



THE END OF FRANÇAFRIQUE: A SECOND DECOLONISATION WAVE IN AFRICA

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On 28 November 2024, Chad formally declared in a press communiqué to terminate the defence accord with France which had been in place since 1976. This announcement came only a couple of hours after the visit of French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Noël Barrot, to N'Djaména. On the same day, the Senegalese president Bassirou Diomaye Faye announced that France would close its military bases in Senegal, as their presence is incompatible with the country's sovereignty. Both African countries were long regarded as being stable allies of France on the African continent and pillars of the elite-centred network of economic, political, and military influences that Paris has been maintaining with most of its former colonies. The end of military cooperation with Chad and Senegal is thus another bitter blow for French foreign policy. This is all the more so as it follows a prevailing trend in francophone West and Central Africa: the open rejection of the so-called Françafrique. Propelled by the emergence of a multipolar world order and harnessed by anticolonial narratives, we are witnessing a new era of African sovereigntism that is closing the chapter of postcolonial special relationship between France and Africa.

Since the 1960's, France has maintained exceptionally close relations with its former colonies and other francophone countries in West and Central Africa, especially on the military, economic, monetary and diplomatic level. This so-called Françafrique especially manifested itself in latent, hidden or sometimes even overt political interference, the pegging of the common currencies, the CFA francs, in Central and West Africa first to the French franc and then the Euro, a privileged access to natural resources, and the permanent presence of French troops and military bases.

It was reflected by the close personal relationships between French and African presidents and elites in general (Tarrit & Noirot 2014).

Whereas, over the last decades, the end of Françafrique has been repeatedly announced by several French presidents—mainly with the intention to reduce the budgetary burden of their country's Africa policy—the current developments are different: this time, the move to reshape the Franco-African relationship originates from the African continent. Although in 2023, Paris has declared its intention to progressively restructure and



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downsize its military presence in Africa, Chad and Senegal's decisions have been made over the French government's head. In Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the military juntas that came into power between 2020 and 2023 have even actively forced out French troops and completely broken the diplomatic relations with their former colonial power.

Why is this "historical turn", to cite Chad's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abderaman Koulamallah, coming now? What factors have been triggering this development, 65 years after the French colonies in West and Central



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Africa became formally independent states?

A first element to consider is the rise in Africa of an active young generation who is well-informed and well-connected via social media, and who is not only advocating but pushing for a real change. This also applies to the new generation of young African political leaders who were born many years after the decolonization. Unlike the older generation of politicians, they have not known the personal benefits and privileges offered in return of low-cost mining concessions, interference into domestic politics or the permanent deployment of French troops on their territory. What they have seen instead are yearlong military operations with no tangible outcomes or improvements for the population or the exploitation of natural resources by French companies while their countries remain only poorly developed. This “harsh disenchantment with the reality of the ‘France-Africa partnership’” (Akrimi 2023) is a major driver behind these new political elite’s as well as the broad population’s quest for terminating asymmetric relations and entering relationships at eye level.

A major facilitator is the emergence of a multipolar world order, reflected in the increasing role of other international actors on the African continent, such as China, Russia, Turkey or the Gulf States, which is offering more alternatives and new opportunities for African countries to shift partner. With no colonial burden on the African continent, these partners offer cooperation on the economic or military level while exercising restraint with regard to domestic affairs. Moreover, they do not link their support to any values-based conditions that usually come along with Western assistance. What the new partners are asking for instead is rather clear-cut, such as diplomatic support at the international level, access to energy markets, or mining concessions (EU Parliament 2024).

With the exception of the three Sahel military juntas and despite the growing anti-French sentiments, the current dynamics are however not intended to completely break with France (Wilén 2024). In the press communiqué from 28 November 2024, the Chadian Minister of Foreign Affairs underlined that “[his] government wishes to emphasise that this decision in no way calls into question the historic relations and ties of friendship between the two nations” (République du Tchad 2024 – translated by the author). The focus is however placed on the necessity for Chad to “assert its full sovereignty and redefine its strategic partnerships in line with national priorities” (ibid. – translated by the author). In a similar manner, the Senegalese president made clear that this is not an act of “rupture” but that he is in favour of a “renewed partnership” with the former colonial power and historic ally (Le Figaro 2024). What these countries want is to terminate the somewhat exclusive ties with France that only follow French strategic and economic interests and to assert their status as sovereign states.

The year 2025 will be a decisive one for Françafrique.

It can be anticipated that the “historic turn” is set to continue in 2025, and we will see more African countries following. One already has. In his end-of-year speech, Côte d’Ivoire’s president Alassane Ouattara has already followed Chad and Senegal’s example by announcing too the departure of French troops in January 2025 (Le Monde 2024). With the closure of the French military bases in Chad, Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire, France now only maintains a military presence in Gabon and Djibouti. In a declaration made on 6 January 2025, President Emmanuel Macron has replied to these recent requests to end French military presence by accusing its former colonies of ingratitude

(Elysée 2025). His statement—full of anger and delivered in a condescending tone—incited further indignation in Africa. Instead of showing sensitivity and understanding for the African quest for sovereignty and trying to adapt the French Africa policy to the changing context of a multipolar world order, Macron has most likely added even more fuel to the fire. In doing so, he is taking a clear risk that the shift in France-Africa relations will affect other areas too, such as economy and trade.

France's industry is reliant on African natural resources, and the special access to these resources that it has thus far enjoyed is of significant strategic importance. The French nuclear industry, for instance, is highly dependent on uranium imports from Niger. It is likely that after ending the military cooperation, African countries will try to reduce their economic dependency on France while diversifying their ties with other partners. As a consequence, France would have to look for new sources and partners in a context of increasing global competition.

Some countries in West and Central Africa may even consider pulling out of the CFA franc. Created in 1945 by the former colonial power, the CFA franc has been maintained as two common currencies in West Africa and in Central Africa. Both CFA francs are criticised for being controlled by France, as countries using these currencies must deposit half of their foreign exchange reserves with the French Treasury. Although this requirement was ended for the West African CFA franc in 2020, the persistent practice of pegging it to the euro makes it impossible for the member states of the two monetary zones to develop independent monetary policies. The idea of exiting the CFA franc zone as a move towards more monetary sovereignty has already been expressed by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. It was also one of the points

raised by Senegal's Bassirou Diomaye Faye during his election campaign in 2024 and the possibility continues to loom in 2025.

In conclusion, the current trend of francophone African states independently redefining and reorganising their relations with France is emerging as a second wave of decolonisation. This wave is driven by the request to be finally respected as sovereign states that are free to choose the partners they want to cooperate with. The EU, as one of Africa's traditional development partners, should listen to these aspirations and offer a partnership that is based on and respects mutual interests if they want to remain engaged with Africa. The necessity for a reorientation is even more urgent as France used to be the major driver behind the EU's Africa policy. Moreover, the pattern of states striving towards greater sovereignty is echoing beyond francophone Africa, throughout other

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parts of the continent. One illustration of this is the desire of more and more African states to join the BRICS alliance. While in January 2024, Egypt and Ethiopia officially became BRICS members, in October 2024 three other African countries—Algeria, Nigeria and Uganda—were invited to participate as partner countries. Senegal has applied for membership and numerous other African countries have expressed a similar interest. The primary appeal of the BRICS alliance is precisely its rejection of Western hegemonic claims, its advocacy for a non-interventionist

multipolar world order and the respect of national sovereignty (Rahmawati et al 2024). In light of these prevailing trends and evolving dynamics, it is becoming evident that these geopolitical developments in Africa are likely to persist and even intensify in 2025.

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