



Dimensions
for Strategic Studies

Analytical Report



French presence in West Africa

Between the stimuli of domination and the hick-ups of staying

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Dimensions for Strategic Studies

Dimensions Centre for Strategic Studies (DCSS) is think tank, dedicated to the study of the Middle East and North Africa affairs, provides the Arab readers with a substantive insight on the region's political, economic and social issues and dynamics.

The DCSS was founded in the United Kingdom on January 2020 ,1, and is headquartered in London.

Dimensions Center for Strategic Studies is interested in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) affairs in particular, addressing influences the region has and the effects of this region's interactions with the rest of the world.

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Preamble

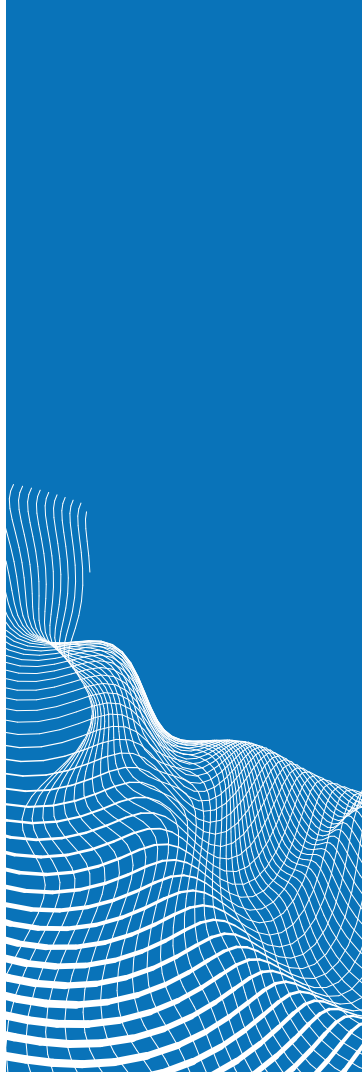
The history and geography of the West African region make it at a crossroads, and an area for the convergence of competing powers' interests in the West (US, EU, UK) and in the East (China, Russia, Turkey). It is no longer a secret that the circle of influence of France in its ancient colonies in the West African region is receding and shrinking. This decline is due to several factors, including France's arrogance towards its old colonies, and the entry of new actors with seductive means and tools to intensify competition.

In 1885, European leaders decided to divide Africa among themselves at the famous Berlin conference, with Britain and France getting the lion's share. A few years after the Berlin Declaration, France entered the West African region to extend its domination, where the idea of colonization began by seizing the territory of the region, sometimes through armed force, and sometimes by reaching protection agreements that put an end to local wars between groups and local communities.

In 1895, France founded an administrative entity, called the West Africa-France region, which comprised Senegal, the French Sudan (currently Mali), Guinea and the Ivory Coast. The entity headquarter was in Senegal.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, almost every West African region was colonized, with pockets of resistance emerging in some places, while a number of regions rejected the protection treaties offered by the French. Resistance has been fierce to those who stand in the way of their presence in the region, with a wave of repression, looting of resources, taxation and recruitment⁽¹⁾. The period of colonization of the region by France lasted until 1960. It was characterized by murder, extermination, theft of resources and heritage, and the obliteration of the identities of the peoples of the region along with the rooting of French culture.

(1) Colonisation de l'Afrique de L'Ouest, fasotour.fr: bit.ly/3DfVrM7.



French colonialism is described as the only colonialism that has maintained many of its economic, cultural and security interests in the areas under its control. This fact is particularly evident in the West African region, where France has for some time been the most influential actor in the economic, political and cultural life of the countries of the region. Paris has monetary cooperation agreements with the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), which consists of eight countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. Under the agreement, France benefited from depositing half of the region's central banks' foreign-exchange reserves with the French Treasury, in exchange for pegging the CFA franc to the former French franc, and later to the euro. Over time, France's interference in the affairs of Member States has escalated, while Paris has contributed, directly and indirectly, to the engineering of the region's systems of government.

France continues to have political and economic influence in the West African region, but Paris' focus on the countries of the region varies due to considerations of history, economics and geostrategic interests. The following countries are at the forefront of French attention in Africa:



Senegal:

This country is described as the historical, political and cultural memory of France in Africa. Historically, the relationship between Senegal and France differs from any other relationship Paris had in Africa. The French presence in Africa started in the Senegalese city of Sinloi in the 17th century. Thus, Sinloi is generally considered to be the first French colony on the continent.

It should be noted that, in 1872, the French colonial authorities granted the city of Sinloi the status of French municipality among the cities and municipalities of France overseas. As such, the inhabitants of the city had the right to French citizenship. Sinloi was the political capital of French colonialism in the West African region, and it housed the most important administrative and commercial facilities of colonialism in the region.

In addition, Senegal is regarded as one of the most prominent cognitive tributary of French education and culture in the region, where the first French schools of education were founded during the colonial period and they were the place for pupils and students from most parts of Africa, who after the departure of France, became the nucleus of the national state.



Ivory Coast:

This country is France's economic lung in the region, embracing its huge investments, and comes as France's second-largest trading partner in Sub-Saharan Africa, after South Africa. The volume of trade between the two sides last year was about 1.6 billion euros⁽²⁾.



Niger:

This country has occupied a special place in France's national security strategy since France began to control uranium production through Areva in 1971. Niger supplies France with 35% of its nuclear energy⁽³⁾ needs, which in turn contributes to 75% of French electricity.

(2) Relations Bilatérales, Côte d'Ivoire D'Ivoire, Direction générale du Trésor, 18/07/2022: bit.ly/3QtAdxu

(3) Syed Omar Weld Cheikhna, "Niger". riches in the blow of international conflicts », Al-Jazeera Net, 26/11/2015: bit.ly/3d0gE2h

Aspects of the French Failure

Recently, many African countries are witnessing an official and popular uprising against the so-called "colonial France", in the desire to liberate themselves from the French hegemony and achieve full independence and protect sovereignty from French arrogance.

Paris is no longer welcome in the West African region. For example, Malians hoisting French flags to celebrate their military avant-garde in 2013 to liberate the north and center of the country burned and treaded on them after the French military failure in the country.

The new generation of African youth believes that France applies immoral methods updated by the strategies of the new generation of colonialism, to maintain its influence and plunder the continent's resources, considering that Paris is trying to take advantage of the presence of many terrorist movements to preserve the legitimacy of the French presence, especially the military in the region, knowing that this French military presence in the Sahelian countries has greatly undermined security.

The main causes of African anger against France can be summarized as follows:

Refusal to apologize for the colonial era:

France is too arrogant in its view of Africa and insists on not apologizing for the colonial era. This perseverance is a source of African anger towards France. Most of the countries that colonized the continent had made great strides in that direction, with the exception of France, whose colonial past was more exploitative for Africans and their resources than for other colonial powers.

Double standards democracy:

Paris, which preached democracy and was forced upon it at the "Franco-African" summit in La Pole⁽⁴⁾, western France, in 1990, failed to tame Africans for a democratic model that would bring stability and support the course of democracy in Africa. Paris has been exposed in its claim to support African democracy, as it has become clear that its choices in the matter of democracy depend on who of its servants would be brought to power by democracy. Paris did not hesitate to participate in the overthrow of democratic political regimes by force, simply because it did not agree with them in politics.

(4) Andr  Laran, "Discours de La Baule", Herodote, 21/08/2021: bit.ly/3dayeAy.



Tightening immigration policies vis-à-vis Africans:

Policies tightening immigration vis-à-vis Africans have brought great indignation towards French governments by Africans, who consider that they have a debt against France, which requires it to open its doors to their immigrants wishing to enter French territory.

French military intervention in Mali failed:

More than nine years after being in Mali to confront jihadist groups, France completed its withdrawal from the country in August 2022 amid tension with the ruling military junta and growing popular hostility towards it. The French military failure in Mali has opened a wave of great anger among the peoples of the Sahel region, who have risen more than once against French forces and blamed them for the deterioration of security.

France's Competitors: Internal Attribution and Competition Areas

have leaned on a range of pillars to create a foothold on the continent, employing a rhetoric critical of the past and the implications of imperialist policies, and offering strategic projects and partnerships based on the principle of win-win partnership. France's failed policies in Africa gave way to Paris's rival powers. These forces

Among the most important tools implemented by the anti-France forces are the following:

Playing the card of the colonial past of France:

Some of the powers competing with Paris in Africa do not hesitate to dig up the colonial past of France and remind it of its crimes against the African peoples, considering that what it achieved of development and prosperity was at the expense of the oppression that it practiced against the African peoples.

Investing in neo-liberal forces:

France's rival powers bet on creating internal alliances, by paying attention to local powers that have come to strongly oppose the French presence in West Africa.



Soft Diplomacy: Anti-France

Anti-France forces adopt the principle of soft diplomacy towards Africa, in order to fill the vacuum left by the decline of Western influence. Such diplomacy relies on fruitful economic partnerships and investment in infrastructure, education and culture, many of which are careful not to interfere in the internal affairs of the countries of the brown continent.

France fears the growing activity of its competing eastern powers, which have reduced France's share of the region's commercial market and challenged it in deals and investments and other areas vigorously, where these powers have gained more influence and effectiveness. Among France's most prominent competitors in the region are:



China:

China has always made a lot of investments and worked in infrastructure cooperation in West Africa. In 2006, China was the largest commercial supplier to sub-Saharan Africa, with more than 10% of market share⁽⁵⁾.

China's strategy in Africa is based on three general characteristics, namely, the supply of raw materials, the search for political support from African countries in international forums, and access to African markets as new outlets for Chinese production.



Turkey:

The Turkish government adopted a policy of openness to Africa in 1998. Turkey's geopolitical isolation at the end of the Cold War has led its current leaders to seek new strategic alliances. As a result, the number of Turkish embassies in Africa rose from 12 in 2003 to 43 in 2022, the most recent in Togo.

Trade exchanges between Turkey and major francophone countries in West Africa are recovering strongly, with trade between Turkey and Côte d'Ivoire jumping by 67% in two years, while trade between Turkey and Senegal increased by 20% over the same period. During his participation in the "Senegal-Turkish" business forum in Dakar last February, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that trade between Turkey and Senegal had reached \$400 million and that the next target was \$1 billion.

(5) "La Présence Chinoise en Afrique de L'Ouest: Le cas du Mali et du Bénin", Agence Française de Développement (AFD), 08/2008: bit.ly/3Bx9snxt.



Erdoğan stressed that his country was working on increasing the volume of trade with all countries, on top those in the African continent, noting that Senegal was the continent⁽⁶⁾ window. "Turkish-African" cooperation expanded to other vital areas such as military and security cooperation, in addition to stimulating cooperation in the educational, cultural and charitable fields.



Russia:

Russia's presence in Africa dates back to the post-1945 period, when Russian diplomacy towards Africa was active in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Soviet Union was able to achieve real rapprochement with the countries of the African continent, as it supported African liberation struggles and provided assistance to the newly liberated countries, knowing that it exported the ideology of its regime to Africa in order to expand its influence, in the context of the Cold War.

It is noted that the security aspect of "Russian-African" cooperation has been strengthened as of 2017, relying not only on military-technical cooperation but also on Russian private military companies. Since 2017, Moscow has been able to sign military cooperation agreements with about 20 African countries, compared to only seven countries with which agreements were concluded between 2010 and 2017. Many of those agreements provide for the deployment of Russian military advisers with a view to enhancing the capabilities of the armies of partner States. Russia's military influence in the West African region is most evident in the Malian state, which two years ago was ruled by a Moscow-backed military government. The rapprochement between Russia and Mali caused the French military to leave the country, protesting Russia's influence over the Malian government. Russia's relations with Mali have evolved to the point of deploying special forces of the Wagner group to confront - along with the Malian army - the violence of militant groups in the center and north of the country.

(6) "Erdogan: The third millennium is an African era and we offer our brothers to build the future together," TRT Arabic, 21/02/2022: bit.ly/3QCFZgc.

CONCLUSION



For some time now, the francophone region of West Africa has been a protected market for France, and Paris has been the commander and forerunner of the region's domestic causes. Recently, however, this picture has changed. Among the major changing factors is that China has become the largest trading partner in West Africa; Turkey is increasing its market share, while Russia has become the largest supplier of arms and one of the largest exporters of wheat to the region. By contrast, France and Western countries have lost a large portion of their market share.

The dynamics of these relations prove that African countries have become engaged in a new agenda to shape their foreign relations, on the bases of reducing the influence of the West in the continent, while opening paths with the aspiring eastern powers to increase their economic, cultural, political and military influence.



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