

THE REASONS OF FRANCE'S RETREAT FROM AFRICA

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ANNOTATION: This comprehensive review paper explores the reasons for France's declining influence in its former colonies and the ongoing competition among great powers in Africa. Recent decades have seen an increasing distance between France and Africa. The primary objectives of this review are to assess the decreasing role of France and the West in global politics, to analyze the reasons for this retreat, and to synthesize the main findings from a wide range of empirical studies and theoretical perspectives.

Drawing from an extensive collection of literature, this review offers insights into the challenges and opportunities of former African countries. Key findings suggest that African countries are avoiding colonial premises like the French language, colonial currency—"Communauté Financière Africaine", and French military and economic help by facing alternative countries like China, Russia, and Turkey.

KEY WORDS: French troops, postcolonial sentiment, China, Russia, and Turkey, Francafrrique policy, "Communauté Financière Africaine", great powers competition.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of 2025, the relationship between France and its former African colonies has been waning as these countries' power is growing economically and militarily. French troops, which were located with the intention of fighting against terrorism and promoting colonial legacy, were expelled by 6 African countries: Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Senegal, and Ivory Coast over the period of 2023 and 2025. As a result of this retreat, France is facing political, cultural, and long-term economic challenges that could make France a third-world country in the future. Over the decade, most the African countries are choosing to work with China, Russia, and Turkey rather than working with France as a result of postcolonial sentiment. What is important to note here is that France is losing both its political and geopolitical importance in Africa and the global community (1).

Furthermore, with the emergence of postcolonial sentiment over the decades, France is losing its soft power in Africa. To reduce their dependency on France, African countries are abandoning their former French language, educational institutions, and scholarships, and replenishing the losses by allying with China, Russia, and Turkey. Most notably, France has to deal with economic losses. France used to buy necessary resources like uranium and electricity at the lowest price from African countries. However, now, African countries prefer working with more profitable business partners like Russia and China rather than France.

THE REASONS FOR FRANCE'S RETREAT

According to security and geopolitical analyst Romuald Ilboudo, this changing attitude of African countries against France is because of a "generational factor". To be more precise, the young leaders of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea have not experienced either colonization or independence. Considering that they do not have any complex, they demand an equal attitude from their colonizer, France. This new generation of Africa sees France's interference in Africa's politics, economy, and military as neocolonialism (2).

One of the traces of neocolonialism is the "Francafrique" policy, which defines economic, political, and military relationships of France and Africa, which mostly works for France's interests. With "the mission of civilizing the nation," France has been exploiting African natural resources and violating the human rights of Africans. Although African countries are officially independent and sovereign, France is able to control them secretly by implementing an agreement that granted monopolies to French companies, introducing the "Code of Indigénat", colonial currency, appointing colonial administrators, and building colonial infrastructures (3).

"Communaute Financiere Africaine" franc currency was created to promote economic growth, monetary and financial stability among 14 African countries and France in 1945 by replacing the French franc. However, the new African generation sees this as economic dependence on France and the lack of economic sovereignty. Because 50 % of the foreign currency reserves of these 14 countries have to be deposited in the French Treasury, and thus, this contract rule does not allow them to use their own money freely. Furthermore, "Communtaute Financiere Africaine" franc is fixed to the euro, and it is controlled by the European Central Bank, which means that the monetary policy is controlled by France's interests, not by Africa's (4).

Strengthening the military is one of the reasons why African countries are avoiding France. The interim president of Burkina Faso, Ibrahim Traoré, says that when we buy weapons from France or the Europeans, they are the ones who really decide what they want to give us. On the other hand, now we are buying weapons from Russia, and 95% of what we want is what we are buying (5).

GREAT POWERS COMPETITION IN AFRICA

France's declining influence in the former African countries created competition among the great powers in Africa. When France's troops were expelled from Mali and the Central African Republic, these African countries turned to Russia's mercenaries called the Wagner Group, in 2022 (6). However, Wagner Group was dismantled and established a new military group called Africa Corps by the Russian Defense Ministry in 2023. According to the report of the Timbuktu Institute, Russia pursues several policies in African countries, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Protecting military regimes, having access to natural resources, particularly gold and uranium, forming infrastructure partnerships, and undermining the influence of France and the West are considered to be key Russian policies towards the Sahel region (7).

China is ranked the fifth-largest investor in Africa. China has been taking several actions to improve relations with African countries. For example, China implemented a zero-tariff initiative for 53 African countries in 2024 to help the South, namely the African region, to develop and improve its power. According to statistics, China and Africa's trade exchange reached \$300 billion in 2024 (8).

CONCLUSION

The relations between Africa and France have been declining in recent decades, while Africa is forming relations with China, Russia, and Turkey. "Generational factor", anti-French sentiment, colonial language, military and economic dependency, and the rise of other countries' influence in Africa are seen as some of the reasons for Africa and France's declining relations.

Allying with alternative powers like China and Russia, Africa is closely working with Russia in the matter of military training, national security, and natural resources. China is investing largely in the infrastructure and economy of African countries. Particularly, it is not true that France's influence is not left in its former colonies, as these countries still use the French language, the "Communauté Financière Africaine" franc that is controlled by France.

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