

# Cooperation, the last stage of colonialism: Analysing the influence of France in Africa

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## Abstract

The objective of this research paper is to analyse the transformation of France's colonial influence in Africa and comment on the contemporary relevance of the same. It will highlight the importance of the region for France, discussing the reasons surrounding the latter's persistence in ensuring its dominance in the region. Furthermore, it will illuminate the concept of *Françafrique* and the mechanisms developed by France to shape its relationship with Africa in a manner that will ensure its effective control of the region. Finally, it will also explore the contemporary challenges that the country has faced in the region and provide an appropriate conclusion regarding the possible prospects of the same.

*Keywords: Françafrique, CFA System, neo-colonialism*

## Introduction

*“Without Africa, France would have slid down into the ranks of a third-world power”*

*- Jacques Chirac, Former French President (Riley, 2016)*

Colonialism, quite prevalent until the late 1940s, started to collapse after the end of the Second World War. With the onset of the process of de-colonisation, colonial powers had to reluctantly abandon their colonial possessions. Though all the other colonial empires fell, the French Empire survived, backed by certain transformations and alterations. This was because of the desperate ambition of France to cling to her colonies for economic and geopolitical advantages which led to severe consequences like the war in Indochina and the bloody freedom struggle in Algeria.

In the wake of such incidents, De Gaulle decided to reorient France's relations with Sub-Saharan Africa to ensure the empire's longevity in the region, which to a great extent is still alive.



**Figure 1:** Representation of Colonial Africa in 1914

*Note:* Sourced from <https://twitter.com/historyville/status/1346340915284217856>

### **France and Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonialism to Cooperation**

To understand the restructuring of relations between France and Africa, it is important to consider why France needed control over Africa.

Firstly, the colonial holdings in Africa were the cash cow of France. The colonies served the dual interests of the colonial power by providing it with the supply of raw materials and being centres of demand for French goods. As a result of this, they provided France with significant monetary profits by supplying cheap resources and importing French goods without any major competition. Due to the world war, the French economy was worn out which prompted France and its allies to extract economic support from Africa. It is also important to note that economic backing was not only required for post-war rebuilding but also for long-term economic gains.

The second reason is that the colonies were instrumental in international politics. France needed its colonies to ensure that it continued to play a major role in world politics. In the post-war era, the USA and the USSR became major players in the international arena, replacing the UK and France. France wanted her place back or at least be at the third spot in global politics and it could do so only by holding her colonies back (Benneyworth, 2011) as the UK was transforming its colonial empires into the commonwealth.

Thirdly, the colonies were associated with French prestige and served as an important geopolitical area. France treated Africa as its backyard or its region of hegemony and could not accept any interference by any other state in the same. Africa served the needs of France whenever required. For instance, the free France movement survived and was sustained largely due to the support and backing of African colonies. The African colonies gave France a tremendous stature on the global stage and supported her economy, thereby increasing French economic and diplomatic strength and thus being a symbol of prestige for Paris.

Fourthly, we have psychological reasons. In the 1940s, 50s and 60s, the French leadership was largely under Charles de Gaulle and other legacy colonial-era politicians who were born and brought up in an era of French dominance. Thus, it must have been psychologically difficult for them to accept that the superior status of their country would be gone and to save or maintain it, control over colonies was needed. Also, there might have been a hope that with a few changes their empire may survive (which was partially true).

Due to the aforementioned reasons, combined with the fall of Indo-China and the freedom movement in Algeria, France wanted to have stronger ties with the Sub-Saharan Colonies of Africa. By the early 1950s, France became delusional with the colonial concept of iron fist control on her colonies and realised that it cannot continue in the same fashion. It thus went on to transform her relations with Africa in such a manner that in the name of African emancipation the needs of France would be served. This transformation was not to be done via top-down control but through blending the socio-political, economic and cultural spheres of Africa and France. This would in turn strengthen their ties and make their relationship inseparable for decades to come.

**Figure 2:** The Franc Zone, a Tool of French Neo-colonialism in Africa, 2020 (Sylla, 2020)



*Note:* The picture has two sides, one reflecting the image of Franco-African love but the other reflects France subverting African nationalism and culture for her benefit as the French flag (symbol of French glory and prestige) is raised by an African woman who is symbolising Africa. She (Africa) is not doing so by free will as the image shows the hands of the woman tied in a chain, which interprets into denial of real freedom to Africa, the picture reflects the fusing of two dissimilar cultures.

This transformation came under the titles 'union française' and 'communauté française', which were the new names of the French empire (the latter for the empire in Africa) and was the result of a referendum under which France began the process of civilizing African states to evolve as successful democratic nations. In this referendum, the states in Africa could choose either full immediate independence, thus cutting off all ties from France and the Franco-African Community (the collective identity of French colonies in Africa) or opt for slow and partial independence under the guidance of and with the continued political, economic and diplomatic backing of France under the African-French community.

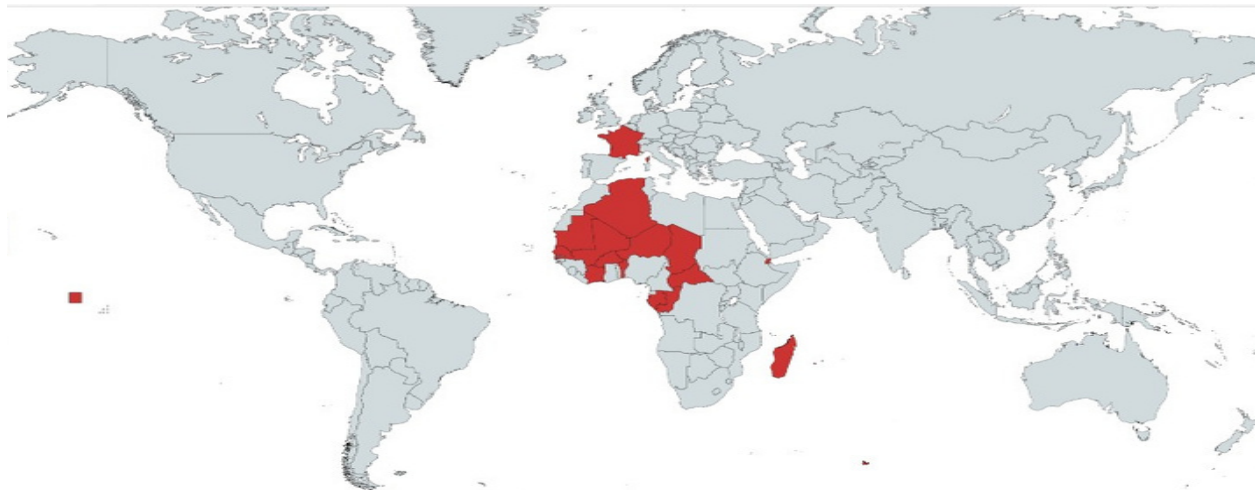
Guinea was the only nation to opt for absolute and immediate freedom and had to face harsh consequences at the hands of France (Hundeyin, 2019), while all others received heavy economic

support/aid, political backing and full protection from the French metropolis and became French-dominated thus serving as resource-rich territories of the modern French Empire. France influences or directs all types of policies of these states and also gets economic gains & diplomatic influence on the international stage. This transformation through which African nations gained partial freedom and France got legitimate influence on them was highly romanticized by the French intellectual class and the nation's puppet governments in the region.

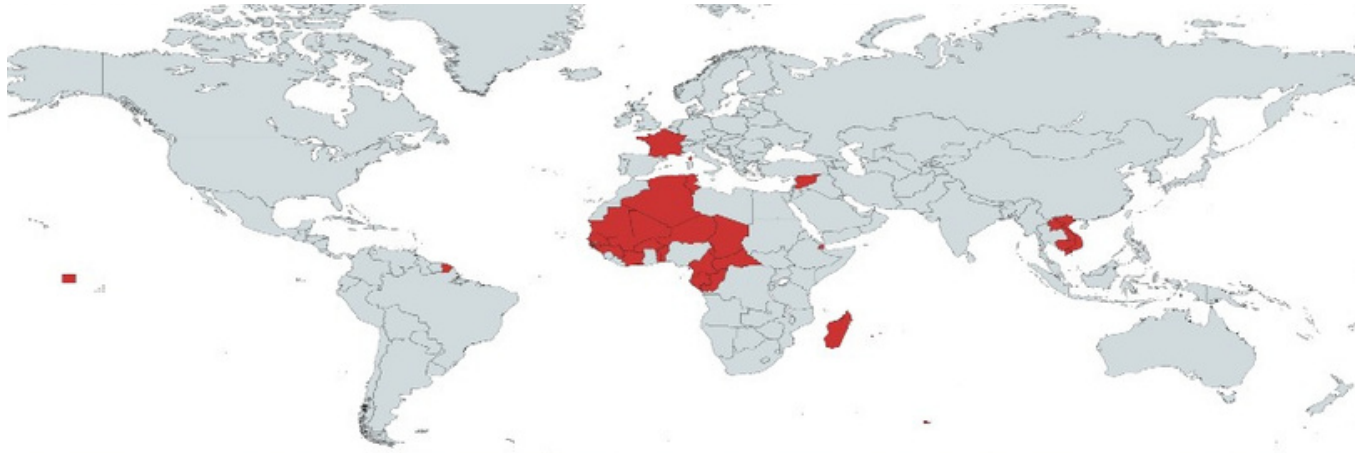
Over a period of time, it was showcased as a relationship between two brothers who were to stand together in all conditions. This policy/ model of control is termed neo-colonialism, which as per Kwame Nkrumah is the theoretical independence and sovereignty of a state, while its economic system and political policies are directed from outside i.e., from another state. This is still very true in the cases of Franco-African relations as even after getting independence in the late 1950s and early 60s (some in the 70s), France is still dominant in the region. For domination, one must analyse various aspects of this relationship.

**Figure 3:** Pictorial Representation of the Transformation of French Colonialism to Neo-colonialism

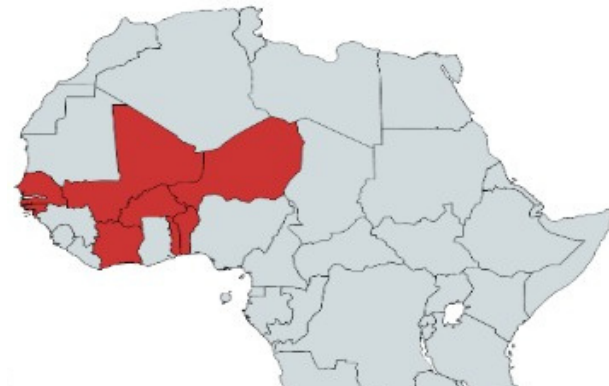
(a) Map showing major regions under French Colonial Rule in the 20th century



(b) The map of the French community, 1959



(c) West African CFA Zone



(d) Central African CFA Zone



*Note:* The above maps show the changing (reducing) influence of France's métropole on the geopolitical level, thus reflecting the desire of France to maintain control of what was left of her empire (French Africa).

### Aspects of *Françafrique*

*'Françafrique'* was a term coined by Houphout Boigny to describe what he believed was the complex web of mutually beneficial relations between France and Africa.

Unlike the other European powers, France decided to intertwine the different aspects of her state and society with Africa in such a complex way that it would become nearly impossible to end her control in the region. The complexity is the result of four interrelated factors:

**1. Economic Factor:** The francophone African nations use the colonial currency CFA Franc (West African and Central African CFA) which ties these nations closely with the French economic system as it did in the colonial era. This has always been a highly debated issue; the supporters of the system argue that it provides economic stability by avoiding high inflation and is valuable because it is pegged with the Euro (earlier with the Franc) and thus has a stable exchange rate. While opponents of the CFA system criticise it as the colonial tax, it is via this system that France earns billions of dollars every year. The arguable figure of \$500 billion is extracted every year from Africa by France via the CFA system.

This continues to date and is due to the cooperation treaty signed between 14 Francophone African nations and France under which 50% of the Foreign Exchange Reserves of these African nations were to be kept with the latter. These countries can only use 15% of these reserves, exceeding which they have to resort to borrowing (Mbogo, 2020). This agreement was on the pretext that the former colonies will be using the infrastructure built by France during the colonial era, so they must pay for that (Mbogo, 2020). Togo under Sylvanus Olympio desired to shed away this colonialist arrangement but was killed by Togolese soldiers trained in France, thus the aspiration of getting free never came true (Boisbouvier, 2021). There are demands to get rid of the system in West Africa which are getting some heed, but this won't be easy for Africa without French will as it provides the former with a lot of bilateral economic aid, thus forcing it into subservience.

1/3rd of French Official Development Assistance (ODA) which is around 3 billion euros flows in Africa per year. A major part of this is directed towards education, culture and scholarships thus greatly influencing these arenas. The economic influence of France in Africa is hugely supported by French companies operating in the region, these MNCs have hegemony, if not a monopoly on African trade and resources, and are both the result and reason for the French colonial grip on the region. France, to date, through these companies imports significant raw materials from Africa as it has been doing since the 1830s, which in fact, have grown now. The raw material and energy dependence of France on Africa increased from 30% in 1950 to 80% in 1989, 100% uranium

imports of France come from Gabon and Niger, while 70% of the total extraction of oil by Elf-Aquitaine (a French corporation) is from francophone Africa (Benneyworth, 2011). Niger's uranium supplies keep the lights on in Paris while the country remains dark because of the one-sided agreements between these companies and the government. Also, the cooperation treaty provides the right of first refusal on any natural resource found in the region to France. Areva, the French uranium mining company operating in Niger has more revenue than Niger.

This system of French economic control is facing a threat from the rising investments by China which has surpassed France in terms of bilateral trade in the region. Thus, it has invited direct trade conflict with the US, which is in a trade war against China. Along with them, India, Japan and the EU are all trying hard to make inroads in the region but France has now shifted focus on retaining her core zones of influence in the economy of the region like control of mining and natural resources etc. Through the cooperation agreements signed between 1958 and 1960, France is now involved in the monetary policy formation of the region which comes through the CFA as the apex boards of the two CFAs provide seats to France (Sylla, 2020) and therefore even after being challenged and surpassed in different parameters, France remains the actual master and controls the economies of the region.

**2. Political Factor:** Control over a region is generally associated with political control because, without it, the control of the resources and population of a region is impossible. Therefore, the French have ensured that even though the CFA zone countries are officially free, the political and governance structure is under French control. To do so, the process of giving slow freedom to Francophone nations post the 1958 referendum began under which these nations first became politically free with their premiers heading their governments in the late 1950s and then sovereign with the same premiers being elevated as presidents. The first leaders of these nations were handpicked by the French government, the presidents of these states were selected after two rounds of clearances, one from Jacques Foccart (the advisor to 4 French Presidents) and President De Gaulle and thus they acted as if they were directed by France on all issues (Diop, 2018). Shortly before independence, France decided to introduce the Presidential form of government in all the nations following the Parliamentary setup as controlling one person would be easier than controlling a set of lawmakers (Fröhlich, 2020). The cooperation treaty signed as a part of Françafrique devised by Foccart has played a significant role in



role in ensuring French grip on the governments of these states as the treaty gives France exclusive zones of economic influence, allows her to keep troops in the region and blocks these nations from entering into a military alliance with any other country without approval. This also brings the army leadership of these nations closer to France. Thus, in a situation where political leaders of these nations slip from the grasp of French control, they are dealt with by the military—either French or native and are thus removed.

This was very evident in the killings of Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso and Sylvanus Olympio of Togo who dared to stand against the French interests. This cooperation treaty has been such an important tool for French sway in Africa that the French government forced African heads of state to sign it at times even by building psychological pressure and harassing them. For example, the premier of France wrote to his Gabonese counterpart that the condition for their freedom was to sign and respect the terms of the cooperation agreement as was done by others (The Franc Zone, a Tool of French Neocolonialism in Africa, 2020). They had also divested the economy and governmental infrastructure of Guinea which opted not to accept the post-independence dictates of France and this had set an example and message for other nations. There has always existed a band of African elites who have benefited from this relationship between France and Africa and have supported the status quo. Similar to the relationship between *zamindars* and the British in India, many heads of state in francophone Africa were in power due to their personal ties with French elites.

Alongside armies and treaties, French MNCs are also accused of influencing elections in the region for their benefit. The French state and major brands have also been accused of having supported dictators in the region who fostered French needs like in the case of Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Republic and others. Over a while, French Presidents and the Heads of the CFA states have enjoyed a special relationship under which the African leaders have supported candidates in French electoral competitions and then these presidents have supported the rule of these leaders in their states. Candidates of French Presidential elections till now visit these nations on campaigns and the transformation of relations with them have always been on their election agenda, though no real positive change has ever occurred. Many African states to date have dictators and presidents backed by France and these nations wait for their real political independence.

Currently, France is facing a challenge from Mali where the Russian-backed government has taken over and has asked French troops to leave the region. However, even after this, French influence is strong in the region as the opponents of the government are seeking and receiving support from France, while the other zones of influence remain intact.

**3. Security Aspect:** Security is one of the most crucial aspects involved in Franco-African relations. It was the foundation on which the process of civilising Africa was based when the nations of Africa opted for slow independence to ensure that they could become successful democracies & properly functioning nations. These African nations faced major threats from militias or army takeovers, either backed by one of the two superpowers or self-originating ones and thus they entered into security agreements as a part of a cooperation treaty with France. This would ensure the security of the newly emerging states as this allowed France to station troops whenever needed, although under the agreement these nations were also obliged to send troops to assist France whenever called for. This arrangement has been both a boon and a bane for both Africa and France.

On one hand, through this system the French train the African troops (Mbogo, 2020) and defend the cause of these governments whenever required and on the other hand, these troops trained in France have brought down many Anti-French governments in the region. In addition to this, French troops ensure that the business interests of the colonial power are not compromised in any condition, even in civil wars like the one in Chad. This maintains the hegemony of France in the region but comes at the cost of the lives of French servicemen. The Sahel region, which largely lies in the CFA Zone, is one of the most disturbing terrorist belts in the world. It has also become a haven for Jihadist fighters from the Middle East, who are now operating in the region alongside other native terror groups (The Hindu, 2021). The civil war in Libya has also served as fuel for terrorist activities in the region. France, since the rise of jihadist groups, has tried to curtail them in the region to ensure that its interests and prestige are intact. Jihadist terrorism is viewed as a cause of insecurity for France because if they take over the government in the countries of the region, its influence in the region will be sabotaged. At present more than 5000 French personnel are fighting the extremists in the region.

**4. Socio-Cultural Aspect:** The real essence of Franco-Africanities lies in this aspect of their relationship. To achieve socio-cultural assimilation, African nations were made to accept French as

their official language (Borchers, 2017) and since then, French has been the most prominent medium of education. Moreover, the influence of France on the education system of central and western African countries has been such that even after decades of independence, the content of the textbooks in use was finalised by the former. This was and is more rampant in central Africa.

The colonial hangover is still prevalent, especially amongst the elite class of these nations as they try to and are deeply ingrained in the French lifestyle, which is associated with prosperity and class mobility. Thus, people in the lower strata of these societies must adopt these French ways and norms since without them it is difficult to reach the upper echelons of society. Even the Presidents, Dictators and Emperors of francophone Africa see their French counterparts as role models. For instance, Jean-Bedel-Bokassa, the Second President and the Emperor of the Central African Republic was a French army officer who crowned himself as emperor on 4th December 1977- he was influenced by French Emperor Napoleon I and crowned himself in a manner as his role model (Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 2014). His coronation attire was also made by the same company that did it for Napoleon. Throughout his autocratic rule as president and emperor, there were accusations that he received assistance from France and French MNCs.

#### **Figure 4: Bukasa and Napoleon**

*Note:* (Left) Clockwise- Bukasa's crown, imperial emblem(Napoleonic eagle on top), admiration for Napoleon & De Gaulle, and dressing for the coronation ceremony. (Right) Napoleon's crown, royal dress, and Napoleonic eagle. Notice how the crown & dressing styles of both emperors are similar. (Melloul, 1977) (Pavlovsky, 1985) (Hoành, 2019) (Apic, 1804) (Heritage Images, 1821)

Sourced from ([www.gettyimages.in/photos/jean-bedel-bokassa](http://www.gettyimages.in/photos/jean-bedel-bokassa)),

([www.gettyimages.in/photos/coronation-of-napoleon](http://www.gettyimages.in/photos/coronation-of-napoleon)),

([cvdvn.net/2019/03/26/the-vietnamese-daughters-of-an-african-emperor-2-vietnamese-daughters-of-african-president-wed/](http://cvdvn.net/2019/03/26/the-vietnamese-daughters-of-an-african-emperor-2-vietnamese-daughters-of-african-president-wed/)) and ([medias.gazette-drouot.com/prod/medias/mediatheque/76673.jpg](http://medias.gazette-drouot.com/prod/medias/mediatheque/76673.jpg))



As per the cooperation treaty, senior African military personnel were to get training in France and would thus develop an appreciation for the French military and technical superiority. This would ultimately lead to them always looking towards French assistance in any calamity and would keep other powers out of the region. It has always been a trend that anti-French governments in sub-Saharan Africa are brought down by army men trained in France. There has been a lack of exposure to any alternative external culture in this region as the population here has been under colonial control and then French influence now for more than 180 years. During the cold war, almost all third-world nations were either influenced by the US or the USSR but in this region, only French influence was present. To counter USSR, the USA backed France in this region and opted to remain out to ensure that France was not annoyed. After the cold war in the unipolar world, the US did not pay much heed to the region. The countries of the region do not have a promising diaspora, as not many

people pursue higher education. Outside the francophone zone, there is a great disparity between former British and French colonies when it comes to students going abroad for higher education and jobs. While much of the education back home is influenced by France, major parts of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) are directed towards education and culture.

The major threat that the French socio-cultural influence faces in the region comes from the Jihadists who have proposed a separate ideology, which is gaining ground in the region and is driving the people against the French-influenced governments.

These aspects of Franco-African relations are the cornerstones of the neo-colonial empire of France, and have undergone some changes over time but have largely remained static and biased towards French benefits.

### **Recent developments and challenges to the French empire**

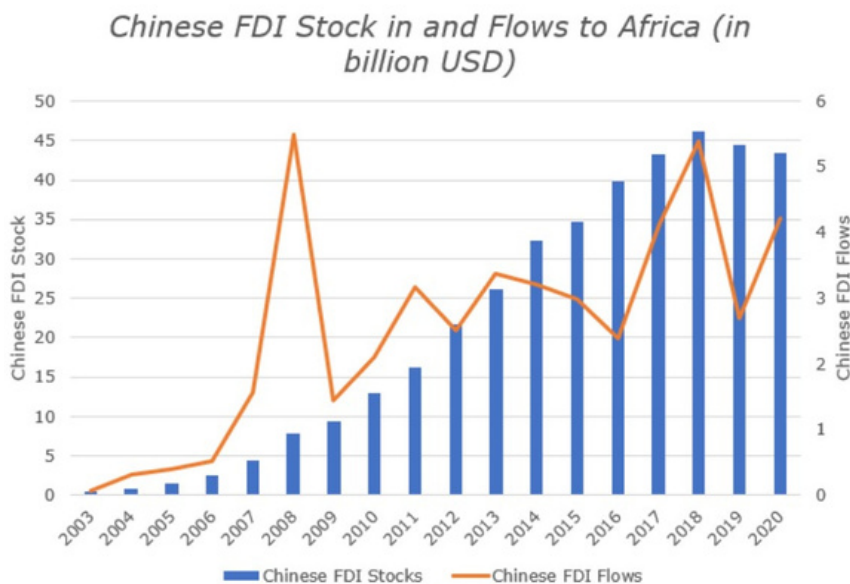
President Macron, who took the office in 2017, was quite critical of colonial rule and its legacy. He had the desire to rebuild French policy towards Africa. He has acknowledged the horrors of the colonial era and has decided to reshape & restructure the ties with former colonies in Africa, and has done so by trying to be more transparent when it comes to tracking the past links of France with Africa which involve the grimmest memories.

To restructure the relationship, he had also decided to return colonial artefacts to Africa from French museums. The financial dimension of this transformation involves doing away with the CFA System, but it has been an uncertain issue as not all nations in Africa are willing to end it. The Western African nations are more willing to bring a change while the central African nations lack this determination. The President's stand is also somewhat ambiguous. While Macron on one occasion stated that CFA is a non-issue, at another event Macron and the President of Ivory Coast said that they will transform the CFA system and obligations like the deposition of 50% of foreign exchange reserves with France. There exists a will among West African nations to end CFA in favour of one single currency called Eco; the program aimed to achieve a major milestone by 2019-20 but got delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Though this system looks for change, that would not be an end of French control of the region and will only happen when it gets a nod from the French government, as has been the case in the past i.e.,

whenever the terms of CFA were altered, it was with the consent of Paris. For example, following the independence of CFA nations, they were obliged to keep 100% of their Foreign Exchange reserves with France but then with a nod from France, it was brought down to 65% in 1973 and then 50% in 2005 (Chowdhury & Sundaram, 2022). So even though the system changed it was with the will of France. So, it is anticipated that even if the system has to end, French benefits will not be compromised.

The public opinion on Macron’s outlook on Africa is extremely divided as some people believe that he genuinely wants to reform Franco-African relations, while others call him a modern-day De Gaulle because of his high ambitions, which can’t be fulfilled without Africa as his geopolitical backyard. As former French Prime Minister Jacques Godfrain put it “... A little country [France], with a small amount of strength, we can move a planet because [of our] relations with 15 or 20 African countries ...” (Riley, 2016). Another recent economic development is that China has taken over France in terms of bilateral trade and is pouring in investments in the region. In the year 2000, France was the largest economic partner of these countries and as of 2022 it has been thoroughly replaced by China but again this challenge loses its edge as France controls the governments of the region and determines the monetary policy thus keeping a check on Chinese ambitions (The French History Podcast, 2022). Also, to tame China, France has increased its cooperation with India in the Indo-Pacific.

**Figure 5:** Chinese FDI Stock in and Flows to Africa (in billion USD) (Fu, 2021)

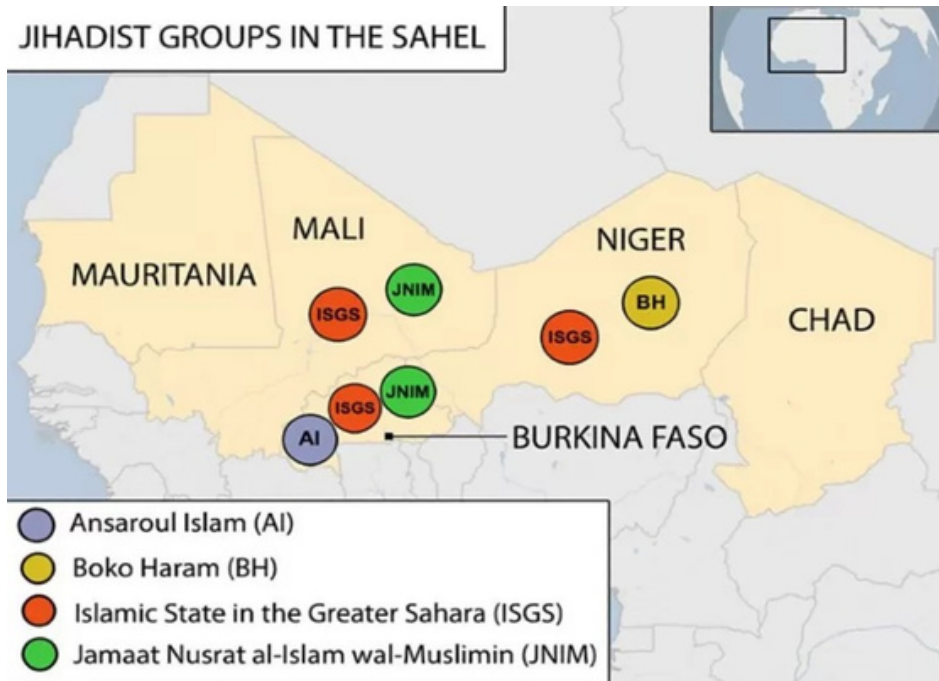


*Note:* Sourced from <https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/the-quiet-china-africa-revolution-chinese-investment/>

The takeover of Mali by a Russian-backed Anti-France junta government in 2021 is a major political challenge to France but it is determined to retake the fallen fortress and for that, it counts on the economic, socio-cultural and security aspects of her relations with Mali. Although the French have got the ultimatum to leave Mali, they are counting on anti-government rebels for their return, which is a serious possibility considering that the security conditions of the region provide it with the grounds to make a comeback. Also, the French MNCs operating in Mali make way for the security of French economic gains.

The steep rise of terrorist activities in the Sahel region, which constitutes 9 francophone countries has created great challenges to the political, economic, socio-cultural and security interests of France. The French government is in no mood to take it lightly and it gets more complicated as to take over the terrorist belt, it requires direct and prolonged military involvement in the region which is not a very popular idea for many in France as hundreds of French personnel have laid their lives on foreign lands without gaining much success. Even after some major operations by France which killed terrorists like Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, the region still serves as a haven for terrorists and is one of the most disturbed in the world (Pandit, 2022) Also, French military operations have lost popular support from sub-Saharan nations because people there believe that France has failed to deliver in its fight against terrorism. Also, France has been accused of keeping local army men on the front lines in risky operations which lead to more native army men dying and thus causing uproar in some nations like Burkina Faso. Even after all this, Macron has not changed his firm stand on the issue of security and is determined to keep fighting terrorism in the region.

**Figure 6:** Jihadist groups in the Sahel (Al-Lami, 2020)



*Note:* Sourced from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52614579.amp>

### **Analysis, is there a modern French empire?**

The existence of a modern French empire can be argued by looking at the various aspects of the relationship between France and Africa. Even though Sub-Saharan African Nations are sovereign, they are still subservient to France. This one-sided relationship was built in connivance with African leaders, some of whom were only interested in retaining power and thus agreed on every dictate of France. While others were hopeful that with French aid their nations would flourish, this hope was shared with the common people who had opted for slow and guided freedom under France.

The French promise of a prosperous Africa and a mini-Paris in all mining towns providing raw material supplies to France is anything but true. Looking at the statistics of various indexes measuring different parameters of prosperity, one can say that Africa has not gained anything but has only given riches to France. Considering the HDI index 2021, one can conclude that the conditions in the region are pathetic, in the ranking of 189 nations, Gabon is the only country which is below 145 in the 119th position, which is not very satisfactory. It becomes worse when



one looks at Mali and Burkina Faso in the 184th and 182nd positions, while Niger and Central African Republic lie at the last on the 189th and 188th ranks, respectively, while France is at the 26th rank. In the ranking of 189 nations for GDP per capita, the Central African Republic is in the 185th position while the other states all rank in proximity and France again is far ahead (Human Development Index (HDI) by country 2022, n.d.). Similarly, these countries are failing to perform well on the democracy index of Africa as well. Out of the 44 African nations, the Central African Republic is in the 43rd position while Chad is in the 42nd position (Kamer, 2022). Many of these francophone states have military juntas ruling them, such as Burkina Faso and Mali. This is so because after independence these mineral-rich nations and their governments did not work for the people of their nations but for French profits, and governments who did not fit well in this framework were overthrown and replaced by pro-French leadership. This arrangement in which France is flourishing at the cost of a failing Africa is a distinctive reflection of an imperialist relation in which the concurred or colonised country serves the needs of the master nation by suffering on its own; this shows how France retains her colonial empire in partiality.

Coloniality has also played a significant role in ensuring the deep-rooted French control in the region as generation after generation believe that their people and their nations are subservient to the French. This mental colonialism is so strong that individuals even now believe that local unresolved problems might or can be solved by the French. The following instances from Burkina Faso reflect the same- when a student asked President Macron what he intended to do about the frequent power cuts in the nation and on another occasion, he was asked about the malfunctioning of the air conditioners in a school (Jacinto, 2017). Replying to the first question, he said that France should not be pointed out whenever a problem surfaces as they are no more a colonial power while on the other occasion, he pointed out to the President of Burkina Faso, saying that he was the right person to answer.

France has in the past held a European land empire but due to wars and the empire being less profitable, it went on to create an overseas colonial empire. When faced with the challenge of falling due to de-colonialization, it was transformed into a neo-colonial empire which has to date been a successful attempt to retain control of the resources and economy of the former colonial nations and has outlived challenges like rising nationalism, regionalism, the cold war, etc.

This is because France had proper plans in place after the Second World War to keep her empire afloat. Though there are growing modern challenges across different arenas like in the economy from China, in politics from rising nationalism, jihadism and involvement of Russia in the region, as well as national and international criticism of French neo-colonialism. For example, the Deputy Prime Minister of Italy said that “ *France has never stopped colonizing Africa and its colonial-style policies in Africa are impoverishing Africans*”, (Mbamalu, 2019) and the Prime Minister of Italy also accused France of commanding considerable sway over its former colonies in Africa and being responsible for several problems faced by them (Gordon, 2022) but the trends show that the fall of the modern-day French empire won't be easy and it won't be anytime soon.

As there is a major difference in the sway of France across its neo-colonial empire in Africa, it might not meet the fate of the erstwhile state of the USSR or the Napoleonic Empire. On one hand, West Africa shows more dynamism and will to separate from France, while central Africa does not, as in the case of the CFA system. Also, this control of France on her neo-colonial empire is so complex that even if one dimension of this control comes under threat, the others play a significant role to restore it. For instance, though Mali has since 2021 slipped off the hands of France politically but the French control of her resources and monetary policy remains strong and the French intelligence is also working against terrorists in the region at the same time. With the support of other countries in the region, France is trying to reassert its geopolitical dominance there while also working on bringing a Paris-backed government to the general election due in 2024. Likewise, though China has become a major player in the markets of sub-Saharan Africa and has thus invited the attention of the US, India and Japan in the region, the French interest remains intact because the political control, resources and security of the region largely lie in the hands of the same. Thus, one can say, by using all sorts of tactics France has successfully retained control of her empire.

The prolonged interference and control of France during the colonial and post-colonial periods in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa have brought the world system theory into implementation in the region as the Sub-Saharan nations serve as the periphery states and supply cheap raw material and labour force to France, which acts as the core state that gets advantages from the periphery.

This French influence is facing resistance from the youth across the peripheral countries, which are voicing their anger against French hegemony (Fröhlich, 2020). However, they are neither sure nor united on what sort of change they wish for; if it is political change, economic transformation, socio-cultural shift or are they looking to end the French influence holistically; this confusion has weakened their claims. Moreover, they are not certain about what to opt for once the French influence and interference are gone. Will they look towards the west for support against terrorism and domestic issues or towards Russia just as Mali did or to someone else?

Moreover, will the side they choose not try and build a new hegemony? Another alternative is that they can go on without external support but in this case, their survival comes into question as they are too weak. For instance, Chad has one of the highest levels of hunger in the world. Also, many of the CFA countries have a rating below average in the ranking of fragile states- these include Chad, Burundi, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Niger, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mauritania, Togo, Djibouti and Rwanda (Failed States 2022, n.d.). Due to prolonged exploitation and continued backwardness, these nations have become so fragile that some face the threat of meeting the same end as Afghanistan at the hands of jihadist groups operating in the Sahel and therefore need the assistance of French troops. Also, the countries of the West and Central CFA Zone have witnessed interstate conflicts like civil wars and revolts (Chouala & Ayangafac, 2008), (Kuerschner, 2013) and would have faced the same fate as that of Yemen or Libya but the French intervention to protect their interests prevented such conditions. For instance, the French troops fought in Mali to ensure that the government of Mali retains its hold over the regions which slipped out of its control, as this would ensure French dominance remains intact (Nelson, 2016). Thus, France has not allowed these states to fail and at the same time is keeping them fragile enough to ensure the survival of the French Empire in Sub-Saharan Africa and this has led to the creation of a vicious cycle in which the CFA zone countries are being exploited for the advantage of France, which is very much in line with the world system theory.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis shows the dire condition of francophone African countries- this is largely because of the French rule and exploitation of Africa even after the independence of these countries by

policies charted by the French Government. Unlike them, if one looks at the African commonwealth nations, it could be seen that they have done significantly better than the former French colonies in different areas and are better placed in almost all indexes; they are truly sovereign and thus actually free. A basic difference that reflects their better status is the much greater student diaspora that they have than the CFA countries. This difference is because the governments of former British colonies functioned much more freely than the governments of former French colonies. This was in turn because of the difference in approaches of the British and French governments in the post-2nd World War era. Britain under the Labour Party headed by Attlee decided to dissolve the empire and create a commonwealth of nations in which the former colonies would work together with free will. In the words of the late Queen Elizabeth, it is a family of equals (Newton, 2022), as the government wanted to concentrate on issues in the UK. On the other hand, France under De Gaulle decided to reassert control back on her colonies. Thus, in the name of transformation from colonialism to cooperation, France brought the neo-colonial empire in place which is more vicious than colonialism because of the official invisibility of the other country that controls vital aspects of the suppressed nations. This official absence of the oppressor makes neo-colonialism harsher and stronger than colonialism; the external power (ex-colonial master-France) is no more directly involved in the day-to-day affairs of the former colonies, the neo-colonial power does not have the burden of handling the governmental aspects in the subjugated nation or being answerable to the problems of the people. No direct use of hard power to control these nations is needed, thus bringing down the maintenance cost of the colonies of the neo-colonial empire, thus making neo-colonialism more profitable.

Throughout elections, French Presidents and presidential candidates have talked about changing the relationship with CFA zone countries but as they come into power, they seem to do nothing constructive. African leaders have also in recent times shown more desire to leave the system and move on. This continued hold of France on its former sub-Saharan colonies shall come to an end as no empire lasts forever. The neo-colonial empire of France emerged as a measure to delay the declining control of France over its former colonies, its control would come to an end over a while, but the memory of colonial rule shall always remain. The greatest threat to the modern French empire comes from Pan-Africanism, though it is not a very strong force but it can certainly be a future prospect that can liberate former French colonies from the grip of the French state.

Nationalism can also be a way out of the French influence, and these two can be the best options as they will ensure the true sovereignty of the region, which will lead them to the path of progress.

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