12,500 ^a
Nigeria	3,494
Angola	2,265
South Africa	1,100
Côte d'Ivoire	718
Gabon	654
Equatorial Guinea	635
Congo-Brazzaville	601
Ghana	424
Madagascar	394
Mauritius	360

a France absorbs approximately 3.5% of Africa's total exports of 344,000\$ million

Source: UNCTADstat, <http://www.unctadstat.unctad.org/ReportFolders/reportfolders.aspx>

French companies are competing increasingly with new powers for contracts and market shares. However, they remain in a strong position across the continent and are dominant in many Francophone African countries. The precise French strategies in reaction to the growing presence of other commercial powers would be a subject of useful further research. In many respects new commercial powers, such as China, compete in different sectors to the French. But in some areas there is direct competition, such as in infrastructure and oil. Here the French try to deploy what political influence they can, according to different national contexts, to counter the evident Chinese advantages in terms of cost and scale.

The leaders of Francophone African countries are trying to encourage ties with other countries, but they also remain dependent on French investment, aid and broader support, simply owing to a lack of domestic capacity. It is striking, for example, that soon after awarding the contract for the Dakar port to Dubai Ports World, President Wade sent his son to Paris to mend relations directly with Sarkozy. This continued dependence is often seen in Africa as monopolistic or exploitative. In part, that perception derives from the historic and current realities, and from a correct perception that, like elsewhere, political influence is a vital part of capturing market share in Africa. It is also a function of the low level of African capital formation and the commodity export orientation of African economies. Although President Sarkozy is unlikely to be overly concerned by such issues of perception, the longer-term question this raises is at what point French commercial presence can be seen as 'normal' rather than as related to the *Françafrique* heritage. This is a particularly acute problem for French policy in the context of increased competition for Africa's resources and markets. Although Sarkozy is ostensibly working to reform French actions on the continent, many French officials, politicians and private individuals also wish to maintain privileged relations with authoritarian leaders precisely because they are regarded as of vital commercial importance.

French development aid

French development aid has long been concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite some shifts, the region still absorbs 45% of French official aid, according to the latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) figures. The two sectors in which aid has been most concentrated in recent years has been education (a traditional area of French aid, which accounts for 20% of current French spending) and debt relief. The latter became an important part of French aid in the late 1980s, but has since eased off as the finances of Francophone African economies have recovered, and debt relief has been granted. French aid has been one of the support mechanisms of French commercial presence on the continent, whether formally through aid tied to commercial contracts, or informally since the 'untying' of French aid. Sarkozy has made it clear that he intends to use aid to that end, both in Francophone Africa and beyond.

Following the reforms of 1998, the institutions of French aid remain relatively complex. The foreign ministry controls a portion of aid spend, especially in the culture and education. But the technical French aid agency, the AfD, has continued to assert its position. It is involved in financing infrastructure projects and has undergone a relative shift towards non-Francophone countries. The AfD now raises and spends its largest amounts in sub-Saharan Africa in South Africa, where it works on social service delivery

and the promotion of small and medium enterprises. However, the exact relationship between French development aid and the AfD is highly intricate. In more developed economies the AfD acts like a development bank, giving loans rather than grants and acting as a lever for finance from other institutions. In such countries, only a part of AfD spending counts as official development aid. The AfD is legally a bank, owned by the French state, and in South Africa, for example, it makes a profit. In terms of aid and personnel, it is still fairly concentrated in Francophone Africa.

REFORM OF FRENCH MILITARY PRESENCE

Background – the French military in Africa and Chirac’s reforms

Since the creation of the Senegalese *Tirailleurs* (riflemen) in 1857, the military has always been an important part of France’s relations with Africa. Shared experiences of combat in the two world wars and in the French empire had a lasting effect on relations.⁴¹ In some countries, French military presence was more brutal and controversial, as in Cameroon where it stayed on after independence to crush a nationalist movement.⁴² However, in all cases ties were created with the emerging African leadership, civilian and military. Significantly, the French military came to see Africa as an area in which French power could be projected, with costs and risks contained.

The rationale of French military presence in Africa therefore derived from the overall philosophy of French presence described earlier – to protect loyal allies and secure French diplomatic and economic interests. The means to this end consisted of a network of French bases and missions, complemented by a very large contingent of advisors and trainers, an intelligence presence, and occasional reliance on mercenaries.

Agreements were signed with most former colonies. In Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, the Central African Republic and Djibouti military bases were established or maintained from the colonial period. Some agreements allowed – although did not oblige – France to intervene to secure the regime in case of internal or external threats. In other cases military co-operation agreements were signed to provide training and equipment.⁴³ This presence allowed the French military to intervene on the African continent, in a variety of circumstances, around 30 times after 1960. Most commonly, although not always, these interventions were in support of a threatened ally.

At the end of the Cold War, ten thousand French troops were present on the continent in five bases, as well as a mission in Chad that had become a permanent base in all but name. French military advisors still numbered over nine hundred.⁴⁴ An additional rapid reaction force has also been available to French policymakers, and was used in Rwanda in 1993. This presence had declined steadily from around thirty thousand troops just after independence, but still represented significant investment. Many French officers and officials were proud that Francophone Africa had, overall, suffered from less instability than other parts of the continent. However, the end of the Cold War, the spread of civil conflict and complex emergencies in Africa, and the French role in Rwanda all undermined the rationale, and legitimacy, of French presence.

In 1995 Chirac came to power, strongly attached to the French military as well as to France's traditional role in Africa, but also aware of the need for reform. He and his advisors aimed to adapt and redefine French military presence, addressing its weakening legitimacy while still retaining influence acquired through the present structures. In French eyes, the African security context had become one of 'diffuse threat' (including, after 2001, terrorism) and complex stability challenges.⁴⁵

To address the legitimacy deficit, Chirac emphasised that France would no longer play the '*gendarme* of Africa', and would cease to interfere in the internal affairs of African countries. As discussed, this policy was strongly influenced after 1997 by Jospin's Socialist Party government. When interventions did occur, greater emphasis was placed on acting under a UN mandate. This 'UN cover' had been a feature of French intervention in Rwanda (Operation Turquoise in 1994) and was used to intervene in Côte d'Ivoire from 2002.

To address Africa's evolving security challenges, Chirac started the evolution of French military presence towards training African forces, subsequently linked to support for the emerging African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). This resulted in the creation of 17 regional training centres and the launch, in 1997, of the *Renforcement des capacités africaines de maintien de la paix* (African Peacekeeping Capacity Reinforcement Programme, RECAMP) training programme, consisting of biannual training exercises and logistical support for African-led missions.⁴⁶ Finally, emphasis was given to spreading the financial cost and political risk of intervention in Africa through deepening co-operation with the EU.

Lastly it is important to note what Chirac did not do – reduce French bases or troop numbers. The only exception was the closure of the base in the Central African Republic, although even there French troops stayed on as part of a (temporary) mission. He maintained this increasingly anomalous structure owing to resistance to change from senior officers and to a major programme of professional reform of the French military, which was considered a precondition for reform of its African presence.⁴⁷

Sarkozy's ambivalent and unfinished reforms

This review of the changing doctrines from 1994 to 2007 demonstrates that for all his protestations of a renewal, the Sarkozy period has been characterised by at least as much continuity as change. This includes promises of less unilateral intervention; multilateral cover, both political and financial; and an emphasis on training African soldiers, and supporting African interventions instead of putting French troops on the ground. In addition, French official or semi-official analysis of the African security context remains constant, centred on crises, 'ungoverned space' and diffuse non-state threats.⁴⁸ This approach is similar to the analysis of other major external powers, such as the UK and the US, and has evident links to the post 9/11 agenda.⁴⁹

Sarkozy's speech in Cape Town in February 2008 laid out the broad lines of his approach. France would avoid direct interventions; help Africa to build its own capabilities ('The African Union wishes to build a stand-by force by 2010–12? Well then, that is France's objective too'); and involve the EU in these efforts. It is important to note that this switch to training African peacekeepers is common across the UK and the US.⁵⁰ Finally, and this is where his approach has differed significantly from his predecessors,

Sarkozy promised to renegotiate all defence agreements with African countries, to review all French military bases, and to do so on an entirely transparent basis.

The renegotiations commenced following the Cape Town speech. In July 2008 the French base in Abidjan formally closed, leaving just the UN-mandated Licorne force. However, following the confirmation of Alassane Ouattara in power in April 2011, the expected withdrawal of French troops from Abidjan has been delayed, with the new president asking them to stay on to help with training the new Ivorian army, stabilising his regime and protecting him physically.⁵¹

After negotiations with the Senegalese and Gabonese authorities, the decision was made to close the base in Dakar, and keep the base in Libreville. The main factor behind closing the Dakar base was the desire of the Senegalese regime to recover land in central Dakar. The regime offered the French the opportunity to move their base to a new inland location near Thiès, but this was not considered practical. The French will retain around half the land and 450 houses and apartments they currently occupy, and leave behind 300 soldiers. The base will not include any formed units, but will mainly be at officer level, and will have a training role and logistical capacity. The soldiers will potentially provide a platform for interventions against new threats, such as terrorism (see Box 1).⁵²

In terms of the renegotiations for the new agreements announced in Cape Town, all of which will be assistance agreements and not defence agreements, those with Togo and the Central African Republic have been finalised and are published in the official French government gazette. At the time of writing, new treaties with Gabon, Senegal, Djibouti, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and the Comoros are still being negotiated.⁵³

Box 1: French troop presence in Africa at start of 2010

Missions

Côte d'Ivoire: 930 troops
Chad: 945 troops
Central African Republic: 230 troops

Bases

Djibouti: 2 900 troops
Senegal: 1 150 troops
Gabon: 900 troops

In addition to this, France has around two hundred troops embedded in European or UN missions, and 2 600 troops and *gendarmes* on the island of Réunion (part of French sovereign territory).

Source: French Senate, February 2010

Pending the withdrawal from Dakar and with question marks remaining over the presence in Abidjan, there were still around seven thousand French troops on African soil in 2010, only a slight reduction from 1990 levels. However, the planned configuration will probably reduce this by just under half. It is also important to emphasise the severe reduction in

the number of military co-operation officers embedded with African forces, which has declined from over nine hundred in the late 1980s, to around one hundred and fifty today. The emphasis is now on training and logistical support for all four regional components of APSA: Dakar (1 150 troops) in the West to cover the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Libreville (900 troops) in the centre to cover the Economic Community of Central African States; Djibouti (2 900 troops) to cover East Africa's regional organisations; and the base in Reunion (2 600 troops and *gendarmes*) to cover the South African Development Community. Even should direct interventions be phased out, this is thin coverage for the size of the tasks and the geographical spread; which helps to explain continued emphasis on a European role.

There are several points to consider in attempting to understand the reforms to French military presence in sub-Saharan Africa. The first is that once the changes have been bedded down, they will represent a reduced presence and a reduced cost. The cost pressures, in the context of expensive re-equipment programmes, rejoining the command structure of NATO, and continued focus on Asia and the Middle East, including a new French military base in Abu Dhabi, are undoubtedly a factor.⁵⁴ Equally, Sarkozy's strong emphasis on relations with the Mediterranean have been important, as seen in the decision to hold the 2010 France–Africa summit in Egypt and later – when it was shifted to France owing to disagreements over the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan – to make Hosni Mubarak a guest of honour. There is significant unease among the French military at this reduction, and a belief that France should retain a strong, albeit reformed, presence in sub-Saharan Africa,⁵⁵ not least for the emergency evacuation of French and other nationals.

The second point concerns an emphasis on multilateralism, which is now a constant refrain accompanying all French action. In particular a UN mandate has been seen as vital legitimacy cover for interventions in Côte d'Ivoire and Chad.⁵⁶ However, this emphasis on the UN suffers from two major problems. Firstly, it is not perceived as providing legitimacy when France is seen as dominating the Security Council to suit its own agenda. As the French Senate report of 2006 stated, 'it is difficult for a former colonial power such as France to engage on the ground, even in the framework of the "new doctrine" [ie under UN mandate], which will not necessarily be seen as new'.⁵⁷ Secondly, the refusal of French troops to act under UN command, even when under a UN mandate (for example in Côte d'Ivoire), is often seen on the African continent as compromising multilateralism.⁵⁸ Conversely, although this point is less frequently heard, the French role as lead nation in multilateral interventions is useful to provide coherence, funding and political momentum to ensure they succeed in their mandated tasks.⁵⁹

A further important aspect of France's multilateralisation is links with the AU and its five regional bodies. The new configuration of the French military in Africa is intended to respond to the emerging APSA. The French, along with other Western powers, have devoted considerable human and financial resources, including through the European African Peace Facility which is funded in great part by the French, to supporting the various elements of APSA. This is now considered a vital part of France's Africa policy. Although France's actual bilateral financial contribution to the AU is much smaller than that of the UK, for example, and is small compared with France's overall military engagement on the continent, it has allocated a lot of resources to region-based training activities. In addition, the position of the AU and regional bodies is considered a vital

part of multilateral cover for French actions, and is an increasing site of diplomatic co-ordination. On Côte d'Ivoire, the ECOWAS and Nigerian position – in the forefront of attempts to force Gbagbo to recognise his electoral defeat of 2010 – was of great importance to the French, who now recognise the growing and largely positive role of ECOWAS in conflict mediation in the region.⁶⁰

To contribute to the management of Africa's complex crises, France is well aware that it must share the political and financial costs with its European allies. This has been seen in the decision taken in 2007 to transform RECAMP into an EU programme, under the authority of the EU Council of Ministers. It now has non-French European officers at senior levels. However, on the ground there is still reluctance to merge all French training efforts fully into multilateral programmes, not least owing to a perception that such programmes are cumbersome and unproductive.⁶¹ RECAMP and the regional training centres are still staffed mainly by French personnel, focused on Francophone countries and predominantly in the French language.

This comes at a time when Europe's embryonic security actors are increasingly interested in Africa's stability – as witnessed both by European funding of APSA, and by European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) missions in Africa: four military (DRC twice, Chad/Central African Republic, and Somalia) and two training or support missions (DRC, Guinea-Bissau) since 2003, out of a total of 10 ESDP missions worldwide.⁶² France has been instrumental in many of these initiatives, and has a tradition of using the EU to burden-share in Africa. However, it is not in exclusive control of the ESDP agenda in Africa, nor is French support for a European role absolute, especially given Sarkozy's support for France's role in NATO. For the moment, the EU and NATO have a de facto division of labour, both in terms of the kinds of interventions they carry out and where these are carried out (the EU focusing especially on sub-Saharan Africa). In short there is genuine, although 'messy', multilateralism occurring.⁶³

Interventions in Chad and Libya

The complex story of France's involvement in Chad under Sarkozy starts with the desire of the former foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, to play a role in the resolution of Sudan's Darfur crisis. When his idea of 'humanitarian corridors' proved unworkable, French attention turned to the possibility of using presence and influence in Chad to contribute to much-needed regional stability, encompassing Darfur, Chad and the Central African Republic.⁶⁴

In late 2007 the decision was made to push for an EU force, to act as a bridging mission for a future UN force and as a stabilising presence to allow humanitarian work to continue in the east of the country. The presence of a French military mission already in place was seen as a way of facilitating what was to be the EU's most complex logistical mission in Africa. European partners proved sceptical – the French member of the European Parliament, Marie-Arlette Carlotti, spoke for many when she said 'France must not seek to control this mission for its own ends ... I will be particularly vigilant to make sure that the interests of Africa and Europe prevail over France's *pre-carre* [France's area of influence on the continent]'.⁶⁵ In the face of this European reluctance, the French made up over half the troops of the mission, including the ground commander (the overall commander, based in Europe, was Irish general, Pat Nash).

In February 2008, as the European mission was preparing for deployment, Sudanese-backed rebels entered the capital. Following a prolonged battle, which reached the gates of the president's compound, the rebels were beaten back. France's precise role in these events is not entirely clear. Although the French troops in Ndjamena undoubtedly spent most of the time involved in a complex evacuation of French and other nationals, it is also highly likely that they supplied assistance to Chadian president, Idriss Déby, in particular intelligence on rebel movements. It also appears that the French supplied Déby with crucial armaments just before the fighting.⁶⁶ It is certain that their role in securing the airport for evacuation purposes not only protected Déby's helicopters, but also allowed for further arms to come in from Libya.

France's presentation of its role has been ambivalent. On the one hand, it has emphasised its neutrality, with Sarkozy stating in Cape Town three weeks later that 'France did not allow itself to become embroiled in the conflict'. On the other hand, it has emphasised that Déby was the legitimate president of the country and, implicitly, that there was nothing wrong in offering him support under the terms of the 1974 defence agreement. This is an important distinction and demonstrates that there is remaining uncertainty in French policy circles concerning what kinds of interventions are desirable and legitimate, in the framework of a 'reformed' policy. In the end, the violence of February 2008 did not prevent the deployment of the European force, which operated in the east of the country for a year alongside, but with a different mandate from, the French troops, until it was replaced by a UN force.

The French force, which many observers had expected to leave with the withdrawal of the European force, has stayed on. This is in part because many in the French military wish to remain in Chad, as a presence in the heart of the African Sahel and for training opportunities, especially for fighter jets. However, recent indications are that the French presence in Chad will evolve towards a smaller training-oriented mission.⁶⁷ As it is characteristic of these negotiations, it should also be noted that much of the hesitation over France's withdrawal has been owing to President Déby's own uncertainty over whether French presence serves his interest or not, and his attempt to extract the maximum political and financial gain from any renegotiation.⁶⁸

Chad clearly represents a case of complex multilateralisation of an existing French policy. The involvement of a European force, and a UN mandate (authorising the EU force through the UN Security Council Resolution or UNSCR 1778 of September 2007), proved insufficient to allay fears and suspicions of a French agenda, and in particular of French support to an authoritarian leader threatened by internal instability.

France's role in Chad should not, however, be taken as representative. Although the factors pushing the French to seek a European role and a UN mandate are now clearly a structural feature of French policy, it is likely that direct French military involvement will decline in the coming years owing to growing reluctance on both French and African sides. Where interventions do occur, they are likely to be targeted at specific threats (see Box 2 on page 26) rather than providing allies with blanket regime guarantees, although African leaders may well try to use the former as leverage to gain the latter. African populations, for whom the French military presence on the continent is a vivid symbol of incomplete decolonisation and partial sovereignty, regard these developments as long overdue. Francophone African leaders are more ambivalent; some welcome the changes, whereas others continue to look to France to secure their regime.

Recent events in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya seem to strongly call into question the French doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of African states. The 2011 intervention in Libya in support of anti-Gaddafi rebels is, on the face of it, a curious 'neocon' turn on the part of the French president, using military technology to support supposed democratic forces. The military support given to rebel forces, even as the AU was trying to set in place a negotiated settlement, was resented across Africa, and has opened up the French and other Western powers to accusations of double standards. Despite many misgivings about Muammer Gaddafi as a leader, the lack of respect shown for the sovereignty of an African state will not have been overlooked. Nor will the stretching of a UN mandate from protecting civilians to taking sides in a conflict. Relations with the AU may have suffered, although institutional co-operation is thick enough to continue in the interests of both parties, especially as the AU Commission took a relatively strong anti-Gaddafi position.

Box 2: France in the Sahel

The West African Sahel has hosted a group of terrorists since around 2000.⁶⁹ The group, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), is an offshoot from the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. It sought sanctuary in the Sahel, principally in northern Mali, following defeat by the Algerian military. Analysts tend to agree that the group numbers in the Sahel region are between one hundred and three hundred people, divided into three or four separate cells (it also has a presence in Northern Algeria). The majority, especially the leadership, are Algerian, but the group also includes other nationalities, including Mauritanian, Nigerian and Malian. The group has inserted itself into the smuggling economy of the region. Indeed the line between its ideological and criminal aspects is decidedly blurred.⁷⁰

The group announced its presence spectacularly in 2002 by kidnapping 32 European tourists (none of whom was French) in Mali. They were eventually freed, most likely following ransom payments. For the next six years the group appeared to be contained. Despite evident French concerns, not least as Algerian militancy has a significant impact on France, the Americans appeared willing to take the international lead in training and equipping local forces – principally Mauritanian, Nigerian and Malian – to confront the threat.

However, as the group turned increasingly to kidnapping Western targets, generally accomplished through intermediaries, France was dragged into direct confrontation.⁷¹ In December 2007, a group of French tourists were killed in Mauritania, although the exact role of AQIM in this is not clear. Following the execution of British hostage, Edwin Dyer, in June 2009 when Britain refused to pay a ransom, in November the French aid worker, Pierre Camate, was kidnapped in Mali. He was released in February 2010 when Mali released four terrorists, thereby drawing the anger of neighbouring Mauritania and Algeria who were seeking their extradition. The French government has denied that they pressured the Malian government to release the four (who served out very short sentences before their release).

In April 2010, another French aid worker, Michel Germaneau, was kidnapped in Niger, and, as is typically the case, transported across the region to Mauritania. After an attempt to free him by French special forces and the Mauritanian army on Malian territory in July, in which several supposed members of the kidnap cell were killed, Germaneau died.

At first the French authorities condemned his execution by the group, but it is now considered possible that he died of natural causes. His body has not been recovered.

Possibly in revenge for the July 2010 raid, AQIM kidnapped five French nationals, a Madagascan and a Togolese, all working for the French uranium giant, Areva, or its contractors, in Niger in September.⁷² The Madagascan, the Togolese and one French hostage were released in February 2011; the others remain in captivity. Emboldened by this, a group, presumed to be AQIM or working for them, then kidnapped two Frenchmen in a restaurant in central Niamey in January 2011. The Nigerian military and the French – who by this point had established a considerable military presence in the area, including surveillance planes based in Niamey – gave chase. Both hostages and three Nigerian *gendarmes* died in a shootout in Mali two days later.⁷³ A number of uncertainties remain concerning whether any kidnapers survived, and how one of the hostages and the Nigerian *gendarmes* were killed. The suspicion of death by friendly fire remains strong.⁷⁴

AQIM is now explicitly targeting the French, and is demanding that they withdraw from Afghanistan and repeal the recent law banning the public wearing of the full veil in France. These demands may well be an ideological cover for pecuniary motivations, and the group's capacity to inflict serious damage on French interests may be limited (the kidnappings can in some ways be seen as easy targets). However, they do alter the strategic context for the French. The time when the French could stand aside from these issues in light of their position on the 2003 Iraq war appears to have ended.

As French military and intelligence services increase their presence in the region, they will be obliged to build closer relations with local forces, including in Burkina Faso where they have already relied on the regional negotiating power of some of Blaise Compaoré's close aides. It is interesting to note that the new French ambassador to Ouagadougou is an army general, a very unusual situation in French diplomacy. The risk that this poses of being manipulated for local agendas should not be underestimated, especially in a context where a growing terrorist and criminal threat is creating considerable tensions between the states of the region; and the fall out from the end of the Gaddafi regime in Libya is being felt across the region in terms of increased flow of fighters and weapons. The journalist, Philippe Leymarie, offers some shrewd advice:⁷⁵

Beware of mission creep, a French specialty. It starts with a humanitarian mission, with information sharing or soft cooperation, aimed at rescuing [French] nationals. And then it morphs, days or weeks later, into a fully fledged intervention, with its obscure side and a whole load of geopolitical consequences, not all very positive.

FRANCE'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE CÔTE D'IVOIRE CRISIS

France and the Côte d'Ivoire crisis

Since the 1930s Côte d'Ivoire was the most economically successful of France's African colonies and at the heart of *la Françafrique* – a phrase coined, with positive connotations

at the time, by pro-French president, Houphouët-Boigny. Côte d'Ivoire was also a vital part of Francophone Africa, drawing in migrant labour from all over the region. The country had a remarkable density of ties with the former colonial power, including thousands of ex-patriot French workers, a dominant, indeed monopolistic French economic presence, highly placed French officials and advisors, and a military base.⁷⁶

Given these dense links, it was perhaps inevitable that France was dragged into the Ivorian crisis sparked off by the coup of December 1999, and the subsequent (and linked) coup attempt of 2002, which resulted in an on-off civil war. Space prevents thorough discussion of the crisis, but it is important to note that French policymakers were deeply involved from the beginning. Under the Jospin–Chirac cohabitation they decided against intervening with military force in 1999, despite support for such action from many in Paris.⁷⁷

Following the outbreak of hostilities in September 2002 – a few months after Chirac was returned to power, this time without having to ‘cohabit’ with a Socialist Party government – the French approach was to stabilise the situation, and support peace negotiations between the rebels and Laurent Gbagbo’s government. This was based on several premises. Firstly, that the Ivorian crisis was an internal matter, and that the Franco–Ivorian defence treaty concerning external aggression therefore did not apply. Secondly, that the rebels had a legitimate case and should be treated as equals in negotiations. Finally, that a negotiated solution was possible, provided sufficient buy-in was achieved both from Ivorian parties and from the international community.

This approach led to the signing of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement in France in March 2003 and the creation of a series of national union governments. However, the agreement was deeply controversial for the Ivorian regime. Although France presented it as part of a new way of doing business, preferable to the Americans’ bellicose attitude towards Iraq, it was seen by Gbagbo’s side as giving succour to an illegitimate rebellion, and as a refusal to recognise the support Burkina Faso had given to that rebellion. That Chirac was a major historical figure in the Gaullist branches of *la Françafrique*, to which Gbagbo’s camp was viscerally opposed, further fuelled Ivorian suspicions. So did Burkina Faso’s well-known position as a key ally of the French.

Events took a dramatic turn for the worse in November 2004. Following an attack on a French base by Ivorian planes, the French destroyed the small Ivorian air force, parked on the runway at Abidjan airport. Anti-French rioting followed, orchestrated by the Ivorian regime, and the French used lethal force against protesters on two occasions. The majority of the twenty thousand-strong French community left the country. These incidents fundamentally altered France’s relations with its former colonies. It demonstrated that France’s dense presence made it vulnerable to any regime willing to manipulate domestic hostility and resentment, and that its involvement in African crises could quickly become a no-win situation. Other African leaders, including soon-to-be AU mediator, Thabo Mbeki, were shocked by the sight of French troops firing on crowds.⁷⁸

In the subsequent two and a half years, France gradually disengaged itself from the Ivorian mediation (notably in favour of South Africa), while also attempting to multilateralise it through an international contact group set up in October 2005. Official and unofficial emissaries on both sides attempted to patch up relations, and preserve France’s commercial interests. But, with Gbagbo still unwilling to move to elections even after his first presidential term expired in October 2005, political relations remained hostile.

Sarkozy and Côte d'Ivoire, 2007–11

The arrival of Sarkozy as French president in May 2007 appeared to herald a tentative improvement, despite his long-standing friendship with opposition leader, Alassane Ouattara. This was helped by the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement of March 2007, and the consequent calming of tensions in the country. It was also facilitated by the increasingly prevalent analysis in French official circles that Gbagbo was there to stay, and likely to win any future elections, and that relations therefore had to be repaired.

Convinced that Chirac had been behind the 2002 coup, President Gbagbo's supporters cautiously welcomed a president who appeared to have little *Françafrique* baggage, and who had broken acrimoniously with Chirac, their *bête noire*. Gbagbo himself welcomed Sarkozy's intention to reset military relations, describing the decision as historic.⁷⁹ Ties were maintained through Robert Bourgi (who, rather surprisingly given their divergent political careers and allegiances, is close to Gbagbo, as they taught together at Abidjan University in the 1960s); the former co-operation minister, Michel Roussin, now working for Bolloré; and through Claude Guéant. Sarkozy was particularly concerned about protecting France's commercial interests, and was relatively successful in doing so. This was demonstrated when Bolloré won the contract to manage Abidjan's new port, which opened in April 2008. The Bolloré affiliate, Euro RSCG, also acted as consultant to Gbagbo in his electoral campaign in 2010.

In addition, French companies ran Côte d'Ivoire's water and electricity throughout Gbagbo's time in power, and Orange had well over half its mobile phone subscribers. However, the French stopped short of fully renewing diplomatic relations so long as elections were delayed. For example, Gbagbo did not attend the France–Africa summit in Nice in June 2010.⁸⁰ His refusal to accept electoral defeat on 28 November 2010, and the subsequent crisis as rebels advanced on the capital in February 2011, evidently led to a sharp deterioration in relations with France. For three months, Gbagbo's regime used an anti-imperialist discourse to try to drive a wedge in the African position, making it hard for the French to claim full AU support. Although most of West Africa, particularly Nigeria, stood firm, South Africa, part of the panel established by the AU to look at the issue in January 2011, initially took the line that the elections had been 'inconclusive', which most observers saw as a pro-Gbagbo position. However, seemingly owing to President Zuma's discussions with other members of that panel at the beginning of March (although the change has never been explained fully by the South African government), the position changed, isolating Angola and Uganda, and to a lesser degree Ghana, as Gbagbo's last supporters on the continent.

The initial French approach was to push for broad diplomatic isolation of the Gbagbo regime, rebuff any possibility of French military intervention, and to put in place sanctions to isolate Gbagbo within his own camp and persuade those around him of the hopelessness of his cause. Following a European visa ban on Gbagbo and 58 of his supporters, on 14 February 85 people and 11 companies were subject to a Europe-wide asset freeze, affecting in particular the cocoa export sector. This European sanctions regime was unusually firm and broad.

On 23 December 2010 the West African Central Bank of the Franc Zone stopped emitting money to the Gbagbo government. One month later the pro-Gbagbo governor, Philippe Dacoury-Tabley, resigned. French-owned commercial banks were caught between

pressure from Gbagbo to stay open and the collapse of their day-to-day work as the crisis unfolded and liquidity dried up. The two most important banks – the SGBCI, owned by Société Générale, and BICICI, owned by BNP Paribas – eventually pulled out in February 2011, just as Gbagbo was attempting to acquire their assets, the senior managers fleeing the country with their families.⁸¹ Not all French-orchestrated economic pressure was successful, with *Le Monde* reporting in February of considerable resistance among the French business community to French government moves to isolate Gbagbo.⁸² However, it does appear that the overall pressure was a factor, as Gbagbo's government found it harder to pay civil servants and troops. It has also now become clear that Gbagbo lost a lot of money in rushed purchases of arms that he never received, partly due to international (including French) pressure on potential suppliers.⁸³

Towards the end of March 2011, the situation deteriorated significantly on the ground as the forces loyal to Alassane Ouattara pushed through to Abidjan.⁸⁴ French troop numbers in the country were boosted from 900 to an eventual 1 700 with reinforcements from Gabon and Chad. At this point, France was clearly preparing for the eventuality of armed intervention. At the multilateral level, it obtained cover through the UNSCR 1975 of 31 March 2011, which confirmed earlier authorisation 'to use all necessary means to carry out its mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, within its capabilities and its areas of deployment, including to prevent the use of heavy weapons against the civilian population'. However, as in Libya, whether this actually covered what France subsequently did is a matter of some debate. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, the foreign minister of South Africa, which served on the UN Security Council at the time, said later that she didn't 'remember having given anyone authorisation for an aerial bombardment of Ivory Coast'.⁸⁵

On 1 April 2011 it seemed that the forces loyal to Ouattara were about to depose Gbagbo with no significant help from French forces. However, Gbagbo held out, and under cover of a truce, his forces pushed out into Abidjan. At this point, on 9–10 April, following a request from both Ouattara and the UN secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon, the French started heavy bombardment of Gbagbo's positions. On 11 April French forces helped to surround Gbagbo's residency while he was captured. Although there was a careful presentation to show Gbagbo being captured by pro-Ouattara forces, it is now known that French forces played a crucial role right to the end.⁸⁶

As well as damaging the legitimacy of the incoming president, these events have inevitably sparked a polemical debate on the rights and wrongs of French intervention. This debate carries a huge stake for a country still recovering from civil war, and there is a real risk of opposing 'narratives' again hardening into opposing sides.⁸⁷ The position different people have taken, in Côte d'Ivoire, the rest of Africa and in France, is generally dependent on prior attitudes to Gbagbo, and on views, often ill-informed, of who won the elections. Doubtlessly, the debate will rage on (see Box 3 on page 31). French officials saw the intervention as a means of bringing events to a swift end and of preventing the sort of prolonged and bloody fight that other African capitals (Brazzaville, Freetown, Monrovia) had suffered from in recent years. They also felt that having troops already on the ground put them in a position of moral obligation to intervene to cut short a growing catastrophe.⁸⁸

In the first six months of Ouattara's rule, the French have maintained a strong presence, organising Ouattara's personal security, beginning security sector reform, and

preparing a big aid and debt relief package (Côte d'Ivoire has significant unpaid debts to the AfD, which will probably be converted into development projects in what is called a C2D contract, or *Contrat de désendettement et développement*). The close ties between the two presidents, and the role of Ouattara's French wife, who has important business interests in the country, have clearly oiled the wheels.

Box 3: Côte d'Ivoire and the war of the web

While democratisation in Côte d'Ivoire has a poor record, it has done much to open up public debate. A new generation have used music, public forums (the famous 'agoras' and 'parliaments' of Abidjan) and the Internet to make themselves heard on the political scene. Although violence has been prevalent in these debates among the country's youth and students, the crisis itself has also allowed new forms of national self-understanding to emerge. Whether lambasted for its neocolonial role, or seen as an ambivalent route for social ascent through emigration, France is never far from such debates.⁸⁹

The 2010–11 crisis was played out in forums and discussion sites on the Internet. Although there are evident pitfalls in studying this phenomenon,⁹⁰ its importance for the Ivorian crisis makes it hard to ignore. This importance derives from Abidjan's relatively dense Internet connectivity; from weakness or evident partiality of print and broadcast media; and from a persistent mistrust of official or established information channels, including foreign news sources. The rights and wrongs of the conflict have also been debated vigorously by a large diaspora community and throughout much of Francophone Africa.

The outgoing president, Gbagbo, made a significant investment in Internet campaigning, both because incumbency gave him the resources to do so and because his entourage were more adept at using new technologies than his rivals.⁹¹ Following his electoral defeat, the official or semi-official – the difference of course is deliberately blurred – pro-Gbagbo websites propagated his main messages. These included a legalistic and 'sovereignty' interpretation of the events designed to persuade any wavering civil servants or security forces that the incumbent was there to stay. As the crisis dragged on, the websites embarked on a sustained campaign against the international community, which was held to be plotting Gbagbo's downfall (which in effect it was, but only following his electoral defeat) if not murder (which it was not).⁹² The most elaborate version of this latter approach was the detailed 'leak' from the French intelligence services concerning a plot to assassinate Gbagbo published in the regime-owned paper, *Notre Voie*, in December 2010. Although an evident fabrication, this document was taken up, often completely uncritically, by other websites in Francophone Africa, and widely commented on in the blogosphere, with opinions fairly evenly divided on its credibility.⁹³

Such ideas have been shared on less-official sites, or in the comments attached to popular websites. Much of the debate is both nuanced and heartfelt. In many cases, sovereignty and associated pan-African ideas are combined with an analysis that is not naively uncritical of Gbagbo's role.⁹⁴ For some, the very intensity of the debate concerning France's role is a problem, and a sign that Francophone Africa is having difficulty moving on from relations with the former colonial power.

However, much is highly polemical, centred on insulting the leading Ivorian players, with little regard for facts or credibility of sources, perhaps because the distance of the Internet encourages people to make their polemics more vociferous. The role of the diaspora is also of great importance, and often very polemical, possibly because of greater Internet connectivity outside Africa. Also striking is the level of polemics among non-Ivorian Francophone Africans. For them, the Ivorian crisis is a reflection of their domestic problems and, in particular, of the perceived role of France in their countries' politics. The case of Cameroon, where a pro-French authoritarian regime has been in place since independence, is particularly striking. Cameroonians have been a source of considerable pro-Gbagbo and anti-French writing.⁹⁵

The standard opposition in Côte d'Ivoire's war of the web is for Gbagbo supporters to accuse their opponents of being in the pocket of the West, and of France in particular, who are seeking control of Africa's resources. The murder of Thomas Sankara, the independent-minded president of Burkina Faso in 1987, and the Rwandan genocide of 1994 crop up frequently as references to France's villainous role on the continent. The other side then replies that support for Gbagbo is perpetuating dictatorship.⁹⁶ However, this apparent binary opposition should not lead one to overlook the underlying debate on Ivorian and Francophone African history that, although polemical, is part of the evolution of the political self-understanding of the countries concerned. Views on the role of France, in all their diversity, are part of that evolution.

VICTIM OF CONSPIRACY THINKING, OR STILL AFRAID OF TRANSPARENCY?

Conspiracy theory is an established part of discourse on international events, in part driven by Internet comment. Views of 9/11 and of the death of Osama bin Laden are prominent examples. It is also an important part of recent evolutions in France's relations with Africa. Conspiracy theories find fertile ground in France–Africa relations precisely because these relations have been dominated by secrecy, and because France has in many cases done just what the conspiracy theories take up and exaggerate – destabilising or propping up regimes to further its interests. In recent years there have been an increasing number of credible exposés of France's historic role on the continent, often with a fairly wide audience in France as well as in Africa.⁹⁷

The case of Côte d'Ivoire highlights the problem that France faces in light of its historically dominant position in Francophone Africa. When Gbagbo's camp point to a French hand behind the country's problems, many at home and abroad are highly susceptible to such claims (see Box 3 on page 31). It is no coincidence that Gbagbo's strategy was developed in a country that had been so dominated by French interests under President Houphouët-Boigny (1960–1993) and that suffered a sharp economic decline in the 1990s. As elsewhere, the association between a regime no longer able to deliver services and employment, and the French power behind the throne, had been current since the 1980s, reinforced by French reluctance to lend unambiguous support to democratisation on the continent.

How this plays out, and what the consequences are or will be, varies from country to country, each having its own distinct experience of democratisation since the early 1990s. In countries such as Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville and Cameroon, whose democratisation processes are frozen in a sort of national inertia, political power is frequently seen as derived from external or otherwise suspicious and non-transparent sources, and French power is seen as a vital part of that equation. For many French officials the ‘stability’ of Gabon and Cameroon – ie the absence of recent civil war – is an achievement, a positive side of French presence. But for many Gabonese and Cameroonians it is perceived as double-edged, as the very stability they welcome is often also held responsible for national inertia and an inability to tackle regime corruption.⁹⁸

The death of President Bongo of Gabon in June 2009, and the election of his son two months later, is a revealing example of how this perception of France’s role in Africa is evolving (although the very different contexts of Francophone African countries make broader conclusions difficult). The French, whose power in post-colonial Gabon has indeed been extraordinary, were generally assumed to be backing Bongo’s son, Ali. President Sarkozy denied any such support, claiming on 16 June 2009 that France had ‘no favoured candidate’. However, he had already met Ali Bongo in Paris in November 2008, a calculated move by Ali to boost his aura of legitimacy on the international stage, and an unusual meeting for the French president, given that at the time Ali Bongo was not a head of state.

On the day before the elections, Sarkozy’s unofficial emissary, Robert Bourgi, stated his support for Ali Bongo, calling him a ‘very listened to friend of President Sarkozy’.⁹⁹ Given this context, it is hardly surprising that, as Placide Ondo points out in his analysis of the political significance of rumours in Gabonese life, ‘France holds a key place in the conspiracy rumours of the *Kongosseurs* [barroom griots or storytellers] ... In many political debates French power has become the factor that needs to be resolved if any real change of regime is possible’ (present author’s translation).¹⁰⁰

Box 4: France–Gabon: A very special relationship

The dense relations between France and Gabon are usually interpreted as a result of French interest in Gabon’s oil wealth. Although this factor is crucial, recent studies have shown that the ‘special relationship’ pre-dates the opening up of Gabon’s first oil field, the Gamba, in 1963. It appears that French colonial presence, based mainly on forestry concerns, met little resistance from the populations of the area.¹⁰¹ This accommodation with French presence was reflected in the request made in 1959 by the emerging leader, Léon M’ba, that Gabon become a department of France rather than acceding to independence. Independence did come the following year, owing mainly to French desire to avoid such an anomaly. But it was a curious independence, with the French retaining control over diplomacy and defence, whether through agreements or on an informal, but equally effective, basis. Notably, the French retained monopoly rights over the extraction of mineral (especially uranium) and oil resources.

The French ‘stability guarantee’ was activated in 1964, when a coup attempt threatened Mba’s regime. He was saved by French troops. Mba’s weak internal position, in part owing

to his ambivalence over the very notion of national independence, was recognised by the French. In 1967, with Mba's health declining, they chose his young chief of staff, Albert (later Omar) Bongo, as successor.¹⁰²

At first, Bongo was highly dependent on French support. He repaid this not only through the oil sector, but also through supporting French official or semi-official actions in Africa. Examples included support of rebels in Biafra in 1968 and support of a coup attempt in Benin in 1977. However, in the early 1970s more oil discoveries and rising prices strengthened Bongo's position. Furthermore, the arrival of Valéry Giscard D'Estaing in power in France in 1974, and the subsequent fragmentation of the Gaullist networks in Africa, gave Bongo a decisive advantage over his French interlocutors. Over time, he became a very powerful figure in French politics, financing political parties and forging ties with politicians of all sides (with the exception of the far left). Meanwhile at home, Bongo co-opted all political forces through patronage and looted the country's resources via his family. He acquired significant influence in other Francophone African countries (he was married to the daughter of President Sassou-Nguesso of neighbouring Congo-Brazzaville), and was known to occasionally financially bail out other presidents of the region. Bongo managed to control the opening up of Gabon's political space in the early 1990s, although the French once again had to intervene to prop up their ally, when he was threatened by widespread rioting in May 1990.¹⁰³

French interests in the oil sector in Gabon date back to the loss of the Algerian oil fields in 1962, when the French looked increasingly to the Gulf of Guinea. As more oil was discovered in Gabonese waters, the French parastatal oil company, ELF, became heavily involved in the country, and ELF Gabon became vital not only to French energy supplies, but also to Bongo's control over the country in the 1970s. With its ranks swollen by refugees from Foccart's Gaullist networks, ELF Gabon developed elaborate security and intelligence functions of its own. While the company enjoyed an extremely advantageous fiscal position in Gabon, Gabonese officials, members of the Bongo family and ELF employees siphoned off huge amounts of money to Swiss banks.¹⁰⁴ French nationals remained firmly entrenched at all levels of the Gabonese state, especially in security.¹⁰⁵

Much of this system unravelled in the 1990s, in particular through the judicial investigations of ELF's finances in Paris, which resulted in its merger with Total in 2000. The enquiry implicated a number of senior French officials. Although the relationship remains critical to both sides, Gabon's oil sector and Total's presence in Africa have both since diversified. Following Omar Bongo's death in June 2009, the controversies around the election of his son, Ali, demonstrated, however, that one of the lasting legacies of this very special post-colonial relationship, beyond the ripples it has caused in Paris, is in the politics of Gabon itself, where the political class, haunted by its own dependency and corruption, is still unable to articulate a vision of national independence.¹⁰⁶

French officials frequently complain that their role on the continent is systematically exaggerated.¹⁰⁷ This has some basis in fact; many opposition leaders and other activists in Francophone Africa do see France's hand behind all their countries' ills, and are convinced that France is plundering all their resources. The outrageous manipulations of the Gbagbo

camp in Côte d'Ivoire are a stark example. In part this is a product of the rumours and conspiracy theories typical of authoritarian rule, where popular perceptions often see power as a puppet theatre with the strings being pulled abroad.¹⁰⁸

However, France's negative reputation also derives from a continued unwillingness to be fully transparent about its role on the continent. This can be seen, for example, in Chad, where during the attack on President Déby in 2008, the main members of the unarmed opposition were rounded up, and the leading challenger to Déby, Mahamat Saleh, was killed. Saleh's death has never been investigated properly, although even the timid commission of enquiry concluded, in September of the same year, that he was killed by government troops. Before, during and after the battle of Ndjamena, France supplied logistical and intelligence support to Déby, including placing French officers in Déby's presidential office. Despite pressure from some French parliamentarians, no clear explanation of what the French government knows concerning the disappearance of Chad's opposition leader has been forthcoming, and little apparent pressure has been put on the Déby regime.¹⁰⁹ Despite France having few clear interests in Chad, and a minimal economic presence, it is inevitable that such incidents fuel a general feeling that France is continuing to prop up African dictators for its own benefit.

CONCLUSION

The paper began by looking at the remarkable continuity in France's relations with Africa in the first three decades of independence. It then looked at the changes of the 1990–2007 period, and France's attempts to 'reform' its approach to the continent in response to those changes. Where the Sarkozy period fits into this narrative, and whether he changed France's relations with Africa or they changed despite his actions and approach, receives a mixed scorecard. Although some real changes have been put in place, there remains a persistent gap between professed intentions and actions, especially in terms of military interventions, and ties with authoritarian leaders. This gap is partly owing to stated intentions that do not take full account of the intricacies of power, nor of the ties that continue to bind France to its traditional allies. It is also owing to an insufficient will to push through reform against resistance in Paris and, in some cases, in African capitals. It should also be understood as a result of events that overtake French policy, and shift the dynamics in Paris and in Africa away from the reform programme.

Any judgement on change in French policy is also dependent on one's point of view. Seen from Africa, the presence of French military bases is perhaps the most glaring anomaly in France's role. Sarkozy's reforms in this area, although rendered ambivalent by events in Chad and Côte d'Ivoire, could yet be his most important legacy. Seen from Paris, the anomalous structures dealing with Francophone Africa have proven durable. Despite French protestations that the president's Africa unit is now subordinate to his chief diplomatic advisor and therefore 'normal',¹¹⁰ it is clear that the role of the president's office in African affairs remains exceptional. The role of Claude Guéant in relations with African leaders was, until only very recently, classic *Françafrique*.

The paper also touched on what France means to Africa and what Africa means to France. On the latter, during the Cold War France looked to Africa to boost its sense of rank in world affairs. As French interests shift to parts of Africa where they cannot expect

this sort of symbolic return, and to other parts of the world, this has inevitably changed. For many French politicians and officials, Francophone Africa is as much a series of complex reefs to be navigated as an area of solid influence. French public perception of Africa, and therefore of France's potential role on the continent, is strikingly negative, an 'Afro-pessimism' rather out of synch with some of the economic growth and other positive developments in Africa in the last decade.¹¹¹ In terms of African perceptions, despite the passing years France still plays an important role in how Francophone African countries perceive their own communities. The former colonial power remains important in the debates and divergent interests of different political and social groups in Francophone African countries, in ways that are highly dependent on their own political journeys since the early 1990s.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This is the understanding of international relations derived from the 'realist' school, which sees countries as indivisible sovereign units colliding on the international scene.
- 2 The literature covering France's relations with Africa after independence is far too voluminous to cover in the paper. For an indicative sample see various special issues of the French Africanist journal, *Politique Africaine* (for example *Devaluation* June 1994; *Mitterrand et l'Afrique*, June 1995; *France-Afrique: sortir du pacte post-colonial*, March 2007; see the website <http://www.politique-africaine.com>); Jean-François Médard, concentrating on the notion of French cultural status in Africa: 'Les avatars du messianisme français en Afrique', *L'Afrique politique*, 1999; and in English: Chafer T, 'Franco-African relations: No longer so exceptional?', *African Affairs*, 101, 2002, pp. 343–63.
- 3 On this particular aspect see Médard J-F, 'The patrimonialisation of Franco-African relations: Political exchanges, economic exchanges and social exchanges', in *ECPR joint sessions*, Lieden, 1993.
- 4 This exceptionalism and legal anomaly is well analysed in Obiang J-F, *France-Gabon: Pratiques clientélares et logiques d'Etat dans les relations franco-africaines*. Paris: Karthala, 2008, pp. 77–117.
- 5 See Bayart J-F, *Mitterrand et l'Afrique*. Paris: Fayard, 1983.
- 6 For examples of the blocked democracy of Francophone Africa see, for Togo, Toulabor C & J Heilbrunn, 'Une si petite démocratisation pour le Togo', *Politique africaine*, 58, June 1995; and for Cameroon, ICG (International Crisis Group), *Cameroon: Fragile State?* Brussels: ICG, May 2010, chapter 3. For a specific analysis of the role of French aid see Banegas R & P Quantin, 'Orientations et limites de l'aide française au développement démocratique', *Revue Canadienne d'études du développement*, 1996.
- 7 Unsurprisingly the role of the French in Rwanda has become the subject of a highly polemical debate. Many French officials resent accusations, put forward notably by the current Rwandan regime, that they were complicit in the genocide, and point to their support for the Arusha political process. However, most balanced accounts show the extent to which they supported the Habyarimana regime and turned a blind eye to its material and psychological preparations for genocide. See in particular Krosiak D, *The Role of France in the Rwanda Genocide*. London: Hurst, 2007.

- 8 Summaries of these contrasting positions can be found in Bourmand D, 'La politique africaine de Jacques Chirac: les anciens contre les modernes', *Modern and Contemporary France*, NS4,4:431-42; and in Gounin Y, *La France en Afrique: le combat des anciens contre les modernes*. Paris: De Boeck, 2009.
- 9 See Huliaras AC, 'The Anglo-Saxon conspiracy: French perceptions of the Great Lakes crisis', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36, 4, 1998.
- 10 See Bayart J-F, 'Quelle politique africaine pour la France?', blog entry on Mediapart, 25 October 2010, <http://blogs.mediapart.fr>; and for a selection of largely positive reactions from African heads of state in May 2007, see RFI (Radio France Internationale), 'Sarkozy et l'Afrique: "tourner la page"', 7 May 2007, <http://www.rfi.fr>.
- 11 On immigration issues see Bayart J-F, 2010, *ibid.*; and the websites of the two main immigration charities in France, <http://www.cimade.org> and <http://www.gisti.org>. The present author was unfortunate enough to witness a forced evacuation on a regular flight from Paris to Dakar in September 2010 and can attest directly to the high level of violence used and the shocked reaction of African citizens.
- 12 For an excellent analysis of Sarkozy's links to this strand of French politics see Dely R, 'La tentation populiste de Nicolas Sarkozy', *Philosophie Magazine*, Paris, December 2010–January 2011.
- 13 The 'Pasqua networks' are well dissected in Obiang J-F, *op. cit.*, pp. 180–186. Pasqua was condemned to a year imprisonment and a EUR 100,000 fine by a French court in 2009 in the 'Angolagate' arms trafficking affair. He won an appeal in April 2011.
- 14 Important links between Bourgi and Sarkozy date back at least to 2005, when Bourgi, who had previously been close to Dominique de Villepin, declared his support for Sarkozy in the race to be presidential candidate for the Gaullist movement. See Glaser A & S Smith, *Sarko en Afrique*. Paris: Plon, 2008, prologue and chapter 1.
- 15 The citations from Sarkozy's Benin speech are taken from RFI, 'Bénin Sarkozy révèle sa politique africaine', 19 May 2006, <http://www.rfi.fr>, accessed 25 November 2011.
- 16 The text of the speech is available at <http://www.elysee.fr/president/les-actualites/discours/2007/discours-a-l-universite-de-dakar.8264.html>. Translations by the present author.
- 17 See Gassama M *et al.*, *L'Afrique répond à Sarkozy*. Paris: Phillipe Rey, 2008; and Chrétien J-P *et al.*, *L'Afrique de Sarkozy: Un déni d'histoire*. Paris: Broché, 2008. The author of the speech, Henri Guaino, replied to his critics in *Le Monde*, 'L'homme africain et l'histoire', 27 July 2008.
- 18 See Glaser A & S Smith, 2008, *op. cit.*
- 19 Another example is when the new (and conservative) co-operation minister, Alain Joyandet, said in 2008, 'to speak to African heads of state, you have to understand their customs'. Sarkozy is cited in Glaser A & S Smith, 2008, *op. cit.*, prologue; and Joyandet in Foutoyet S, *Nicolas Sarkozy ou la Françafrique décomplexée*. Paris: Poche, 2008, p. 121.
- 20 For an excellent review of this debate see Coquery-Vidrovitch C, *Enjeux politiques de l'histoire coloniale*. Paris: Agone, 2009.
- 21 See *Le Monde*, 'Au sommet de Nice, M. Sarkozy prône des relations "décomplexées" avec l'Afrique', 2 June 2010.
- 22 For the intrigues of President Sarkozy's Africa policy in his first 18 months in power, see Glaser A & S Smith, 2008, *op. cit.* For the role of Omar Bongo in the sacking of Bockel, see the evidence Robert Bourgi himself presented to French television on 7 September 2009, available on the French news website, <http://www.rue89.com>, 'France – Afrique : Virer un ministre ? C'est simple comme un coup de fil de Bongo'.

- 23 See Gnanguenon A, 'Quelle politique africaine de la France sous Nicolas Sarkozy ?', *Dynamiques Internationales*, 4, May 2011, for a discussion of this ambivalence.
- 24 This is well documented by Hugué V, *Les Sourciers Blancs: enquête sur les faux amis de l'Afrique*. Paris: Fayard, 2007.
- 25 On ill-gotten gains see the final report of the French NGO, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, of which the interim report in 2007 led to the opening of the inquiry: *Biens mal acquis: à qui profite le crime ?* by Antoine Dulin and Jean Merckaert, Paris, 2009. The affair was closed with no outcome in November 2007, but the issue is likely to rumble on, see *Le Monde*, 'L'arrêt sur les biens mal acquis ouvre des perspectives pour les ONG anticorruption', 9 November 2010; and *Le Monde*, 'Les biens mal acquis africains gênent la France', 9 June 2011. Regarding the wealth of President Bongo of Gabon, see the US Senate report, *Private Banking and Money Laundering*. Washington, DC: US Senate, 1999. For corrupt links between French officials, politicians, ELF and the Angolan elite, see Global Witness, *All the President's Men*. London: Global Witness, 2002.
- 26 Little of substance has been written on the very interesting recent relations between France and Rwanda, and the paper's account relies on the press and several interviews with officials and expert commentators in Paris in 2011. For an interesting view of the complex internal factors driving Rwanda's relations with outside powers, including but not limited to France, see Reyntjens F, 'Constructing the truth, dealing with dissent, domesticating the world: Governance in post-genocide Rwanda', *African Affairs*, 110, 438, 2011, pp. 1–34.
- 27 The members of the Arche de Zoé ONG were found guilty in a Chadian court and were sent back to France to serve their sentences, in line with Franco-Chadian judicial agreements. They were granted a pardon by President Déby in March 2008, shortly after the French had helped to save his regime. See Chasles J-M, 'La politique africaine de Nicolas Sarkozy au prisme des relations franco-tchadiennes', *Dynamiques internationales*, 4, 2011.
- 28 See Jean-Christophe Rufin's interview, 'Le Quai d'Orsay ne pèse plus rien dans les affaires africaines', *Le Monde*, 7 July 2010. The polemic between France's foreign ministry and the president's office continued in 2011, in the context of the resignation of the foreign minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie, in February 2011, following scandals surrounding her links to the overthrown regime of Ben Ali in Tunisia. See also the anonymous letter by former and serving diplomats criticising Sarkozy's approach in *Le Monde*, 22 February 2011.
- 29 See, for example, *La Lettre du Continent*, 'Pourquoi Bourgi a brûlé sa case à fétiches', 22 September 2011.
- 30 See BBC Monitoring, 'France backtracks on endorsing Cameroon elections', from *Le Figaro* website, 24 October 2011.
- 31 See the assessment of Glaser A & S Smith, 2008, *op. cit.*, chapter 8, and section 6.
- 32 For the historical aspects, see the analysis of the 'ambivalent' or even 'schizophrenic' attitudes of the Senegalese elite to French rule in Johnson GW, 'Les élites au Sénégal pendant la période d'Indépendance', in Michel M & C-R Ageron (eds), *l'Afrique noire française au temps de l'Indépendance*, 1st edition & 2nd edition. Paris: CNRS, 1992 & 2010.
- 33 The confusion between these different elements is often at the root of analytic disagreements, frequently concerned with whether Africa is 'important' to France's economy or not. The classic argument that France's presence in Africa is not important to the more dynamic elements of the French economy is made in Marseille J, *Empire coloniale et capitalisme français. Histoire d'une divorce*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1984. For a counter argument concentrating on the 'strategic' aspects, see Obiang J-F, *op. cit.*, pp. 92–96.

- 34 The CFA Franc originated in a colonial currency, and had a constant exchange rate with the French Franc from 1948 until 1994. It is divided into two separately administered currencies, in West and Central Francophone Africa, which both have central banks (in Dakar and Yaoundé respectively). Their exchange rate with the Euro is guaranteed by the French government, in return for which each country deposits a portion of their foreign currency reserves with the French treasury.
- 35 See Hugon P, 'La politique économique de la France en Afrique: la fin des rentes coloniales ?', *Politique africaine*, 105, 2007.
- 36 On French aid as a support to Francophone Africa see Moncrieff R, *French Development aid and the reforms of 1998–2002*. PhD thesis, Southampton University, UK, 2004, chapters 1 and 2, http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/46178/1.hasCoversheetVersion/Richard_Moncrieff_Thesis.pdf.
- 37 Glaser A & S Smith, 2008, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
- 38 Figures are from *Africa Confidential*, 11 September 2009.
- 39 For Bolloré's position on this, see interview with Bolloré director, Dominique Lafont, in *Jeune Afrique*, 3 April 2011.
- 40 See *Le Monde*, 'Gbagbo: retour sur l'investissement', 16 February 2011; and for details of Bolloré's presence see *La Lettre du Continent*, 'La stratégie en 3D de Vincent Bolloré', 24 February 2011.
- 41 See Echenberg M, *Les Tirailleurs sénégalais en Afrique occidentale française (1857–1960)*. Paris: Karthala, 2009.
- 42 See Domergue M, Delthombe T & J Tatsitsa, *Kamerun ! Une guerre cachée aux origines de la Françafrique*. Paris: Broché, 2010.
- 43 See Chipman J, *French Power in Black Africa*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989, chapter 5. In the 1970s this kind of agreement was signed with a number of former Belgian colonies, as France moved to spread its influence in Central Africa.
- 44 Chipman J, *ibid.*, p. 147.
- 45 The new French doctrine for its military presence in Africa was defined in cabinet in March 1998. The focus on 'crisis' can be found, for example, in the 2006 French Senate Report, written largely by a parliamentarian of Chirac's camp, Andre Dulait: *Rapport sur la Gestion des Crises en Afrique subsaharienne*. Paris: French Senate, July 2006.
- 46 The regional training centres are listed on pp. 12–13 of the French Senate report, *ibid.* Details of RECAMP can be found on p. 14. Each of the training centres deals with a different aspect of military affairs, such as demining and air pilot training. The trainees are mostly Francophone, although a number of Anglophones have participated enthusiastically in training exercises. Little co-ordination exists between this training network and ECOWAS plans for a subregional intervention force.
- 47 It should be noted, however, that the number of military advisors continued to decline, partly owing to the absorption of the co-operation ministry (which was responsible for them) into the foreign ministry in 1998. For an illustration of resistance from the military in this period, see the comments of Chief of the General Staff, General Bentegeat, in the French Senate report, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–57.
- 48 For an assessment of the new role of the French military see *Le Monde*, 'Pourquoi l'armée française reste-t-elle sur place ?', 1 June 2010. Also see the French Government white paper on Defence and Security, June 2008, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr>.
- 49 See Bellamy W, 'Making Better Sense of U.S. Security Engagement in Africa', in Centre for

- Strategic and International Studies, *U.S. Africa Policy beyond the Bush Years*. Washington, DC: CSIS, 2009.
- 50 See, for example, Van de Valle N, 'U.S. policy towards Africa: The Bush legacy and the Obama administration', *African Affairs*, 109, 434, January 2010.
- 51 Personal interviews, senior French officer, Dakar, May 2011, and other informed officials, Paris, August and October 2011.
- 52 Senegalese President Wade also wanted to use the withdrawal to polish his anti-colonial credentials. Neither Omar Bongo of Gabon, nor his son who took over power after he died in 2009, has shown any such concerns. See *Le Monde*, 'La France va fermer sa base militaire au Sénégal', 23 February 2010. Other details are from a personal interview, senior French officer, Dakar, May 2011.
- 53 The finalised agreements can be found at <http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr>, although the actual full text of the agreements is not available on that website at the time of writing (August 2011). The present author has also been informed by personal interviews with senior French officers, Pretoria and Dakar, April and May 2011.
- 54 See, for example, Lindley J, *French Britain and France: a Dialogue of Decline? Anglo-French defense cooperation and implications for the European and Euro-Atlantic security and defense Relationships*. London: Chatham House, 2010.
- 55 Personal interviews, French officers and officials, Paris, Pretoria and Dakar 2010 and 2011.
- 56 Gandois H, 'La politique africaine de la France au Conseil de sécurité de 2007 à 2010 : un virage multilatéral confirmé?', *Dynamiques Internationales*, May, 2009.
- 57 French Senate report, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- 58 As reported by South African interlocutors in the French Senate report, *ibid.*, p. 18.
- 59 The author is grateful to a reviewer of the paper for pointing this out.
- 60 On the AU see Chafer T, 'The AU: a new arena for Anglo-French cooperation in Africa?', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49, 1, 2010.
- 61 Personal interviews, senior French officers, Pretoria and Dakar, April and May 2011.
- 62 See Vines A, 'Rhetoric from Brussels and Reality on the Ground: the EU and Security in Africa', *International Affairs*, 86, 5, 2010, pp. 1091–1108; and Cummings G & T Chafer, 'Beyond Fashoda: Anglo French security Cooperation in Africa since St Malo', *International Affairs*, 86, 5, September 2010, pp. 1129–1148
- 63 To borrow the term of Gibert M, 'The New European Security Architecture: An example of Messy Multilateralism?', in Chafer T & G Cumming (eds), *From Rivalry to Partnership? New Approaches to the Challenges of Africa*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011.
- 64 For developments in this early period, see Glaser A & S Smith, 2008, *op. cit.*, chapter 2.
- 65 Cited in Chasles J-M, *op. cit.* for brief assessments of the European mission in Chad; see Vines A, *op. cit.*; and Seibert BH, *EUFOR Tchad/RCA – A cautionary Note*. European Security Review. Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, March 2008.
- 66 See *La lettre du Continent*, '100 missiles Milan pour Idriss Déby', 20 December 2007.
- 67 For the evolution towards a training mission, see foreign minister, Alain Juppé, cited in *Le Monde*, 18 January 2011; and RFI, 'Au Tchad, la fin de l'opération Epervier semble se préciser', 6 July 2011, <http://www.rfi.fr>. Chad has long played a very particular role for the French military, for whom myths of the brave Chadian warrior have resonated since it was the first country to declare its allegiance to de Gaulle's Free French in 1941. It is said that President Déby, who fought alongside the French against the Libyans in the 1980s, once gave blood to save a French soldier. For a detailed review, see De Lespinois J, 'Les interventions françaises

- au Tchad 1968 – 1990’, in Pascallon P, *La politique de sécurité de la France en Afrique*. Paris: Harmattan, 2004.
- 68 Personal interview, French official, Paris, October 2011.
- 69 The Sahel, derived from Arabic for ‘frontier’, is the arid strip between the Sahara and tropical West Africa.
- 70 Reliable information concerning the group is extremely hard to obtain; firstly because the terrain and research target are hardly propitious to academic research and secondly because much analysis is either from a somewhat remote angle, such as its relations to the global al-Qaeda network (see, for example, Celso A, ‘Al Qaeda in the Maghreb: the “newest front on the War on Terror”’, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 19, 1, 2008) or written by experts on its Algerian origin. The role on the ground of military intelligence services further muddies the analytic waters. The special issue of *The Journal of Contemporary African Studies* in January 2007, edited by Ann McDougall, is a useful collection. More recent pieces include the informative podcast by Yvan Guichaoua on <http://www.opendemocracy.net>, 17 April 2011; Leymarie P, ‘Au Sahel un nouveau front a haut risque’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 2010; and the very US policy-oriented Le Sage A, *The Evolving Threat of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*. Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, July 2011. The present author’s understanding is also informed by several dozen personal interviews in Mali and Niger in December 2006.
- 71 For a short analysis, see interview with French specialist, Mathieu Guidere, by RFI, 10 January 2011, <http://www.rfi.fr>.
- 72 Events in Niger, with a coup d’état coming shortly after a major renegotiation of Areva’s mining contracts, further complicate France’s position in the region.
- 73 See the account in *Le Monde*, ‘Chronologie de l’enlèvement des otages français au Niger par AQIM’, 17 April 2011.
- 74 For a list of the issues, see Survie, *Billets d’Afrique*, Fevrier 2011, <http://www.survie.fr>.
- 75 Leymarie P, *op. cit.*, present author’s translation.
- 76 Among the voluminous literature on the Ivorian ‘miracle’ and the historical role of the French, see Fauré Y-A & J-F Médard (eds), *Etat et Bourgeoisie en Côte d’Ivoire*. Paris: Karthala, 1982.
- 77 The Ivorian crisis, and French involvement, have been well covered elsewhere, in particular in several editions of the French scholarly journal, *Politique Africaine*. See in particular, D’Ersu L, ‘La Crise Ivoirienne: une intrigue franco-française’, *Politique Africaine*, 105, 2007. This section also draws on observations and numerous interviews of the present author in Paris in 2003 and in Abidjan in 2005.
- 78 See, for example, Bovcon M, ‘France’s conflict resolution strategy in Côte d’Ivoire and its ethical implications’, *African Studies Quarterly*, 1, 11, 2009.
- 79 See Gbagbo’s interview with RFI on 14 April 2008, <http://www.rfi.fr>.
- 80 On French business interests see *La Lettre du Continent*, ‘Chez Gbagbo, au paradis du business français’, 8 May 2008.
- 81 See *Le Monde*, ‘Cote d’Ivoire: Gbagbo réquisitionne deux filiales de banques françaises’, 17 February 2011.
- 82 *Le Monde*, ‘Gbagbo : retour sur investissement’, 16 February 2011.
- 83 See ‘Comment le soldat Gbagbo a perdu sa guerre’, *La Lettre du Continent*, 7 April 2011.
- 84 There is an unresolved debate over whether the French provided training or logistical support to the rebels at this point. The French newspaper, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, in its edition of 6 April, claims that the French gave training support, and the news chain, *France24*, claims that the pro-Ouattara forces were trained by French and Nigerian trainers, adding that the equipment

- they had was strikingly new. See *France24*, 'Comment les forces pro-Ouattara ont préparé l'offensive contre Gbagbo', 6 April 2011.
- 85 Cited in *Libération*, 6 April 2011.
- 86 See in particular *Le Monde*, 'Les Modalités de l'intervention des troupes françaises à Abidjan', 12 April 2011.
- 87 See, for example, Schumann A, 'Ivory Coast: The agonies of reconciliation', *The Guardian*, London, 8 May 2011.
- 88 See French sources cited in *Le Monde*, 'Les Modalités de l'intervention des troupes françaises à Abidjan', 12 April 2011.
- 89 For the musical aspects, see Schumann A, *Danse philosophique! The Social and Political Dynamics of Zouglou Music in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 1990–2008*. PhD, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 2010, especially chapters 7 and 8. See also Banégas R, 'Côte d'Ivoire: Patriotism, ethnonationalism and other African modes of self-writing', *African Affairs*, 105, 421, 2006.
- 90 The reliability and representivity of sources is difficult to determine, as highlighted recently in the affair of American Tom MacMaster, who faked a widely read gay Syrian blog.
- 91 See, for example, *Le Monde*, 'les Partisans de Gbagbo organisent la riposte sur le Web', 29 December 2010.
- 92 A representative selection can be found on <http://revuedepressecigbagbo.over-blog.com/categorie-11891206.html>. See also <http://claudus.ivoire-blog.com>. It should also be noted that much mainstream media analysed the French intervention of April 2011 as neocolonial interference, in particular in the US, where the view that France is the villain in Africa feeds into anti-French sentiment stemming in part from the Iraq war of 2003. See *Le Monde*, 'Cote d'Ivoire: La presse internationale juge neo-coloniale l'action de la France', 12 April 2011. Some prominent Americans, such as Republican senator, James Inhofe, have offered Gbagbo support, partly owing to perceived religious affiliations, and also owing to links through the oil sector. See *New York Times*, 'A strongman found support in prominent U.S. conservatives', 11 April 2011.
- 93 The original article is in the archive section of <http://www.notrevoie.com>, accessed 28 July 2011. For an example of how the article was taken up and widely commented on with little critical evaluation of its source, see 'Côte d'Ivoire: un document secret des militaires français révélant le plan pour tuer Gbagbo', 29 December 2010, <http://www.Camer.be>, accessed 28 July 2011; and in particular the extensive and interesting comment chain.
- 94 A good example of such an approach is the article by Senegal's Moustapha Che Sall, 'Cote d'Ivoire: trêve de démagogie; trêve d'hypocrisie', *Africa Presse*, 22 February 2011.
- 95 See, for example, the article by Beyala C, 'Horrible journée : L'Afrique vient de perdre la Côte d'Ivoire', 24 May 2011, <http://revuedepressecigbagbo.over-blog.com/categorie-11891206.html>. For a representative example of the interpretation of the Ivorian crisis through Cameroonian history, see Anonymous, 'La France ou la stratégie du chaos en Côte d'Ivoire', *Cameroon Voice.com*, 28 January 2011. See also the music and statements of Cameroonian reggae man, Joe La Conscience, for whom Gbagbo is an African nationalist hero.
- 96 A representative exchange is the following, from the comment chain to an article on *The Post* website: AKA H le 30/03/2011 à 15:53: *Le seul qui le 14 juillet 2010 ne se soit pas prosterné devant sarkozy en France, c'est Laurent Gbagbo...Il a choisi la totale indépendance...C'est mal passé en Françafrique...* ; Fanta Diallo le 30/03/2011 à 17:37: *Laurent Gbagbo indépendant face à la France ? Arrêtons là les fables, c'est bien lui qui a signé tous les contrats liant la Côte d'Ivoire à des*

entreprises françaises. Gbagbo n'est pas le 'combattant' contre l'impérialisme des occidentaux qu'il veut faire croire, sa fortune personnelle amassée sur le dos du peuple ivoirien et mise à l'abri en est la meilleure preuve, <http://www.lepost.fr>, accessed 26 July 2011. (Translation: AKA H: *The only person to not go and prostrate themselves before Sarkozy in France on the 14 July 2010 is Laurent Gbagbo ... he chose total independence ... that goes down badly in Francafrique*. Fanta Diallo: *Laurent Gbagbo independent from France? Let's stop the dreaming, he is the one who signed all the contracts tying Ivory Coast to French businesses. Gbagbo isn't the 'fighter' against imperialism he wants to make us believe, his personal fortune gained at the expense of the Ivorian people and put safely abroad is the best proof*).

- 97 The polemical work of Francois Xavier Verschave in the 1990s did much to bring these issues to the French public. More recently see the France 2 television documentary, Benquet P, *Francafrique, 50 années sous le sceau du secret*, France 2, 2010; and the recent tome on the role of the French in Cameroon, Domergue M, Delthombe T & J Tatsitsa, *op. cit.*
- 98 For the perceptions of the French role in Cameroon, especially around the 2008 general strike, see ICG, *Cameroon: the Dangers of a Fracturing Regime*. Brussels: ICG, June 2010, pp. 20–21. The conclusions here are in part drawn from dozens of personal interviews the author carried out in Cameroon while researcher for International Crisis Group in 2009 and 2010. For the case of Gabon, see Bernault F & J Tonda, 'Le Gabon: une distopie tropicale', *Politique Africaine*, 115, 2009.
- 99 Cited in *Le Monde*, 30 August 2009.
- 100 Ondo P, 'Le Konossa politique ou la passion de la rumeur à Libreville', *Politique Africaine*, 115, 2009.
- 101 See Obiang J-F, *op. cit.*, chapter 1; and M'Bokolo E, 'Forces sociales et idéologies dans la décolonisation de l'AEF', *Journal of African History*, 22, 3, 1981.
- 102 For evidence that Bongo was quite literally chosen by the French, see the statements of some actors involved at the time in Benquet P, *op. cit.* Bongo presents a more rebellious and anti-French vision of his early years in his rather unconvincing book of interviews: Omar Bongo, *Blanc comme Nègre*. Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2001.
- 103 On this period, see Gardinier D, 'Gabon: Limited reform and regime survival', in Clark J & D Gardinier (eds), *Political Reform in Francophone Africa*. Colorado: Westview, 1997.
- 104 See Obiang J-F, *op. cit.*, pp. 152–168.
- 105 On the many French nationals, usually connected to ELF and explicitly or implicitly supported by the French state, see Obiang J-F, *op. cit.*, chapter 3; and Smith S & A Glaser, *Comment la France a perdu l'Afrique*. Paris: Hachette, 2004, chapter 5. A particularly notable case was that of Maurice Robert, the former head of ELF's intelligence service, who became ambassador to Gabon in 1979, at Bongo's insistence, and in the face of much unhappiness in the French diplomatic service.
- 106 See the analysis of the electoral dynamics in Levi Martial Midepani, 'Pratiques électorales et reproduction oligarchique au Gabon', *Politique Africaine*, 115, October 2009.
- 107 A typical statement is the following: 'We [the French] find ourselves in a situation where our political military or economic engagement in support of Africa is seen by many not as a sincere desire to help, but as neo-colonial interference; but a situation where, at the same time, any indifference, or withdrawal or lack of engagement is seen as an abandonment or as ingratitude'. Speech by Nicholas Sarkozy in Cape Town, February 2008 (present author's translation).
- 108 See Bernault F & J Tonda, *op. cit.*, who explain this aspect with the notion of 'l'ailleurs du pouvoir' (the 'distance of power', or 'power from afar').

- 109 See Ortiz F, 'Tchad : Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh, symbole des disparus du régime Déby, Le leader politique incarne la cause d'une opposition brimée', 4 February 2010, <http://www.Afrik.com>.
- 110 This point has been made to the present author several times by French officials, including at the Elysée.
- 111 See a report on polling of French opinion in *Jeune Afrique*, 6 June 2010.

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