

# Understanding French Foreign and Security Policy towards Africa: Pragmatism or Altruism

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## Abstract

*France has deep economic, political and historical relations with Africa, dating back to the 17th century. Since the independence of the former colonial countries in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, France has continued to maintain its economic and political relations with its former colonies. Importantly, France has a special strategic security partnership with the African countries. It has intervened militarily in Africa more than 50 times since 1960. France has especially continued to use its military power to strengthen its economic, political and strategic relations with Africa. For instance, it deployed its military troops in Mali in January 2013 and in the Central African Republic in December 2013. Why does France actively get involved in Africa militarily? This research will particularly uncover the main motivations behind the French foreign and security policy in Africa.*

**Key words:** *Francophone Africa, France, Foreign Policy, Africa, economic interests.*

## The Role of France in World Politics

France's international power and position has shaped its foreign and security policy towards Africa. France has been an important actor with its political and economic power in Europe and in the world. It was one of the six important founding members of the European Community after

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the Second World War and plays a leading role in European integration. France plays a significant role in world politics through international organizations. For instance, it is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and NATO, the G-8, and the G-20. It is the fifth biggest economic power in the world (World Bank, 2011) and the second largest economic power in Europe (IMF, 2012). France is among the countries which make the highest military expenditure in the world. For instance, it was the fifth worldwide when it spent \$62.5 billion in 2011 for strengthening its military power (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2011). At the same time, France is the largest military power in the EU and third largest military force in NATO (University of Princeton, 2013). It possesses nuclear weapon (Federation of American Scientist, 2012) and is a founding member of the United Nations.

### **French Colonial Policy in Africa**

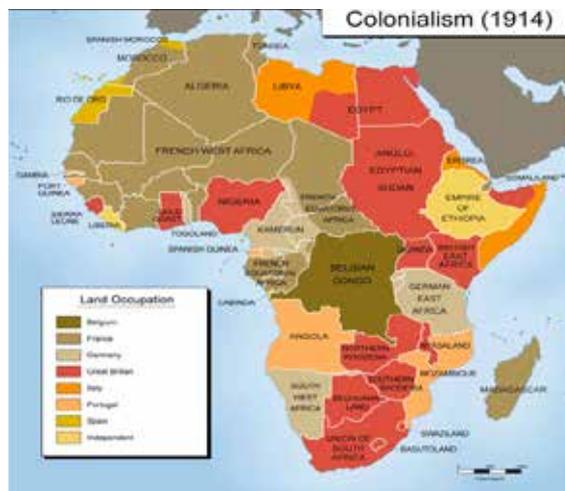
France has maintained a realist foreign policy towards Africa since colonial history. According to realist theory of International relations (IR), states shape their foreign policies according to their own national interests. French interest in Africa began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of a trade port on the West African coast at St. Louis (present day Senegal) (Klein, 1998:22). Importantly, the former European colonial powers, including France, England, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Belgium, signed the Berlin Act of 1884-85 to divide Africa and to protect their common economic and political interests at the Berlin Conference. The Berlin Conference of 1884-5 was a major historical turning point for the beginning of European colonial history and new imperialism in Africa. The colonial powers justified their brutal colonialism in Africa with the Berlin Conference. The main characteristic feature of the French colonial policy was to exploit the rich resources of Africa (Ilfie, 2007:195).

Francophone African states consisted of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, Senegal, French Sudan (now Mali), Guinea, Ivory Coast, Niger, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Dahomey (now Benin), Gabon, Middle Congo (now Republic of Congo), French Cameroon, Oubangi-Chari (now Central African Republic), Chad, French Somaliland, Comoros and Madagascar (Ibid.). France established two important federations in Af-

rica to strengthen its colonies, namely French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. The former became a federation of the French colonial empire in 1895. It consisted of Dahomey (now Benin), French Guinea (now Guinea), French Sudan (now Mali), Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). The first federal government was established in Senegal in 1904. The later was established as a second federation of France in 1910 and included Chad, Gabon, Cameroon, the Congo, and the Central African Republic. In 1960, both federations collapsed after the independence of African states (Manning, 2004:75-6).

It is important to note that France had a different colonial policy in Africa from that of England. While England had a colonial policy in Africa based on economic exploitation of Africa and the protection of the interests of the British settlers, France developed a cultural and political assimilation policy towards its colonial countries in Africa. The main goals of the French assimilation policy in Africa were to exploit Africa and to increase France’s international prestige. The assimilation policy of France in Africa did not respect African culture and traditions. It banned African languages, culture, and identity. Importantly, While the British saw its colonies as foreign lands, the French saw them as a part of France, therefore France imposed its culture on Africa (Fenwick, 2009:2-5).

**Figure 1:** The Colonial Map



**Source:** <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m9/activity4.php>

France established its own economic and political system in Africa to colonize it. While French colonial policy in Africa played a significant role in developing the economic interests of France, it devastated the economic development of African states. France forced its colonies to make trade with Paris, not with each other (Iverson, 2007:16-17). While the French colonies were forced to import goods from France expensively, they were also obliged to export their products to France cheaply. This system created an unfair economic relationship between the French colonies and France, and particularly increased interdependence between France and its colonies (Hrituleac, 2011:36).

Martin argues that France's African policy was based on racism and inequality during the period of colonialism. The French leaders played a significant role in dividing Africa. He claims that France successfully implemented a policy of "balkanization" in Africa through the creation of African federation systems (Martin, 1985:190-1). During the colonial history, the policy of "divide and rule" was implemented by the former European colonial states. For instance, France divided Africa as "Francophone"; England partitioned it as "Anglophone"; Portugal split it as "lusophone". While England ruled and colonized Africa with its policy of indirect rule implemented by local chiefs and tribal leaders, France ruled from the metropole in a policy of direct rule. France preferred a centralized policy to colonize Africa, and thus French colonial policy towards Africa was more destructive, more brutal and less tolerant of African culture and traditions. In particular, French military power played the most important role in colonizing Africa (Fenwick, 2009:2-5). France remained one of the most significant colonial powers in Africa until its colonies gained their independence by the 1960s.

### **France's Relations with Africa during the Cold War Era**

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the period of the Cold War began. New international and regional organizations were established by the global powers, such as the United Nations (UN), the Warsaw Pact Organization, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). More importantly, a bipolar global system based on the hegemonic power of the

USA and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) emerged. After the Second World War, the decolonization process of Africa actively began and by 1960 the majority of the African states gained their independence from France. France developed new policies and strategies in accordance with the global developments so as to keep and strengthen its economic and political interests in its Francophone African territories.

France maintained its relations with Africa through “cooperation agreements”, “military interventions”, and “financial assistance policies” during the Cold War era. According to Martin, the strategy of cooperation with African states had been employed by France as a continuation of its colonial policy (Martin, 1985:191). France’s foreign policy in Africa based on economic and political interests remained unchanged after the African states gained their independence. The first president of the Fifth French Republic, General Charles de Gaulle,<sup>1</sup> played a major role in the birth of the concept of “France-Afrique,” which explains the continuing strong relations between France and its former colonies in Africa. Even though the French former colonies had gained their independence by 1960, France continued to retain control over strategic areas in Africa, such as economic, monetary, strategic mineral policy, defense and security, and foreign affairs (Martin, 2000:3).

In 1939 France established its monetary system known as a franc zone to expand its economic and political influence over her then colonial countries in Africa. The CFA franc stands for two different currencies, the West African CFA franc and the Central African CFA franc. Both currencies now have a fixed exchange rate with the Euro, which is guaranteed by the French treasury. France took control of the currency and financial policies over its former colonies through its monetary system in Africa. Fourteen African countries still use the French currency. In 1994, the CFA franc was devaluated by France by around 50 percent. The devaluation created serious problems in Franco-African relations and seriously damaged Franco-African monetary cooperation (Korner, 2002:199-201). The move also greatly aggravated economic instability in Francophone Africa (Martin, 2000:9).

From the perspective of IR theories, a realist approach dominated France’s policy in Africa during the Cold War era. France expanded its sphere of influence over Africa through military interventions. France’s relations with Africa during the Cold War have been defined by the term

“neo-colonialism” (ibid., pg. 189). The term “neo-colonialism” was defined at the 1961 All-African People’s Conference held in Cairo as follows:

The survival of the colonial system in spite of the formal recognition of political independence in emerging countries which become the victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military or technical means (Smith, 2003:76).

France intervened militarily 20 times in different African states between 1963 and 1983 in order to preserve its interests in Africa (Martin, 1985:194). The most important characteristic feature of France’s post-colonial policy towards Africa was that France perpetuated dependency relations with African states economically and politically and it institutionalized its relations through the establishment of a common organization with Francophone Africa. For instance, the African and Malagasy Union (AMU) was established in 1961 to reinforce political and economic cooperation between France and its former colonial countries in Africa. The organization was dissolved in 1985 (Hance, 1975:85). Similarly, France established the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) in 1970 in order to intensify political, economic and historical relations with its former colonies. The OIF organizes Francophonie summits every two years and brings together all the Heads of State and Government of member countries. The organization is actively running today. Both the AMU and the OIF have played a significant role in maintaining a special relationship with Francophone African countries (Marshall, 2005:474)

**Table 1:** The Main French Military Interventions in Africa since 1960

<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Aim</b>
1964	Gabon	to restore the president after a coup
1968-1972	Chad	to halt the northern rebellion
1978-80	Chad	to defend the government against rebels
1978	Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo)	To save European hostages from rebels
1979	Central African Republic	to remove Emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa from power
1983-84	Chad	to protect the regime against rebels
1986	Chad	to defend the government against rebels
1986	Togo	to restore the president after a coup
1989	Comoros	to put down a coup
1990	Gabon	to support the regime of president Omar Bongo and evacuate foreign nationals from cities damaged by upheaval
1990-1993	Rwanda	to evacuate French and other Europeans after rebels attacked the country
1991	Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo)	to support the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko
1992-94	Somalia	to participate in the “Restore Hope” operation with the US
1994	Rwanda	to participate in “Opération Turquoise”
1995	Comoros	to halt a coup and protect the regime
1996-7	Central African Republic	to maintain order after a coup
1997	Republic of Congo	to evacuate foreigners during the civil war in the country
1996	Cameroon	to provide military assistance to Cameroon
1998	Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo)	to evacuate foreigners
2002-present	Ivory Coast	to participate in “Operation Licorne”
2003	Democratic Republic of Congo	to maintain order in the northeastern Ituri region of the DRC
2008	Chad	to strengthen the regime and evacuate foreigners during the upheaval
2011	Libya	to put down the regime of Muammer Gaddafi
2011	Ivory Coast	to participate in the “Licorne” operation and to put down the regime of Laurent Gbagbo
2013	Mali	to support the regime in the country against the rebels

**Source:** [http://www.expatica.com/fr/news/french-news/france-africa-a-long-history-of-military-intervention\\_142434.html](http://www.expatica.com/fr/news/french-news/france-africa-a-long-history-of-military-intervention_142434.html)

As can be seen in Table 1, France has intervened militarily 31 times in Africa since 1963. All French military operations have taken place in Francophone countries. It is worth mentioning that French military interventions in Africa have played a significant role in protecting French economic and political interests on the continent. Kieh (2004:53-5) states that France's military engagement has damaged political, social, and economic stability in African countries. In particular, it has undermined democratic development of the states and strengthened dictatorship regimes. The most important aims of French military interventions in Africa have been as follows:

1. To preserve its economic interests,
2. To protect its citizens,
3. To safeguard those regimes which have special economic, political, and strategic ties with Paris,
4. To expand its sphere of influence over the region of Francophone,
5. To fight against rebels who threaten the puppet regimes,
6. To increase its leadership role through military interventions in world politics.

French-African security relations played a significant role in developing economic and political relations between France and Francophone Africa. It includes defense agreements, military technical assistance agreements, training of African commanders, establishing of French military bases in Francophone countries, and arms sale. By 1990, France had troops stationed in 22 African countries (Ogunmola, 2009:236) and had set up military bases in strategic countries such as Djibouti, Senegal, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Gabon, and the Ivory Coast. Martin points out that French military forces in Africa did not engage in active conflicts or war. Their role was to protect states which had a defense agreement with France in case of internal and external threats (Staniland, 1987:55). Ogunmola (2009:236) states that the French security policy towards Africa has had two important aims. The first is to protect "friendly governments" against internal aggression so as to protect French economic and political interests; the second is to protect these governments in case of external threats.

After independence, France played a leading role in creating national armies of its former colonial states in Africa. According to defense agreements made between France and its former colonies, France would have to provide their own security in case of internal and external threats. However, these agreements also stated that France could get involved militarily upon the African states' request. Accordingly, France intervened militarily 12 times in some African countries between 1960 and 1963 upon the request of African states (Marks, 1974:96). Furthermore, defense agreements between both sides provided special conditions for France. For instance, African states were only allowed to sell their raw materials to France and were restricted from selling them to third parties (Martin, 1985:198). Contradictions could be found in French African policy. For instance, while France criticized South Africa's apartheid strategies at the official level, it continued to develop economic and trade relations with South Africa. Likewise, France played a critical role in instigating the Nigerian-Biafran War by supporting and selling weapons to Biafra (Pepy, 1970:158-9).

**Table 2.** French Military Defense Pacts with African Countries

Partners	Year	Partners	Year
Benin	1975	Malawi	1980
Burkina Faso	1961	Mali	1985
Burundi	1969	Mauritius	1979
Cameron	1974	Mauritania	1986
Central Africa	1960	Morocco	1994
Chad	1976	Nigeria	1977
Comoros	1978	Rwanda	1975
Congo(Brazzaville)	1974	Senegal	1974
Congo(Kinshasa)	1974	Seychelles	1979
Djibouti	1977	Togo	1963
Equatorial Guinea	1985	Tunisia	1973
Gabon	1960	Zimbabwe	1992
Guinea	1985	Madagascar	1966
Ivory Coast	1961		

**Source:** Degang and Zoubir ( 2011:90).

France signed 27 military defense treaties with African countries between 1960 and 1994, as shown in Table 2. Defense treaties legitimize French military bases and interference in Africa and protect French strategic interests. Defense agreements have enabled French military staff to work as military consultants in the armies of African countries and to train military forces of the host states (*ibid.*, pg. 90). According to Degang and Zoubir (2011:95-100), there are five important dynamics behind the deployment of French military bases in Africa. The first reason is that France has strong economic interests in Africa. It was Africa's largest trading partner between 1991 and 2008. As of 2008, China became the largest trading partner in Africa, though France is still the largest trading partner among EU members for the African countries (EUROSTAT, 2010). Importantly, Africa provides raw materials, such as uranium, natural gas and oil to France, which is still highly dependent on these for its technological industries (Siradag, 2012:75). French military troops in Africa have a mission to protect French economic interests throughout Africa.

The second rationale is that Africa has been a very important continent to popularize French language and culture and to expand its cultural influence. For instance, French language and culture are very popular in Francophone Africa. French military troops in Africa have an aim of strengthening France's cultural interests all over Africa (Degang and Zoubir, 2011:95-100). The third reason is regarding France's political interests. France has strong political relations and interests in African countries. Therefore, France is actively involved in political developments in Francophone Africa. For example, it played a leading role in overthrowing the Kaddafi regime in Libya in March 2011. In April 2011, France cooperated with the UN to disarm the former president of Ivory Coast, Laurent Gbagbo. France's strong political involvement in Africa reflects its strong political interests. The fourth dynamic is that French troops in Africa play a significant role in protecting the properties and security of French citizens living in Africa. More than 200,000 French citizens live in Africa. The French population living in Africa plays an important role in developing France's economic interests. The last reason is that the French military power in Africa also plays a significant role in enhancing military diplomacy, increasing arms sales with African countries, controlling Afri-

can peacekeeping missions, and providing security to the African countries (ibid., pp.95-100).

**Table 3.** French Military Bases and Troops in Francophone Africa in the 1970s

Host Nations	Troops	Host Nations	Troops
Djibouti	3800	Madagascar	2000
Ivory Coast	450	Chad	800
Gabon	450	Senegal	2300
Niger	450	Others	550
Total	10800		

**Source:** Ibid., pg. 91.

While France had permanent military bases in Africa in seven countries in the 1970s, as shown in Table 3, today it only has troops in two strategic countries, Gabon and Djibouti. Since the end of the Cold War era, France has reduced the number of its permanent military bases in Africa due to both economic challenges and shifting interests (Engel and Olsen, 2005:43-4). For instance, it closed one of the most important and largest military bases in Senegal in 2010 (France 24, 2010).

Developing an individual relationship with Francophone leaders became one of the most significant strategies of French foreign policy in Africa. Between 1946 and 1958, all heads of Francophone African states became members of the French Parliament in order to improve bilateral relations with France (Pepy, 1970:158). French colonies, and in particular Ivory Coast and Senegal, had a strong political relationship with French political history. For instance, despite the fact that Félix Houphouët-Boigny was a president of Ivory Coast, he served as a minister in French governments between 1956 and 1959. Similarly, when Léopold Sédar Senghor was president of Senegal, he was also a minister in the French government between 1955 and 1956. At the same time, he served in the French National Assembly for 14 years as a president of Senegal. The first president of Mali, Modibo Keita and the president of Guinea, Ahmed Sékou Touré were also strongly involved in French politics between 1958 and 1984, and had senior political offices in France (Staniland, 1987:52).

During the Cold War era, Africa had been important for France in terms of economic, political and strategic interests. France expanded its sphere of influence over Africa to increase its world power. France is highly dependent on raw materials from Africa, such as cobalt, uranium, copper, manganese, phosphates, and bauxite. The imports of these raw materials from Africa are vital for the developing and functioning of French high-technology industries, aeronautics, nuclear energy and weaponry. More importantly, it set up military bases in strategic countries in Africa, such as Djibouti and Senegal, in order to preserve its economic and political interests (Utley, 2002:130).

### **French Foreign Policy towards Africa in the Post-Cold War Era**

The end of the Cold War era brought structural changes in world politics. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the US remained the most important global actor militarily, economically and politically. The world order shifted from a bipolar global system to a unipolar global system. With the reunification of East Germany and West Germany in 1990, integration movements increased in West Europe. The former colonies of the USSR gained their independence after the 1990s. Furthermore, democracy movements in Africa ascended. The new international system also posed a threat to global peace and security. For instance, the number of civil and ethnic conflicts rose dramatically in different parts of the world, particularly in the areas of the former Yugoslavia. The end of the Cold War also affected French policy in Africa significantly. With the beginning of the fall of the authoritarian regimes in Africa, France redefined its relations with the continent.

Martin (2000:7) argues that economic considerations became more important than political concerns in the new French policy towards Africa after the 1990s. It is important to emphasize that the term “consistency” applied to French relations with Africa in the post-Cold War era. Even though French policy in Africa has not changed structurally, it included new foreign policy principles towards Africa, for instance, developing relations with the “Anglophone” and “Lusophone” regions, new institutional relations and a new political discourse. The US increased its economic and

political relations with Africa, which France began to see as a threat in the Francophone region. Shin (2010:76) stresses that there were four important reasons driving French intervention in Africa after the Cold War. The first one is that France continued to strengthen its economic interests in the post-Cold War era. The second reason is that France has had a complex history in Africa based on strategic interests. The third factor is that personal relationship between French leaders and African leaders played a significant role in enhancing relations (Moncrieff, 2012:362). The last one is that there was a strong mutual dependence between France and its former colonies, which affected economic, political and strategic relations between France and Africa in the post-Cold War era.

There are five important events that changed France's relations with Africa in the post-Cold War (Martin, 2000:7-13). The first was the death of the president of Ivory Coast. France had a strong political and economic relationship with the former president of Ivory Coast, Félix Houphouët-Boigny. The late president had special personal relations with the French elite. He remained in power between 1960 and 1993 in his country and was known as the best friend of France in Africa. When he died in 1993, two former presidents and six former prime ministers of France attended his funeral. The death of the president of Ivory Coast marked the end of an era in Franco-African relations.

The second historical event was the adoption of the *La Baule doctrine*. After the end of the Cold War, a new political structure emerged in African countries. In particular, the new democratic movements affected France's relations with Africa and forced changes in its traditional foreign and security policy. Many African states transformed their political system from a single party system to a multi-party system. At the Franco-African summit in 1990, France adopted *La Baule doctrine* which supported liberalism, multi-party democracy and political reforms in African countries. The process of democratization posed a threat to French economic, political and strategic interests over its former colonial countries. According to the doctrine, France would support democracy, and human rights in African countries and decrease its political and economic assistance to the dictators of Africa (ibid., pp. 7-13) . However, it continued to support authoritarian regimes and corrupt leaders in Africa.<sup>2</sup>

The third important event was the Rwandan genocide in 1994. France had played a major role in strengthening the Hutu government, by providing diplomatic, military, technical and financial support. France's support to the racist regime during the genocide undermined its image in Africa and damaged its credibility in world politics. The fourth significant development was increasing relations between France and South Africa. France has begun to develop relations with countries outside of the Francophone countries in the post-Cold War era (*ibid.*, pp. 7-13). The former president of France Jacques Chirac's official visit to South Africa, Angola, Mozambique and Namibia on 26-28 June 1998 showed that France has increased its economic and political relations with the new countries in Africa. In particular, economic relations between France and South Africa have increased significantly since the 1990s. South Africa became France's largest trading partner in Sub-Saharan Africa. The last driving factor influencing France's relations with Africa was its immigration policy towards Africa. France has started to restrict its immigration policy after the 1990s, and border controls were increased against illegal immigrants. Most illegal immigrants come from North Africa and Sub-Saharan countries. France's anti immigration policy damaged Franco-African relations (*ibid.*, pp. 7-13).

The end of the Cold War had a huge impact on the changing of France's African aid policy. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US increased its strategic, economic and political power on the international stage and began to consolidate its political and economic relations. France employed its aid policy to stop the US' sphere of influence over Francophone Africa. It also used its aid policy as a foreign policy means to change the political system of African countries. The most important principle of the French aid policy towards Africa was based on the protection of French economic interests (Cumming, 1995:394-8). France encouraged the recipient countries to increase economic relations with the donor (Conte, 1997:141). While the pre-1989 aid agenda of France created dependency between Paris and Africa, the new one had an economic basis. Importantly, France extended the limitations of its aid policy after the 1990s. When its aid policy only focused on its former colonies, it included new countries, such as South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. At the same time, France started

to use new methods to provide financial assistance to African countries so as to strengthen its international prestige. For instance, it has begun to utilize it with international institutions, such as the European Union (EU) and the World Bank (Cumming, 1995: 397-8).

During the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012), France developed new methods to preserve its political, economic and strategic interests over Africa. Sarkozy focused on the new concepts, such as peace, security, stability, democratization, the rule of law, good governance, and economic partnership to consolidate its relations with Africa. Importantly, French policy towards Africa shifted from unilateralism to multilateralism. Unilateral military operations by France have been very expensive and have damaged France's image and prestige in Africa and in the world. Therefore, France has begun to involve in Africa militarily through cooperation with international organizations, such as the EU, NATO, AU and the UN. For instance, the EU deployed its first military mission outside Europe to the Democratic Republic of Congo in June 2003. The main aims of the operation were to maintain peace and security, to improve the humanitarian situation, and protect the displaced persons in the refugee camps in Bunia. However, the operation was very limited and short. It lasted just three months and was unable to bring lasting peace, security and stability to the country (Siradag, 2012:270-2).

Likewise, the EU authorized its largest peacekeeping operation in Africa in Chad and Central African Republic in 2008 and 2009 (EUFOR Tchad/RCA). France has been the most important actor supporting the EU peacekeeping operations in Africa militarily, economically and politically. The main driving factor behind France's strong involvement in the EU's military operations was its new multilateral policy in Africa. In addition, the UN currently has seven peacekeeping operations throughout Africa.<sup>3</sup> France plays a significant role in strengthening the military and financial capacities of the UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, and is among the countries providing the most support to the UN peacekeeping operations there (United Nations, 2013). Chasles (2011:4) asserts that multilateralism has provided a number of significant opportunities for France. It legitimizes its military operations through international organizations and increases its global prestige. At the same time, Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capacities (RECAMP), established by France

in 1998, showed that France added a multilateral approach to its French policy in Africa. France created RECAMP in association with England and the US to increase the military capacity of African countries so they could be involved in peacekeeping operations. The Association included Francophone African countries, the USA, England, Belgium, and five Anglophone countries (United Nations, 1997). The fundamental reasons behind the creation of RECAMP are as follows:

1. To get support of international organizations for French military operations in Africa,
2. To legitimize French military operations in Africa and in the world,
3. To strengthen military cooperation between Africa and France,
4. To reduce the high cost of French military operations in Africa.

Since the post-independence era in Africa, France has institutionalised its relations with African states, and, since 1973, has organised Franco-African summits in order to reinforce its social, economic, and political relations with Africa. At the France-Africa summit in Nice June 2010, France underlined that establishing a strategic partnership based on equality, solidarity and mutual respect was necessary for fighting against the common threats facing both continents and for enhancing their mutual interests. Importantly, France agreed to strengthen Africa's security system through regional and sub-regional organisations, and in so doing pledged €300 million between 2010 and 2012 to African states and organisations. It also agreed to train 12,000 African troops to reinforce African peacekeeping operations during that time (France Diplomatie, 2010).

### **French Foreign Policy towards Africa under François Hollande**

François Hollande was elected as the new president of France on 6 May 2012. In particular, the Mali crisis has been a crucial test for the Socialist French president. French intervention in Mali in January 2013, known as "Operation Serval," demonstrated that France has continued to pursue its economic and strategic interests in Africa. It also showed that "continuity" has been one of the most significant foreign policy principles

in French policy towards Africa. Hollande made his first official visit in Africa to Dakar, Senegal in October 2012. During his visit, he stressed that democracy, human rights, and the principle of mutual respect will play a critical role in developing relations between Africa and France. According to the French president, geographical proximity, the human factor and economic and energy relations have been the most important factors influencing French policy in Africa (Melly and Darracq, 2013:12).

President Hollande's predecessor, Nicholas Sarkozy, came to power in 2007 stressing that France should change its relations with Francophone Africa and decrease the number of French military bases in Africa (*ibid.*, pg.7). By contrast, French active intervention in Libya and the Ivory Coast in 2011 proved that it is difficult to change France's old relations with its former colonial countries. Even though the fundamental principles of French policy in Africa have not shifted with the new presidents of France, Hollande has implemented his new African policy based on France's geo-economic interests.

Prior to the French intervention in Mali, Hollande took steps carefully on the international scene and called the international community to work together against the rebels in the country. He underlined that the Malian crisis would not only threaten Africa's security but also international security. In particular, France called on African regional and sub-regional organizations to cooperate in combatting the insurgents and to support the regime in Mali. Furthermore, France has sought financial support from the Gulf Arab states to assist during the Mali operation. It is important to underline that France has used its global power in order to strengthen its economic, political and strategic interests by cooperating with international and regional organizations during the French Mali operation. On 20 December 2012, the UN authorized the deployment of the military operation of the ECOWAS in Mali, so that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deployed its military mission to Mali known as "the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA)."

France has sought to legalize its military operation in Mali with three critical steps. The first step is that France intervened militarily in Mali upon the request of the Mali government (Al Jazeera Center for Studies,

2013:3). The second step is that France collaborated with the international community during the Mali crisis. For instance, the UN Security Council (UNSC) with its resolution plan of 2085 adopted on 20 December 2012 played a critical role in legalizing the French military involvement in Mali. The last step is that France shared financial responsibility with the international community including the Gulf African states.

The French intervention in Mali also has strategic consequences for French foreign policy towards Africa. The first is that President Hollande increased his popularity and strengthened France's leadership position in Europe and in Africa. The second result is that France has kept its economic and strategic interests through the operation. Mali has significant oil, gas, and mineral resources. For instance, it is the third largest producer of gold in Africa (Evanno, 2013:1). Importantly, France is still highly dependent on these for its technological industries. Furthermore, Niger is a very rich country in uranium and a very important country for French economic interests. It is the fifth largest producer of uranium in the world. France makes 80 percent of its electricity from nuclear power and gets 33 percent of its uranium from Niger (Francis, 2013:6). France has still been using the rich resources of Africa for its economic and technological developments (Moncrieff, 2012:360). In addition, France with the cooperation of the EU and the Republic of Mali organized an international donors conference named "Together for a New Mali," held in Brussels on 15 May 2013, in order to reinforce the legalization of French military intervention in the world. One hundred eight countries attended the conference and "the Plan for the Sustainable Recovery of Mali (PRED)" was adopted by the participants of the conference. The donor countries have committed to donate €3.25 billion to Mali.

The French Defense Ministry adopted the "White Paper on National Security and Defence" on 29 April 2013. According to the white paper, France should retain its military bases in the strategic countries of Africa to maintain its economic, strategic, and global interests through Africa. In particular, the region of the Sahel, Equatorial Africa, the Horn of Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa have been significant for French economic and strategic interests (Melly and Darracq, 2013:12). It is likely that French foreign policy towards Africa under the leadership of Hollande

will continue to focus on developing French economic, strategic and political interests in Africa. The French military intervention in Mali shows that France will continue to get involved in strategic countries in Africa militarily when French security and strategic interests are threatened.

## **Conclusion**

Africa has been a strategic place providing a wide range of opportunities for France, which has maintained its strong historical, economic, political and strategic relations with African countries since the end of the colonial period. There are about 240,000 French citizens living in Africa and many international French companies operating on the continent, such as Total, Areva, Accor, Bolloré, Bouygues, and Elf Aquitaine. These French companies have played a significant role in developing French interests on the continent. Africa has rich natural resources and provides raw materials, such as uranium, natural gas, and oil to France. Importantly, France is the largest trading partner for the African countries within the EU members. French economic interests in Africa have been the most important driving factor influencing France's relations with the continent.

The emergence of the new actors in Africa has affected the dynamics of French foreign policy towards Africa and forced France to adopt a new foreign policy towards Africa. The new actors have increased their economic, political and diplomatic relations in Africa. For instance, while China's total trade with Africa reached \$111.81 billion in 2012, India's total trade with Africa was around \$45 billion in 2010. Turkey has also strengthened its economic and political relations with the continent, with its total trade with Africa increasing to \$23 billion dollars in 2013 from \$2 billion dollars in 2002. The new threats and challenges, including immigration issues and drug trafficking have also influenced French foreign policy on the continent. After the 9/11 attacks, fighting against international terrorism has been a strategic priority for France. Conflicts and wars, political instabilities and failed states have threatened French economic and strategic interests on the African continent. Since 2000, France has been actively involved in African peace and security in order to sustain security. For instance, it plays a leading role in the EU peacekeeping operations in Africa.

The main reason behind France's active involvement in the EU and UN peacekeeping operations in Africa is the protection of French economic, political and strategic interests on the continent against the new emerging threats and challenges.

France has changed its foreign and security policies according to the new global developments. Until 2000, France had a unilateral policy towards Africa, and did not work closely with the international community when getting involved in African politics. In the post 9/11 era, France has particularly begun to work with the international community in order to more effectively respond to the new threats and challenges which face France and Europe. For instance, President Hollande has actively cooperated with global actors during the January 2013 French military operation in Mali. The Mali operation showed that multilateralism has become one of the most significant foreign policy tools in French foreign policy in Africa.

One of the main reasons behind the French military operation in Mali was to fight against international terrorism. However, on this front French policy in Africa faced serious challenges. French policy-makers established a connection between the religion of Islam and terrorism for the French military operation, which damaged France's image in the Islamic world. In addition, While France refused the deployment of a military operation to support the regime in the Central African Republic, it intervened in Mali militarily for a short time in January 2013. Its contradictive foreign and security policy has undermined its credibility in world politics.

Since 1960, France has intervened militarily in Africa more than 50 times. French military involvement in Africa shows that the relations between Africa and France will continue to develop and protect French economic and strategic interests. France has retained its military bases in strategic countries in Africa, including Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Djibouti, and the Central African Republic. These military bases of France in Africa have been playing a significant role in keeping French economic and strategic interests throughout Africa. Lastly, Africa will never lose its strategic importance for France and the concept of continuity will apply to French policy in Africa.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 He remained in power between 1959 and 1969.
- 2 These countries and leaders would include the former president of Rwanda Juvénal Habyarimana, the former president of the Democratic of the Congo Mobutu Sese, Cameroon's president Paul Biya, Chad's president Idriss Déby, the former president of Togo Gnassingbé Eyadéma, the former president of Gabon Omar Bongo, and the former president of Ivory Coast Aimé Henri Konan Bédié.
- 3 They would include Darfur, Liberia, Western Sahara, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast and Abyei.

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