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Building new relations between France and Africa

A contribution from the Tournons La Page movement



TOURNONS LA PAGE
Pour l'alternance démocratique en Afrique

France is at a turning point in its relations with African societies. The announcement of the withdrawal of Barkhane forces from Mali and the growing rejection of the French presence in the countries of the former «pré-carré» show that the status quo is no longer possible.

The movement of mistrust towards France is deep, popular. It is fed by the colonial legacy, the arrogance of the French elites and the support of Paris to dictatorial regimes. But also from a permanent military presence, from deep misjudgments about the nature of conflicts or from the closure of borders and visa restrictions. To reduce these demonstrations to a simple manipulation of opinions by foreign powers or governments in search of legitimacy, as the French authorities still too often do, is ultimately a denial of reality.

The deep desire of African citizens to be sovereign, to determine the course of their history, and aspire to democracy, freedom, gender equality and social justice. Everywhere, youth mobilizations oppose electoral manipulations, demand respect for constitutional rules - notably the limitation of the number of presidential terms-, reject dynastic powers. They denounce the responsibility of African elites in the capture of resources and put the issues of anti-corruption and accountability at the heart of their demands. The recent coups d'état in the Sahel, sometimes based on these mobilizations, will not break the popular aspirations. But this time again, as during the «Arab Spring», the French public authorities have not taken the measure of these movements, of their strength and of the profound political and societal changes they bring about.



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**« THE SPEECHES ANNOUNCING,
EACH TIME, «THE END OF
FRANÇAFRIQUE» ARE NO
LONGER SUFFICIENT »**

A few milestones have been reached in recent years, with progress on memorial issues - recognition of the crimes of colonization and of French responsibility for the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, for example - or on the need to return looted cultural property. The recent Africa-France summit in Montpellier put aside the old dictators to give other voices a chance to speak, from civil society, the economic world, intellectuals or the diaspora. But these openings are not enough to trace a path of rupture. They have not transformed France's relationship with its former colonies, nor the perception that African peoples have of them. The speeches announcing, each time, «the end of Françafrique» are no longer sufficient.

Tournons La Page on these asymmetrical relations and forging new ties with Africa requires a profound rethinking of French foreign policy. First of all, France must abandon the posture that it has an African «vocation». A refoundation of relations between France and the African continent necessarily requires a political and military «withdrawal» of Paris, by simply accepting that France is a partner among others and that the history of Africa can also be written without France. The scope and horizon of this step aside, as well as the modalities of its realization, must be debated. Symbolic measures - such as putting an end to the Africa-France summits - are necessary. But this will must be translated into concrete actions on military, democratic, economic or memorial issues. It must be accompanied by a profound institutional and doctrinal overhaul, based on a few principles:


- Put **democracy, human rights, accountability and the rule of law at the heart of French foreign policy**, in Africa as elsewhere.
- **To respect the independence and sovereignty of African peoples**, and therefore their capacity to decide on their political and economic trajectory as well as their alliances, and to **show humility regarding France's alleged duties**, in order to put an end to posturing and injunctions.
- To open, in France, a **democratic debate** on the reorganization of foreign policy in Africa, by associating parliaments - French and African - and by giving full scope to **dialogue with civil society**.
- Favouring **multilateral approaches** to security, environmental and economic issues. Responses to climate issues, development financing, the fight against tax evasion or the regulation of multinationals are necessarily part of international cooperation.
- Put **justice** - social, fiscal, climate - at the heart of France's action in international forums, by ensuring **policy coherence**, in the fields of public aid, foreign trade, taxation or agricultural policy. An ambitious international cooperation policy must be assumed before citizens as the means to succeed in economic, social, democratic and ecological transformations on a global scale. In other words, make **international solidarity** a mode of action to build the «living together».



Credit : tournonslapage.org/en/outils-et-ressources

There is no naivety in this approach to international politics, and the powers that are taking advantage of French difficulties to establish themselves in Africa are also defending their own interests, sometimes at the cost of the worst exactions. But trying to maintain, at all costs, a «rank» of great power by defending a supposedly «natural» zone of influence is a chimera. This policy is now colliding with African realities. On the contrary, being lucid means giving priority today to multilateral approaches in order to influence the evolution of the world - as France was able to do with the Paris Agreement - and to contribute to the emergence of global responses to economic, environmental, health or security crises.

Paradoxically, the rejection of the French presence is such today in Africa that it is in the trivialization of its foreign policy with the continent and in the affirmation of these principles that Paris will be able - perhaps - to regain influence there.



1

Putting democracy, human rights, accountability and the rule of law at the heart of foreign policy

The French orientation and programming law on development policy and international solidarity of August 4, 2021 explicitly mentions the defense of fundamental freedoms, the promotion of democratic values, the rule of law and support for good governance mechanisms. The challenge today is to give concrete expression to these orientations in public statements and to equip ourselves with the tools for an ambitious policy of support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Contributing to the strengthening of the rule of law and checks and balances means building long-term stability.

This is no longer the time for muted interventions; French foreign policy must be legible and visible. Having a voice that carries weight on issues of democracy and human rights, putting an end to «double standards» diplomacy, including with respect to governments that may be our allies on the security front, is an imperative for restoring the credibility of French diplomacy. It is not a matter of imposing democratic processes from outside, but of taking strong positions, assuming the consequences on the economic or diplomatic field, and of supporting those who are committed to the defense of human rights.

**« THIS IS NO LONGER
THE TIME FOR MUTED
INTERVENTIONS »**

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- **Systematically, publicly and strongly denounce human rights violations and adopt a real policy of protection and reception of human rights defenders**, with the organization of the reception and support of threatened persons and the establishment of «focal points» in embassies.
 - **Deploy a genuine feminist diplomacy**, committed to supporting the fight against sexist and sexual violence, against discrimination and gender inequality and for access to sexual and reproductive rights.
 - **Condemn all attempted coups**, whether **military or constitutional, and electoral manipulation**. Adopt common positions within the European Union and the United Nations to establish a regime of personalized sanctions (travel bans, asset freezes, etc.) against officials of regimes who maintain themselves in power and/or are guilty of human rights violations.
 - **Create a «Permanent Delegation for Human Rights and International Cooperation» within the French Parliament**, based on the model of the European Parliament's DROI sub-committee or the German Bundestag's «Commission on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid». More generally, strengthen the means of parliamentary groups to monitor and control French foreign policy.

2

Demilitarizing relations between France and Africa

Credit : Flickr - 17-07-17-Operation Irelana_008 - MINUSMA / Harandane Dicko

African crises are very often, in the first place, crises of citizenship to which France responds today with an exclusively security approach, in great confusion as to the real nature of the threats. The «war on terror» has become an absolute imperative of African policy, giving the military apparatus primacy over the diplomatic apparatus and over development cooperation. Governments involved in the fight against jihadism benefit from a security «rent» that guarantees them both financial support and a total absence of condemnation of rights violations for which they may be held responsible. Any consideration other than security, particularly in terms of human rights, has become inaudible or secondary for the French authorities.

**« IT IS NOW NECESSARY TO
REVIEW THE ENTIRE FRENCH
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COOPERATION IN AFRICA »**

The stalemate of the conflict in the Sahel and the withdrawal of French troops from Mali demonstrate the failure of this approach. The redeployment of military forces to Niger or other countries in the region is not a sustainable solution either. The failure of Operation Barkhane should, on the contrary, be the occasion for a broad public debate on the issues at stake in the Sahel and, more broadly, on the maintenance of French military bases in Africa and on the principles and doctrine of French external interventions. It is now necessary to review the entire French policy of military and security cooperation in Africa and to recognize that it is impossible for France to intervene alone. In the same way, a broad citizen debate is necessary on the place of arms sales in French foreign, commercial, diplomatic and security policy.

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- **Clarify France's position on military engagement in foreign conflicts**, by defining precisely the rules and modalities, in particular **by reaffirming the principle of placing all such interventions under the mandate and command of the United Nations**. Precede any military intervention with a debate and a vote in Parliament, to be renewed each year to authorize its extension.
 - **Increase transparency in military and security cooperation** by including these issues in the annual report to Parliament on French arms sales, which must itself become exhaustive so that parliamentary control can truly be exercised. New military cooperation agreements, particularly those signed over the last ten years with the Sahel countries, must be made public.
 - **Prohibit the export of surveillance, security and law enforcement equipment to regimes that may use them to repress** peaceful demonstrations or to neutralize associative and political activities. Similarly, end all forms of support, including through military or security cooperation, to regimes responsible for rights violations.



3

Changing the paradigm in the support to civil societies

At the Africa-France summit in Montpellier, the staging of a direct dialogue with civil society is a communication success that carries the message of a «break with Françafrique» of dictators and occult networks. In reality, the initiative is deeply out of step with the dynamics of youth and civic and democratic movements. It confines the upheavals of African societies to the fields of the economy and digital technology. Above all, it masks a real retreat in political dialogue, while the spaces for discussion with French and African organizations have shrunk considerably over the past decade. French public authorities remain reluctant to engage in dialogue with actors who have ambitions for political and social transformation, and even more reluctant to finance them. The funds devoted to strengthening civil societies are now derisory.

To go beyond declarations of principle, French cooperation must break with its very conservative stance on governance issues, which reduces democracy to administrative reforms and the proper functioning of the state apparatus, when it is not used as a screen for liberalization policies. France must provide concrete support to movements and organizations committed to the promotion of democracy, the defense of rights and freedoms, and social justice.

**« THE FUNDS DEVOTED
TO STRENGTHENING CIVIL
SOCIETIES ARE NOW DERISORY »**

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- **Renew the dialogue** between the government, parliamentarians, embassies and African civil societies, in their diversity.
 - **Increase the share of official development assistance (ODA) channeled through international solidarity organizations** and make it possible to fully fund the actions of human rights organizations, as is the case for humanitarian emergency action.
 - **Increase direct support to civil society movements and organizations in the South** committed to the promotion of democracy, social justice, the defense of rights and freedoms or the fight against corruption and, more generally, **increase the share of public aid devoted to strengthening the rule of law and checks and balances** (parliaments, media, etc.).



4

**Defending an approach
to migration centered
on human dignity,
human security and the
universality of rights**

Credit : Flickr - UNHCR / E. Hockstein / August, 2009

France and the European Union are locked into a security-based management of migration. They try, by all means, to control and constrain them. Yet, they are an inescapable dimension of our globalized societies and very often the consequence of climatic crises, of the confiscation of political and economic power, of repression and of the resulting lack of perspectives for young people. Instead of accompanying these migrations, European countries are shirking their responsibilities by making official development assistance or the issuing of visas conditional on the implementation, by African countries themselves, of migration control and readmission policies. The right to live with one's family and the right to asylum, in particular, are called into question by successive legislation on family reunification and the outsourcing of borders to countries where human rights are flouted. Strategies that increase the precarity of migrants are attacks to dignity, as well as obstacles to integration.

These very costly policies are not effective. They result in an increase in deaths or disappearances on the roads to exile, the generalization of violations of the fundamental rights of migrants along the migratory route, the systematization of detention centers and the criminalization of exiles and those who come to their aid. They create a «security rent» for the governments that implement them.

It is urgent to break with the rhetoric of the African «demographic bomb» or the risk of «migratory submersion» and, on the contrary, to recognize the positive contribution of migration, both for the host countries and for the countries of departure. The overhaul of migration policy is essential to re-establish a relationship between societies. And there will be no French policy of influence in the world without an assumed policy of mobility.

**« THE OVERHAUL OF MIGRATION
POLICY IS ESSENTIAL TO RE-
ESTABLISH A RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN SOCIETIES »**

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- **Renounce policies of externalization of borders and readmission agreements**, first and foremost with countries responsible for human rights violations, and stop making official development aid, whether French or European, conditional on the implementation of repressive migration policies.
 - **Promote and finance the conditions for a dignified and unconditional reception** and social and civic integration of exiles-e-s, in particular unaccompanied minors. Allow free choice of the country in the Schengen area where exiles wish to file an asylum application.
 - **Open up legal migration channels** by granting more visas, especially for African students, encourage circular migration and increase exchange schemes.

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Paris — 18 mai 2021

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18 mai 2021



**Carrying the ambitious
agenda of a fairer
economic system**

Credit : Flicker - International Monetary Fund - Photo/Cyri Marcellhacy, 18th May 2021

All over Africa, populations are mobilizing against the confiscation of political power, but also against the corruption of elites, the confiscation of resources and economic predation. The challenges of mobilizing internal resources, financing social sectors, economic and monetary sovereignty, fighting poverty and inequality, redistributing wealth or fighting corruption and tax evasion are also democratic challenges: making development policies, taxation or investment priorities a subject of public debate is part of the conditions for political changeover.

The CFA franc is today one of the most symbolic but also the most concrete colonial legacies, which crystallizes the rejection of the French presence in Africa. It has undoubtedly brought a certain monetary stability to the countries that share this currency, but at the price of giving up important economic steering levers, a loss of competitiveness and French supervision over the management of foreign exchange reserves and convertibility control. Today, this is a major obstacle to the expansion of regional integration. The recent announcement of a reform of the system, which for the moment concerns only the West African zone, is a first step, but without breaking the links or restoring the monetary sovereignty of the countries concerned. It is now time to definitively turn the page on this mechanism for the entire Franc zone.

The rebuilding of relations between France and Africa also requires a greater commitment within the international financial institutions so that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank abandon their regressive economic conditionalities. Greater investment by Paris in multilateral negotiations on trade, taxation or climate change is necessary, if it does not defend its own interests alone but a community of interests with the poorest countries. But here again, a change of posture is needed: France can no longer be «the voice of Africa» or that of developing countries, but must use its influence to ensure that these countries are really at the negotiating table. It must become involved in cooperation dynamics within multilateral spaces, in particular the United Nations, which alone have the legitimacy to advance methods, governance and instruments of international law and contribute to the resolution of conflicts.

**« FRANCE CAN NO LONGER BE «THE VOICE OF AFRICA»
OR THAT OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, BUT MUST USE ITS
INFLUENCE TO ENSURE THAT THESE COUNTRIES ARE REALLY
AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE. »**

- **Give total independence to the central banks of the CFA zones**, without French representation or intervention. States that currently share the CFA franc must be able to regain their total monetary sovereignty, decide on a fixed or floating parity of their currency with the euro or any other international currency - possibly a basket of currencies - and define the rules of their eventual monetary integration.
- **Refuse any conditioning of aid to the economic, migration and security interests of France and the European Union.** Make official aid more effective in the fight against poverty and inequality **by increasing the share of grants** - France is currently one of the OECD countries with the highest share of loans in official aid -, by targeting **the poorest countries and the most fragile states**, by significantly increasing the share of ODA devoted to **basic social sectors** and by supporting inclusive and resilient development models that contribute to the realization of human rights and food sovereignty of populations.
- **Recognize the co-responsibility of lenders - including France - in the way debt crises are created** and cancel all debts resulting from loans granted to States whose leaders are responsible for misappropriation. **Promote a multilateral mechanism for restructuring sovereign debts**, independent of creditors, transparent and binding, which gives priority to human rights and the satisfaction of the basic needs of populations.
- **Revise bilateral tax treaties between France and African countries**, which are often very favorable to the interests of multinational companies, support countries that commit to fairer and more progressive tax reforms, and **support the strengthening of national tax administrations** in African countries in the fight against tax evasion.
- Act, in France and at the multilateral level, in favor of **tax transparency** (setting up public registers of beneficial owners and public country-by-country reporting of key information and taxes paid by multinationals) and promote the creation, within the United Nations, of an international tax body that would allow all States to participate in negotiations on reforms of the international tax system.
- The law on the **duty of care for multinationals**, adopted in 2017 by the French Parliament, is a major step forward. It creates a legally binding obligation for multinationals to identify and prevent violations of human rights, human health and safety, and the environment. France must now ensure its implementation, particularly by integrating the gender dimension, and bring these principles to the attention of the European Union, where a directive is currently being prepared.
- Increase the resources of the judiciary and the police specialized in the **fight against international corruption** and economic and financial crime. The adoption in 2021 of a legislative framework for the **restitution of «ill-gotten gains»** is an undeniable step forward, which must now be implemented through the effective application of the principles of transparency, accountability and the inclusion of civil society in the restitution process.



Making climate justice an issue of international solidarity

Credit : Unsplash.com - Yasmine Arfaoui - 10th October 2019

No region of the world escapes the impacts of the climate crisis, but the countries of the North, as well as the multinationals of the most emitting sectors, have a historical responsibility in the increase of global greenhouse gas emissions. The people who have contributed the least are the first victims, while having the least means to protect themselves. The fight against global warming is therefore now a question of climate justice, which implies addressing environmental and social issues together, giving developing countries the means to adapt to change and promoting other models of production and consumption. The richest countries, including France, must respect their commitments to finance climate transition policies and make a greater commitment to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

For African societies, the challenge is to ensure that the ecological transition is not made at their expense, through the creation of a «climate rent» for authoritarian governments that engage in greenwashing, through the low-cost extraction of mineral resources necessary for the energy transition or through a «circular economy» that would get rid of its waste on the continent. More broadly, «carbon offsetting» schemes should not allow the largest emitters to reduce their commitments cheaply.

- **No longer support the development of new fossil fuel extraction projects in Africa** and therefore put an **end to BPI France's export guarantees** for all oil and gas projects of French companies. The latest reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are very clear: in order to respect its climate commitments, the international community must stop the development of these new projects today.
- **Increase and prioritize climate change financing for the poorest countries**, focusing not only on reducing emissions but also on adaptation and compensation.



**Assuming the history
of France in Africa to
deconstruct the colonial and
post-colonial imagination**

Credit : Pexels.com - Emmanuel Ikwegbu - 27th July 2021

Colonial culture, racism and sexism remain deeply rooted in French society, which has great difficulty in facing the violence that has marked the history of France's relations with Africa. Presidents François Hollande and then Emmanuel Macron have paved the way for the recognition of some of these colonial and post-colonial crimes, as well as for a policy of restitution of cultural property looted during the colonial conquest. But the number of works actually returned remains too small to convince us of the true will to promote a policy of restitution. At the same time, new legislative provisions reduce access to the most sensitive classified archives, which become inaccessible without any time limit other than that decided by these same services. The «declassifications», carried out on an ad hoc basis, according to political imperatives, do not allow us to shed full light on the most troubled episodes of this colonial and post-colonial history.

These new restrictions on access hinder historical research on subjects that are essential to public debate and to the understanding of contemporary issues. Documenting, and ultimately acknowledging, the extent of colonial and post-colonial crimes is nevertheless a necessity for deconstructing the colonial imaginary and reconciling the memories of French and African societies. It is up to historians to undertake this memorial work, more than to official commissions, provided they are given the practical and financial means to do so.

Allow unrestricted access to all public archives at the end of the legal time limit - generally fifty years - and declare a principle of general derogation from this time limit (except in the case of justified exceptions) for all unclassified archives that concern relations between France and its «pre-square». For the latter, facilitate the declassification of all archives that are not directly related to external military operations.

**« IT IS UP TO HISTORIANS
TO UNDERTAKE THIS
MEMORIAL WORK »**

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- Allow **unrestricted access to all public archives at the end of the legal deadlines** - generally fifty years - and declare **a general exemption from these deadlines** for all unclassified archives that concern relations between France and Africa. Facilitate their declassification when they are not directly related to current external operations.
 - **Give French and African researchers the means to confront their work,** by multiplying research grants, academic exchanges and by organizing the sharing of archives that their digitization now allows.
 - **Implement the recommendations** of the report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, commissioned by the President of the Republic, on the restitution of African cultural heritage.



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