

Redesigning Cooperation: The Eschatology of Franco-African Relations

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ABSTRACT This study traces the relationship between France and Africa through historical and colonial links in Francophone Africa during the post-independence era. Especially, the relevance of Francophone Africa to France's economic, strategic and geo-political calculus. The unipolar system brought about by the end of Communism witnessed a shift in France's African foreign policy. The article highlights the dilution of France's African policy in the foreign policy of the European Union in the face of American assertion in Africa. The disquisition scrutinizes the dynamics of France's attitudinal change. Franco-African relations witnessed a twin-diversification. As France opened new economic vistas with the Anglophone and Lusophone states in Africa, so did Francophone Africa with the Anglo-Saxon and Asians. This dynamics translates also into France's programmed disengagement from its Francophone bastion. This vacuum is gradually and constantly being filled by the United States and other members of the G 8. Apparently, the American assertion is perceived by the Hexagon as an encroachment on its 'private ground'. In conclusion, it is argued that France is caught in a dilemma. For complete withdrawal from Francophone Africa will be difficult to carry out.

"If France still retains an international dimension which its Hexagon does not justify on its own, a lot is due to the political, economic, cultural, sometime effective network that it maintains in Africa with about fifteen states whereabout tens of million people speak its language" Imbert (1982).

"Successive governments and the majority of public opinion were for a long time convinced by the fact that restoring the greatness of France could come only from its Empire and not in its strong integration in the structures of global economy" Bost (1999).

"The French economy is not strong enough to pull Africa toward a sufficient level of growth" Freeman (1999).

IN LIEU OF AN INTRODUCTION

Franco-African relations have endured despite the nascent and transitory hiccups in the train of cooperation. The mountains of adventitious and concrete advantages, opportunities and prestige that colonialism had offered France have spilled over to the post colonial Francophone states. The French hegemonic role as regards the Francophone states has been characterized by a heavy disequilibrium. This imbalance is seemingly perpetually designed in favour of France in spite of the so-called partnership that France professes. Relations between France and Sub-Saharan Francophone Africa (SSFA) can be easily considered from a dual perspective. The first segment is an off-shoot of the colonial policies. This period, often time, known as "the golden era" of Franco-African relations, started from the twilight of colonialism to the end of the Cold War. The post-Cold War era dynamics that informed Franco-African relations, now on the downgrade, constitutes the second phase of these relations. These two cardinal phases are important signposts to understanding the

dynamics of Franco-African relations. The former was imperialistic in nature. The plenitude of that relation was characterized by the policy of interference and intervention either overtly or covertly in the affairs of the former French colonial dominions. The first phase in Franco-African relations could undoubtedly be described as a sinecure for France. It was the perennial lubrication of the pseudo metamorphosis of the colonial ties. The current phase under review is the manifestations of French resignation from its interventionist policy in Africa. In fact, France's silence on recent past events and on the unfolding ones is quite loud and eloquent. The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the protracted crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, are ominous signs of the oddment of its interventionist policy in FSSA. The abdication of the self-imposed "prerogatives" and "traditional responsibilities" and "engagement" to Francophone African governments is just manifest. Apparently, assistance from France is gradually becoming evanescent.

It is in the light of the foregoing that this article discusses the salient aspects of the meta-

morphosis as regards SSFA. A cursory look at the Anglophone and Lusophone countries relations with France shows that economic interests are overtaking the traditional relations between France and its former colonies. The turnaround in French policies with Africa is traceable to the aftermath of the Franco-African summit held in La Baule (France) in 1989. The redefinition of France's African policies is informed by the advent of new plural dictates in the international politics. First, the reappraisal of French policies in Africa is due to the unipolar system with the triumph of liberal ideology over communism coupled with the emergence of a vibrant and virile European Union within which some aspects of France's foreign policies are being diluted. For major decisions on Africa are taken in Brussels. In addition there is the new fervour the United Nations found after the end of East – West rivalries which translates into the active involvement of the global organization in the resolution of conflicts. Third, the concerted efforts of the G8 (the most industrialized countries in the world) also impact on the African continent and influence the policies of African governments. Fourth, the attendant result of the sum-total of this policy is that, the resolution of African conflicts has to be done *pro domo* by Africans. In a nutshell; Africans have to take the initiatives in mediation, peacekeeping, and conflict resolution mechanisms with extra-African powers playing a supportive role (Ogunmola 2005). In the economic realm, the economic reforms are initiated and driven by the Bretton Woods Institutions. In what looks like a dialogue of the deaf, while Africa emphasizes on debt relief/cancellation, the search for the elusive favourable terms of trade; the North focuses on good governance, democracy, the rule of law, market driven economy coupled with economic reforms as harbingers of prosperity and socio-economic upliftment for Africa. From the foregoing, it appears that France found a new prism through which it has been looking at its relations with its former colonies. It is on more than one score that the paper echoes the changing nature of Franco-African relations. These relations have shifted from *bilateralism* to *multilateralism*. The traditional Francophone friends of France see France's *multilateralism* as an abdication of responsibility. In this connection, the article settles for a triple pattern that is interwoven to examine Franco-African relations, viz., the political aspect, the economic dimension and the military/strategic

sphere of their relations. The cultural/technical assistance or the politics of *La francophonie* constitutes the epiphenomena that are added to the tripod.

Redesigning Franco-African cooperation has far reaching implications for relationship. By and large, it means remodeling a pattern that had existed before. Redesigning implies the alteration, in this context, of the *modus operandi* of France's foreign policy toward Sub-Saharan Francophone Africa. The *leitmotiv* for cooperation are multi-faceted. Holsti (1995) notes that "governments cooperate for the primary and essential reasons of *reducing the costs...* in order to *increase efficiency*. Arguing further, Holsti (1995) remarks that cooperation may spring from solidarity against threats or common problems.

The adumbrated can not be dissociated from "the importance of *reciprocity* as a basis for cooperation and policy of harmonization. It is the expectation of *joint gains* that is the driving force of most international cooperation" Holsti (1995). {Italics added}. The reason is that states have the burning expectations that interdependent relations and advantages ought to be mutual.

At this juncture, it is reasonable to claim that when there is an imbalance in the relationships as Deutsch (1989) points out, what obtains is dependency. Owing to the lopsided France-Francophone African relations, it is significant to note that the relations are apparently neo-colonialism coated in the mantle of cooperation. We are now set to discuss the factors that engineered French hegemony in Francophone Africa. It is asserted that the Cold War imperatives were the major determinants. However, the other side of the coin is that, predominantly, the French national interest occupies the summit of these facilitating factors.

THE COLD WAR IMPERATIVES

The interventionist, supremacist and paternalistic French views of Francophone Africa were anchored at the fear of the contagion effects of communism. The West was desirous of maintaining the former colonies under its sphere of influence. Under the guise of what appears like a division of labour, France willingly took on the role of containing communism in Francophone Africa. Britain and America were apparently assigned to hold back "the red threat" in Anglophone and other parts of Africa; and if need

be, through their proxies. Clapham (1996) rightly observes that:

“For some [African] leaders, a close alliance with the West offered a measure of security, which they may well have left with exchanging for the potentially higher but nonetheless riskier reward of non-alignment... [T]he fact that the Francophone states of West Africa were all much smaller in population than the two large Anglophone ones of Nigeria and Ghana can only have encouraged the great majority of them to remain in close association with France”.

In addition, the Gaullist vision of France’s foreign policy in Africa was the perception and conception that French economic, political, cultural and military assistance is extended only to states that espoused that vision. In the process, some African governments became subservient to French interests to the detriment of their own national interest. For example, Côte d’Ivoire, under Houphouët-Boigny gave huge concessions and a free reign to “French investors to repatriate their profits to an extent to which would frighten a less bold president” Chanter (1964). The cumulative effect of this policy is the devolution of roles to France in national security and on the international financial and economic terrain. France was unequivocally the mouth-piece of such African governments in the international arena. The Gaullist policy on Africa was invariably adhered to and implemented by various French governments irrespective of ideological colouration. Consequently, the majority of Francophone states espoused the French view of global politics. The voting pattern of these countries in international fora did reflect invariably the position of Paris. Successive French governments ostracized those Francophone African governments of communist allegiance. The Guinea of Sékou Touré was the epitome of the French proscription. According to Rubin and Weinstein (1977), France imposed on Guinea myriad of backbreaking economic and financial decisions.

FRANCE AND FRANCOPHONE AFRICA: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND THE YEARS OF POLITICAL TUTELARY

There is no gainsaying that there was a firm cultural and well-grounded psychological attachment of the emerging Francophone elite to France. The French colonial school, *Ecole William Ponty*,

in Senegal, served immensely as a melting pot for virtually all the first crop of the future French-speaking West African leaders. The psychological impact and educational aspect of colonialism as well as the political indoctrination worked in favour of France. At the time when independence became the clarion call in other parts of Africa, the Francophone political elite first of all strove to strengthen the umbilical cord with France. This was apparently due to the window of opportunity the close ties with France could open. Crowder (1968) remarks that the political elite “opted for a French-African community in which African state would share power with France on equal basis”. It was only after the *volte-face* of Sékou Touré of Guinea-Conakry and Dibo Bakary in Niger due to the French procrastination that the Francophone political leaders sought in earnest independence (Crowder 1977). As a result of this political agitation, France introduced a new constitution in 1946. The constitution gave the opportunity to the colonies to vote and send their representatives to take ministerial appointments by incorporating those Africans into French governments. For example, Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d’Ivoire was a minister from 1956-1959 during the French Fourth Republic while Léopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal was in Edgar Faure government from 1955-1956 (Rubin and Weinstein 1977; Mazrui and Tidy 1984). These leaders were groomed in the art of governance as a prelude to independence.

FRANCE AND FRANCOPHONE AFRICA: CROSSING THE RUBICON

The independence of Francophone Africa did not mean the severance of economic and cultural ties with France. Severing the umbilical cord became a daunting task for the majority of Francophone states. In most cases, these states are tributaries to French economic and financial patronage. For those radical African leaders of the Francophone bloc, the fear of the withdrawal of French patronage: political, economic and financial assistance was the beginning of wisdom. After decades of escapism in their relations with France, Francophone African states came to term with bitter realities. Indeed, the Francophone countries had to give special considerations to the appraisal of the lopsided relationship. Nwokedi (1982) asserts that the political and economic re-assessment resulted in the *crise de la coopération* that erupted in the 1980s.

Apparently, the biennial Franco-African summit which held its inaugural meeting in Paris in 1973 under President Georges Pompidou was gradually overtaken by the hard and stubborn realities that Francophone states had to grapple with. French African foreign policy is not uniform. This is seemingly due to the fact that Paris has a circle of trusted friends in francophone Africa. This exclusive circle is referred to, in the Gaullist semantics, as the *pré-carré* or “the square meadow”. The Gaullist vision witnessed a more incisive thrust when Valéry Giscard d’Estaing emerged at the Palais de l’Elysée in 1974. Franco-African relations assumed a personalized and glamorous outlook by giving privileges to selected members of the Francophone bloc. It was the era of unlimited preferential treatment to the *pré-carré*. Mostly those who embraced capitalism – with state intermittent interventions in the domestic economy- on the one hand; while on the other, there were those rulers that gave unalloyed support to France despite the socialist rhetoric. Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, ex-Zaïre (Democratic Republic of Congo) are illustrative of the former while Senegal is representative of the latter group. A third segment must be allowed to have a firm grasp of this policy. In fact, those Francophone African presidents that professed Marxism-Leninism were treated as the lost sheep of the Francophone stable. Sékou Touré (Guinea-Conakry) and Mathieu Kérékou (République Populaire du Bénin) socialist regimes belonged to this category.

France and Francophone Africa: The Security Agenda

Since the advent of the Fifth Republic, Baylis (1995) asserts that French “defence policy has been seen as one of, if not, the most important instrument to achieve the objective of French foreign policy”. The combination of France’s defence and foreign policies has catapulted France, as a *deus ex machina* in Francophone Africa. The synchronization of these policies is also attributable to the hegemonic roles of France in the domestic affairs of its former dominions. Similarly, France established its authority in its former colonies through its extended deterrence: the setting up of French military bases in some Francophone countries.

In furthering this policy, Baylis (1995) observed that France made it a point of duty in

its strategic thinking during the ideological Cold War, and “... to support, in case of emergency by military aid, the independence of certain states of Francophone culture”. To give this policy a biting tooth, France had signed series of defence and military assistance agreements with virtually all Francophone African states. According to Chipman (1986), these agreements gave France a certain amount of leeway to intervene on the side of governments to quell insurrections. The French military policy in Africa has a twin objective:

- a) The stabilization of “friendly governments” by manning the army through a myriad of military attachés and advisers, and the intelligence service of the country which are signatory to the defence agreement,
- b) The protection of these countries against external aggression by setting military bases in strategic countries.

It was pursuant to this policy and with overweening confidence that France intervened, for example, in The Republic of Gabon in order to foil a coup attempt and reinstall President Léon Mba in 1964. Similarly, The French paratroopers were in Zaire (The Democratic Republic of Congo) to quell an uprising in the Shaba Province in 1977 and intervened again in favour of the Mobutu’s regime in the Kowelzi imbroglio in 1978. Equally, in 1979, Operation Barracuda was launched in the Central Africa Republic (CAR) to overthrow the régime of the discredited and self- acclaimed Emperor Jean Bedel Bokassa.

In the light of the aforewritten, it is essential to note “as at 1990, French troops were stationed in 22 African countries” (Imbert 1990). It is a truism that France considers Francophone Africa, especially the Francophone Maghreb, as important components of its strategic and defence policy. In the words of Vogt (1990)

...French policies in Africa have been dictated by certain discernible patterns in French behaviour...

France has intervened militarily in African conflicts more than any other extra African country.¹

Probing further, she highlights the relevance of Africa to the French strategic calculus. Putting her argument in a historical perspective

and benefiting from hindsight, Vogt (1990) opines that:

“It has been argued that following France’s defeat and occupation by the Germans in the Second World War, and considering the important

role played by the colonies in support of the "Free France" movement, especially the importance of North Africa to the success of the Allied causes in the Second World War, the French became more aware of the importance of the African continent to European defence, both as regards the defence of Europe and as a source of supplies when international conflicts erupt."

She concludes her argument with a forerunner of the foreseeable French attitudinal change thus:

...The French foreign and defence policy posture evolved from what it was in the days of de Gaulle and his cosmetic insistence on supposed French independence of action- just as the French global politics is increasingly being aligned to Western and NATO positions so is also her policies in Africa being increasingly influenced by larger Western interests. [Emphasis added]

This is manifestly what obtains since the emergence of the unipolar system. This metamorphosis preoccupies this essay. The inescapable inevitability of the wind of change in Franco-African relations was manifest with French weight behind a new fervour for Europe. Clichés like "France can no longer be the Dairy Cow of Africa", "New priority for France" within government circle were clear indications of the new orientation of France foreign policy.

FRANCE AND AFRICA: THE NEW WORLD ORDER BEGETS A FACE-LIFT

Although, majority of literature on Franco-African relations portrays the Franco-African summit of La Baule as the harbinger of the new dispensation in Franco-African relations, this essay contends that the advent of the Socialist Party in France at the helm of affairs in France, did mark more or less, the beginning of the decline in Franco-African relations.

Prior to the Swan song of communism, the emergence of the Socialist party in France in 1981 was a watershed in Franco-African relations. For the party had never ruled since the independence of the Francophone states. The Socialists clung to a new set of policies that gave a new tone to Franco-African relations with noticeable changes. However, the intentions and the electoral promises of candidate François Mitterrand could not be sustained by President Mitterrand. The Socialist government steps in African affairs were stamped with ambiguities and/or lack of political

will. In fact, there was a flagrant lack of political will to give the necessary impetus to concretize the intentions of the French socialist government. After series of procrastinations and contradictions coupled with a good deal of trial and error of France's African policies, the imperatives of *Realpolitik* predominated (Ogunmola and Badmus 2004 a, b). France returned to its former policies where the priority of the *pré-carré* was given adequate consideration. It was obvious that in French government circle, the evocation of Franco-African relations engendered a mixed feeling.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to correct the general and erroneous belief that François Mitterrand followed the path of the Gaullists. It is well worth noting that François Mitterrand served as Minister of Overseas Territories (Territoire d'Outre-Mer) under the French Fourth Republic. Bayart (1984) illuminates the discourse and puts the record straight when he asserts that, in actual fact, it was the Conservatives that followed the course of action that François Mitterrand had charted on Franco-African relations. Bayart (1984) continued the argument thus:

The real continuity is older than the Conservatives claim. It began with Mitterrand to General de Gaulle in 1951, by successfully obtaining the rupture between the Rassemblement démocratique africain² (RDA) and the French Communist Party, and that M. [Gaston] Deferre had ratified by presenting his Outline Law in 1956.

In any case, the advent of François Mitterrand marked more or less the beginning of the end of the primrose path. This does not imply the alienation of Francophone Africa but a gradual decline was noticeable. The changes in the international system accelerated this momentum. The advent of the unipolar system was a principal signpost in Franco-African relations. The reality of the New World Order was instrumental to a new era in France-Africa relations. Paris unequivocally laid emphasis on the democratization process and conditioned developmental assistance to multi-partyism, human rights and its corollaries. This set of rules was conveyed to the Francophone leaders in 1990, at the La Baule summit by François Mitterrand. In the wake of that Franco-African summit, National conferences were organized in some Francophone countries.

However, while Mitterrand outlined this policy - his conservative Prime Minister during the cohabitation-Jacques Chirac expressed a dissonant view during an official visit to Côte d'Ivoire. Bayart

(1995) reminds us that Jacques Chirac emphatically concluded that Africa was not yet ripe for multipartyism because ethnicity pervades the continent. All the same, the spirit of La Baule became the new gospel of France's African foreign policy. This gave an impetus to the apostles of multipartyism. But France made sure that its interests were adequately preserved. The path to the democratization was not uniform. Overwhelmingly, the change was cosmetic. In most cases, the incumbent was returned to the presidential seat. This was the case of President Albert Omar Bongo of Gabon and Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire.

In some cases, the democratic underpin led to a new generation of African leaders. The emergence of a new crop of African presidents that replaced the old authoritarian régimes, through the ballot box; and, in some circumstances, with the assistance of the "street". This coincided virtually with the advent of another generation of French policy makers. Franco-African relations were considered from another prism. The diversification of partnership from France for the former and, the extension of French economic magnet to the Anglophone and Lusophone states by the latter by taking into cognizance the primacy of economic interests.

DIVERSIFICATION OF PATERNSHIP: A TWO-WAY PERSPECTIVE

The new French policy was marked with the seal of plural partnership in SSA. As adumbrated, the emergence of the Socialist government in France was a turning point in Franco-African relations. The Socialist government steps in African affairs were stamped with ambiguities and/or lack of political will. This is true especially with Anglophone and Lusophone states (Bach 1983; Bayart 1984; Gaulme 1999). For Nwokedi (1995) the post-la Baule dynamics reverberations on Franco-African relations saw the ascendancy of the Bretton Woods Institutions in the search for, and in the imposition of economic reforms. As I argued somewhere else (Ogunmola 1998), these reforms found a new gusto with the Conservatives in 1993, during the second French co-habitation and gradually led to the rupture of the devaluation of the *Francs de la Communauté Financière de l'Afrique* (FCFA) that came to pass in 1994. The attendant result of the devaluation gave a renewed vigour to the diversification of

other partners apart from France by the Francophones. The more so that major decisions affecting the Francs Zone are now taken in Brussels, Washington, or during the G 8 summits. It seems that the new generation of Francophone presidents realised then that Paris is no longer the economic *Sesame*. Moreover there had been a gradual but constant withdrawal of French Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in the CFA zone (Bost 1999; Gnassou 1999). It is this line of thinking that informs the slow but steady penetration of American economic interest in the French economic bastion in Francophone Africa. This incursion was not without French enmities. The protracted Franco-African honeymoon was more significant in the area of intervention where the French attitudinal change has far-reaching implications for the internal security of the Francophone states. These states have to look for ad-hoc alternatives for their policy in order to open new economic vistas with other partners. The new actors in Francophone African countries are mainly the United States, Japan, Germany, Canada, China, and the Asian Tigers. The possibility of France frowning at this economic policy is mentioned in many circles. The reason is not far-fetched. The economic rivalry in Africa between France and the United States is more exacerbated since the end of the Cold War. This is mainly due to America new vision of its partnership with Africa. An illustration of this economic competition was the Congolese civil conflict that shook the country to its very foundation. The civil strife was interwoven with domestic intrigues and external economic undertones. The eviction from power in 1997 of the democratically elected president of the Congo, Professor Pascal Lissouba by the former military head of state, Denis Sassou Nguesso is a case in point. The Congolese civil war was closely related to the economic romance in the oil sector with American oil firms to the detriment of ELF -the French oil conglomerate-The push and pull between France and the United States is corroborated by Freeman (1999)³. She points out that:

Our [American] commitment in Francophone Africa is minimal in as much as the French strive to impede our investment. American investors have a lot of difficulty in working in most former French colonies (...).

Any American investor will confirm it. The French have set innumerable barriers. [Translation mine]

Having said that on the attitudinal change of Francophone African states, let us now consider the French economic about turn in Francophone Africa. There is a noticeable trend in the decline of the level of France's investment in the Franc zone. I now pass the baton of the discourse to Bost (1999). He draws our attention to the fact that,

"Since 1996, the new mode for computing French Direct Investment that integrate the profit reinvested, the part of the Franc zone is in fact anecdotal: 1, 5% in 1996, 1, 1% in 1997".

The birth of the "Euro"—the common currency that some members of the EU adopted—on January 1, 1999 sealed the end of the parity between the French Franc and the CFA Franc. However, by and large, the advent of the Euro did not change drastically the old order as regards the conversion or parity of CFA Franc. As I stated somewhere else, Ogunmola (1998), the change was rather nominal. de Siguy (1999) reminds us that, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the Central African Economic Community Union (CAEMU) reached agreements on the basis of the accords France had signed with the two sub-regional Francophone organizations. Similarly, it is on the bases of the same agreements that the Eco, the embryonic West African Common Currency, is being initiated with the Anglophone bloc. Furthermore, the new orientation of France's African policy is geared towards a "plural Africa" to the detriment of the *pré carré* where the level of French investment is shrinking compare to the ever increasing French presence in Anglophone African states. The Anglophone states have taken breathtaking impetus pertaining to French investment in SSA as regards the Francophone bloc. For example, Bost (1999) states that in 1996, Congo, Gabon, and Côte d'Ivoire were lagging behind Nigeria and South Africa and Nigeria was a net and principal receiver of French FDI. To all intents and purposes, this trend is not limited to France. For in 1997, South Africa and Nigeria got respectively the Lion's share of the total volume of FDI in SSA while Angola occupied the third place (Bost 1999). Furthermore, in the area of financial assistance to SSA, French financial assistance has taken the curve of reduction. In fact,

"French Public Developmental Assistance Fund to SSA has depleted from \$960 millions in 1980, an average of 3.1 billion per year from 1994.

The reduction was even more pronounced in 1999 as only 1.4 billion was channeled to SSA. This figure represents a reduction of 55%" (OECD 2001).

As shown above, it does translate in a serious financial setback for SSA. This is a bitter truth true for the states in the Sahel belt that suffer from prolonged and acute drought. This is compounded by the stark and living reality of globalization. SSA is being gradually and steadily marginalized even within the periphery of international economic and financial system. However, and according to Michel (2005), Africa got an assurance from the European Union that at least, financial assistance meant for Africa would not be diverted⁴. On the aggregate, the diversification is both ways. And this is a shift from *bilateralism* to *multilateralism*.

FRANCE'S INTERVENTIONIST POLICY IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA: INTERNAL (IN) SECURITY AND RISING CHALLENGES OF STATE SURVIVAL

The New World Order (NWO) caught the Francophone states off guards as what is of prime importance: the defence of the territorial integrity of the country. This was reposed with France and France had played diligently this role. Especially, when and where French investments are important or when a friendly government was in power. Indeed, and as alluded to earlier on, France did rescue the pro- Western government of Marshall Mobutu in Zaïre (DRC).

The first thing that needs to be said is that the post-La Baule spirit and its dynamism have been the driving forces behind a re-engineered France's African policy as far as France's traditional partners are concerned (Ogunmola and Badmus 2004 a, b) The metamorphosis is more pronounced in the implementation of the defence pacts that were instrumental to the security of the signatory states. The new vision has rendered the defence agreements obsolete. Consequently, France withdrew its military interventionist policy into its shell as far as internal (in) security is concerned (armed insurrection against constituted authority) and external aggression are concerned. The alteration of France's African defence policy has fatal consequences for the defence of Francophone Africa. France's non-interventionism did result intermittently in interventionism. Albeit of another kind. The

interventionism in vogue is the airlift of western expatriates from flash points in African countries. To drive home this point graphically, is the provision of a *cordon sanitaire* in Gabon during the 1990 uprising in the city of Port-Gentil (Gabon's economic oil heartthrob). Similarly, *Opération Pélican* was launched to airlift expatriates in 1997 from Congo Brazzaville during the fratricidal war. And more recently, is the non-interventionism of France in the imbroglio that eventually led to the overthrow of the former president of Côte d'Ivoire, Henri Konan Bédié. The former head of state called in vain on the French troops stationed in the military base (43rd BIMA) to intervene by the virtue of the 1961 defence agreement. de Bellescize (1999) emphasizes that the resignation of France's interventionism was a phase-out programme in conjunction with some members of the Security Council -The United States and Britain-. The merging of the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in 1999 led to the creation of the Department of Military Cooperation and Defence. Subsequently, the number of French military instructors in the Francophone states witnessed a drastic reduction from "5200 in 1997 to plummet to 3100 in 1999" (Deroche 2001). The security problems of SSA Francophone states is convoluted by the pervading economic slump, the debt overhang that stems from the unequal and deterioration of the terms of international trade coupled with the political mismanagement. The weak nature of Francophone states partly explains the failure of some these states to deal decisively and effectively with insurrection. The most striking examples are Mobutu's Zaïre and the intractable Côte d'Ivoire militaro-political logjam.

Henceforth, France now moves cautiously on the slippery terrain of intervention by using *multilateralism* as a shield. Although the policy of the Zone of Priority and Solidarity (*Zone de Solidarité Prioritaire*) [ZSP] still considers the Francophone zone as a necessity in France's African foreign policy, de Bellescize (1999) argues that the fact still remains that the idea of the "plural character of Africa" predominantly features at the zenith of this policy while the ZSP is seemingly seen as a "moral debt" in the traditional bastion of French politics in Africa. According to de Bellescize⁵, the French new partnership was given a fillip by the two immediate Secretary General of the United Nations. Ghali, in his "Agenda for Peace", mooted the idea of a permanent African

peace keeping force under the aegis of the UN in 1992 and reiterated same in 1998. de Bellescize (1999) stated that, the former Secretary General successor, Kofi Anan, went a step further by suggesting that such a peacekeeping outfit must be authorized by the Security Council of the UN and must be under the leadership of a regional or sub-regional organization. This view tallied with the French new policy on Francophone Africa. The Abidjan doctrine, which stipulates that, henceforth French interventionist policy in ZSP would be under the umbrella of multilateralism. In the economic domain, multilateralism would be through the Bretton Woods institutions and the European Union. The military aspects would be undertaken under the auspices of the UN, regional organizations (African Union), or via sub-regional organisations. This policy was concretized in the DRC through the Central African Economic Community (CAEMC). Similarly, the policy informed the creation of French UNICORN Operation that was diluted in the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI). In actual fact, it would be more accurate to state that UNICORN supplemented the efforts of ECOWAS Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ECOMICI), (Ogunmola 2005). A cardinal aspect of France's new vision in Francophone Africa is the French peacekeeping agenda for Africa: *Le Renforcement des Capacités de Maintien de la Paix* (RECAMP). It is a three-pronged programme, which consists of the training of African officers in the technique of peacekeeping. This aspect has two wings: the training of African officers to the rudiments of peacekeeping and the military training of African multinational forces in peace-keeping operations. The third segment involves the financial and logistics support to those operations.

As regards the cultural angle, La francophonie (the association of French speaking countries) has become the focal point of Franco-African relations. Clapham (1996) avers that the politics of *La francophonie* is a cobweb of patrimonial and personal interests that are interwoven through political business, economic and monetary connections. These ramifications spanned generations of leaders in the political labyrinth of France and Francophone Africa. However, it is pertinent to note that *La francophonie* tentacles are beneficial to less endowed members in the domain of technical assistance given the fact that Canada -another

strong partner of La francophonie- is not enmeshed in the intrigues of Franco- African relations and pays more attention to issues such as Human rights, good governance, etc.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

This foregoing analysis of Franco-African relations has shown beyond reasonable doubt that changes have become constant key elements in these relations. Thus, the African realities of France's policy makers have shifted from "the Francophone sphere of influence" or the idolizing of the "pre carré" as well as what one may sum up as the idealist policy to *Realpolitik* where economic interests play a primordial role. The Francophone bloc no longer plays a predominant role in these relations. French interventionist policy in safeguarding "friendly" regimes is now limited to a string of fairy lights of peacekeeping under the guise of multilateralism. Apparently, both sides of the divide have joined the train of *multilateralism*. The real challenge lays with Francophone Africa. This is its ability to manage diversity and this will go a long way in charting a new course for the socio-economic well- being of the zone by re-engineering their comatose economy in an era where Anglophone and Lusophone states are occupying the economic center-stage of Franco-African relations.

France is seemingly entrapped in the cobweb of ambiguity. When France does not intervene in the politico-military logjam of any of its former dominions, the French are accused of being indifferent. The other side of the coin is that when France decides to intervene, the French are accused of interference and neo-colonialism by a party to the conflict. Another dimension of France's new policy in Africa is the American factor which makes France total disengagement problematic owing to the legendary French mistrust vis-à-vis the United States with the American ascendancy in African Affairs in recent times. The French will chart a new course of Action. It is a policy of semi-indifference and semi-interference (covertly or overtly) depending on France's national interests.

NOTES

1. For a comprehensive list of France and African states military and technical assistance agreements and French intervention from 1959-1984, see John

- Chipman, "French Military Politics in Africa". *Adelphi Paper* N° 201 (IISS), 1986.
2. Félix Houphouët-Boigny was the secretary general of RDA.
3. Constance J. Freeman was a former Director of the African Programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, USA.
4. Louis Michel spoke in his capacity as the European Union Commissioner for Development and Cooperation.
5. Gabriel de Bellescize was the Ambassador for the French *Renforcement des Capacités de Maintien de la Paix*. (RECAMP)

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