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France declared persona non grata in Africa

France, once considered a “key” partner in Africa, is now seeing its influence decline. The recent breakdown of military agreements with certain African countries, such as Chad and Senegal (which is looming on the horizon), is a striking example that extends the list that is part of a historical continuity.

The time of colonies is over, but the imprint of France, a former colonial power, remains palpable in Africa. Today, it no longer presents itself as a mistress, but as a supplicant seeking to join this continent in full transformation. Africa is asserting itself as a rising force, turning away from its former mentors to embrace new perspectives. France, at this crucial turning point, must choose between adapting or disappearing. Its former “military bases”, once perceived as centers of influence, risk becoming marginal entities, symbolizing a necessary strategic repositioning. These occupying forces sent to Africa, once “insiders” have today become “outsiders”, wandering the continent like individuals in exile without a soil. Thus, among many other fairly important ones, the rupture of the defense cooperation agreements with Chad and Senegal, in addition to causing chaos within the government apparatus in Paris, is comparable to a grenade with the pin pulled, thrown into the legs of President Vladimir Putin’s adversary, flanked at the Elysée.

The French military presence in Africa appears as the symbol of the failure of an obsolete colonial model

This article explores the recent dynamics of France’s declining influence in Africa. Under Emmanuel Macron, France, often seen as a free-rider within the European Union and NATO, is facing increasing challenges. As geopolitical tensions with Russia escalate, the French

people may soon feel the economic consequences more acutely, with the need to change course becoming ever more urgent.

The colonial backlash: France, unwelcome ghost of a bygone past

For decades, France treated Africa as its privileged domain, a space shaped to its own interests through a military presence that symbolized its pervasive dominance. Today, this landscape has changed dramatically. What was once a badge of power is now seen as a burden, an unpleasant reminder of a colonial past that Africa seeks to leave behind. France, once in a position of strength, now adopts a supplicant posture to maintain its presence on a continent that increasingly rejects it. Defense agreements that were once imposed are now renegotiated or canceled, and local populations express frustration at interference that is perceived as foreign and intrusive. This transformation is illustrated by the metaphor of a ghost of the colonial past, whose shadow continues to weigh on international relations, fragile economies, and changing African societies. However, this ghost is now seen as an obstacle to African emancipation. The rejection of France can be explained by several factors: a deep anti-French sentiment intensified by neocolonial policies and military interventions, the quest of African countries for total sovereignty, and the rise of nationalist movements that see France as a brake on their ambitions. This is why the French military presence in Africa appears as the symbol of the failure of an obsolete colonial model. Mocking the legitimate aspirations of African peoples, the speed with which France is disappearing from the continent's geopolitical landscape is beyond the understanding of the Elysée's Tintin, who, in reaction to each sweep, convenes a council of moles to cast anathema on his close collaborators. In this situation, it is crucial to rely on key historical events, to listen carefully to African leaders expressing their discontent, and to compare this dynamic with other former colonial powers such as Great Britain or Belgium, the latter also being invited directly or indirectly to begin their withdrawal from the continent.

New reliable partners: when Africa turns to the East

Over the decades, France has positioned itself as Africa's exclusive partner, albeit undesired by local populations, paradoxically embodying the guarantor of its instability and underdevelopment. Today, this narrative of an exclusive partner seems less and less convincing as Africa seeks to consolidate its autonomy and diversify its partnerships. On the front line, Russia is strengthening its presence by offering weapons and military training, thus exploiting the African terrain to promote mutually beneficial interests while counterbalancing Western influence. At the same time, China has been able to seduce African leaders with ambitious financing for major infrastructure projects, without imposing the same political

obligations as France. Chinese infrastructure, such as roads, ports and dams, also symbolize a pragmatic and mutually beneficial partnership. France, once a hegemon, now finds itself challenged by powers it sees as rivals, with its so-called “universal values” of “democracy” and “human rights” pale in comparison to its own economic and geostrategic priorities. The new partners – Russia and China in the BRICS Alliance – with their emphasis on pragmatism and investments that not only please leaders but also have positive repercussions on local economies, are redefining the continent’s geopolitical landscape. In this strategic reconfiguration, corruption, a legacy of the colonial past, the fight against which facilitates the establishment of new alliances with partners working for shared development. Thus, Africa, compared to a market receptive to multiple proposals, sees its dynamics reinvented with Sino-African and Russian-African summits and cooperation agreements changing the international game.

Africa, a changing continent: France, helpless spectator of a new world

Africa, once perceived as immutable, is now transforming at a frantic pace, driven by a dynamic, educated and connected youth. This continent in full renaissance is challenging colonial vestiges and redefining its sovereignty by opening up to strategic partnerships, notably with Russia and China of the BRICS alliance, and by promoting technological growth and innovation. African metropolises are bubbling with new energy, propelling an ambitious middle class eager for change. Faced with this effervescence, France, the former guardian, observes, often disconnected from contemporary African realities, oscillating between a role of spectator and actor not even secondary, but accessory. While digital technologies revolutionize communication and social mobilization, a vibrant civil society is rising, defending human rights, ethical governance and environmental sustainability. Although faced with challenges such as population growth (which is an asset to be exploited, like China and India), climate change and social disparities, Africa is asserting itself with innovative solutions, inspired by a multipolar vision. To dream of becoming a partner again – something that no African wants anymore – France must reinvent itself and align itself with the emerging aspirations of this Africa in full metamorphosis, moving away from paternalistic approaches.

From the above, we can deduce that France, once the master of an African empire, is now seeing its influence collapse. Africa is freeing itself, while at the heels of France, which is forced to withdraw.

It can be said that France is now a lesser player in the African geopolitical and geostrategic chessboard.

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