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The Future of Françafrique: Neocolonialism in Africa and the War on Terror

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ABSTRACT

Françafrique refers to the complex system of political, economic, and military relationships between France and its former colonies in Africa, characterized by neocolonialism, paternalism, and corruption. This paper aims to analyze the history and future of French geopolitical activity in Africa, including its motivations, strategies, and impacts. We first establish the background of France's complex relationship with Africa, beginning with French colonialism in the region and decolonization. Next, we look at the period of close ties France maintained with most of its former colonies in Africa throughout the late 1900s. Additionally, we discuss the effects on French and American geopolitical power in developing regions that the "Global War on Terrorism" has had through the examples of operations Barkhane and Freedom's Sentinel. Lastly, this paper looks to the future and identifies several trends and challenges that have impacted France's power in Africa, and how these trends will continue into the future.

KEYWORDS

Africa, France, colonialism, terrorism, USA

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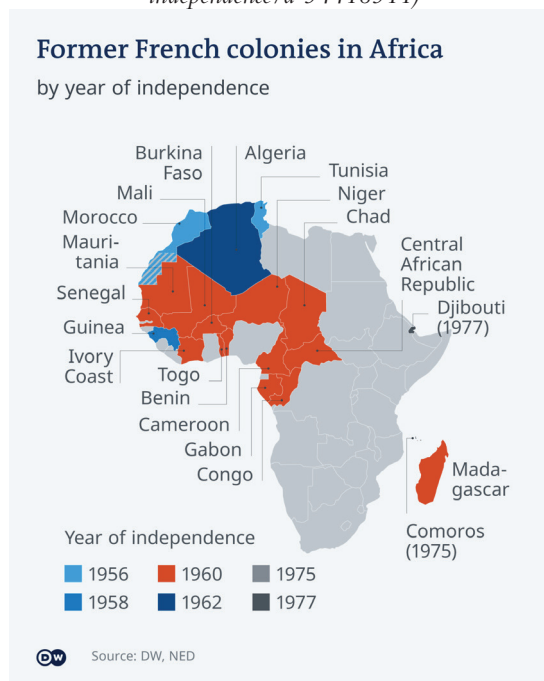
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1. INTRODUCTION

France has had a presence in West Africa since the 1600s, and in 2023 French troops still have a presence in the region despite France formally granting all of their colonies independence in 1960. France's long history of strong ties with West Africa has been extensively researched under the term *Françafrique*. However, significant developments have occurred since 2020 that have gone underreported and under-researched amidst several other global shifts in the same period in parts of the world more represented in English language media. In this paper, we propose that over 150 years of French control in Africa effectively ended in 2022 in a series of disasters coinciding with the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, which has led to rapid and permanent French divestment from the region that continues to this day.

2. END OF THE COLONIAL ERA, 1945-1960

*Figure 1. Former French colonies in Africa
(retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/en/africa-and-france-an-unfulfilled-dream-of-independence/a-54418511>)*



In December 1945, two important economic frameworks were created. Firstly, the Bretton Woods agreement created a fixed currency exchange rate and open market between Western Europe, including France and her colonies, and the United States. Secondly, the CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine—African Financial Community) Franc Zone was created in Africa, creating a fixed currency exchange rate and open market between France and Africa. The United States was in a position of almost complete domination over its vanquished enemies and victorious allies alike in 1945. French goods could not compete with American production, threatening France with the prospect of never industrially recover-

ing from World War II and, in fact, potentially further deindustrializing due to production moving to America or even the colonies, as France's mercantilist system of controlled trade with the colonies was disassembled by the Bretton Woods agreement. This was an existential threat to France's great power status. Charles de Gaulle reacted by heavily devaluing the franc against the dollar, keeping French goods cheap on the international market and international goods expensive on the French market. This worked wonders for encouraging the rebuilding of industry in France, but not necessarily Metropolitan France. The franc was also used in Africa, which could lead to funds that would otherwise go to rebuilding Metropolitan France being invested in Africa to take advantage of the cheap labor pool, deindustrializing and bankrupting France as they would be forced to subsidize African goods on the global market by maintaining a low exchange rate. This would be catastrophic for France, so the CFA franc was created. Maintaining the CFA franc as a separate currency from the French franc allowed France to redirect international and domestic investment from Africa to France while attempting to maintain a trading dynamic similar to the prewar mercantilist system. The CFA franc would continue to fulfill this role until 1994, when it was devalued (Dillner, 2022; Creevey et al., 1995).

In "The United States, Algeria, and the Fall of the Fourth French Republic" (Wall, 1994), Irwin M. Wall writes, "[a]fter the war, the Americans concluded that preserving French hegemony in the region was the best way to guarantee North African security, but Washington continually pressed the French for reforms" (p. 489). Wall writes this concerning the Algerian War, but this sentiment underlied the United States' policy towards all European colonies directly after the war, where the overarching goals were to prevent the spread of communism and to sustain American geopolitical interests. The conflicts and turmoil in North Africa had direct consequences for French West Africa as well, as it triggered changes in France's political and institutional structures and impacted its colonial and subsequent foreign policy in West Africa. The establishment of the Fourth French Republic followed the downfall of the Vichy government and the conclusion of World War II. Contemporaries viewed it as a restoration of the pre-war Third French Republic, and consequently, it encountered many similar structural issues. Wall continues, "Internal American accounts of critical political and military events during the French-Algerian war depicted a regime in Paris in total disarray, its authority not only vitiated on the local level by military and diplomatic officials but the cabinet itself divided and unable to come to coherent decisions, with individual ministers flouting the authority of the premier" (p. 492).

The United States policy towards France's colonialism was largely influenced by its Cold War strategy, which prioritized containing Soviet influence and preventing the spread of communism. As such, the US saw France as a crucial ally in maintaining regional stability and preventing communist forces from gaining a foothold. However, the Suez Crisis marked a turning point in the US' approach to France's colonialism. The crisis involved Israeli, British, and French invasions of Egypt in response to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal. The US opposed the invasion and worked to broker a ceasefire, which led to the withdrawal of the invading forces. However, the incident was extremely humiliating to the French and the British, marking the former European great powers as subordinate to the United States. During the aftermath of the Suez Crisis, United States Secretary of State John Dulles proclaimed, "the United States must now exercise leadership, and cease walking a tightrope between British and French relations and the friendship and understanding of the newly independent countries escaped from colonialism"

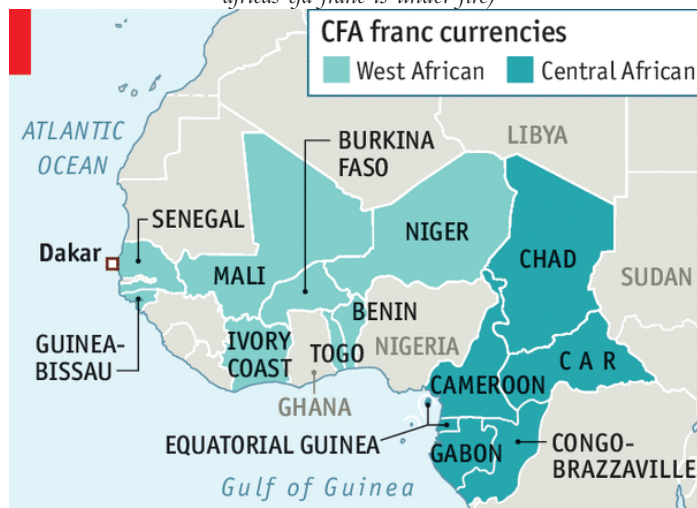
(Wall, 1994, p. 499). The Suez Crisis of 1956 marked a shift in the United States' foreign policy towards more substantial support for decolonization, but the country still avoided direct involvement in the process (Metz, 1984).

In "American Attitudes Toward Decolonization in Africa" (Metz, 1984), Steven Metz writes, "[a]lthough the Suez crisis in 1956 represented the first great divergence of American and European thinking on events in the Third World, most of the shift in Africa policy that took place between 1952 and 1960 can be traced to the climactic ruse of events in Africa itself. Even though violent uprisings had been crushed in Madagascar, Kenya, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, and Guinea, there was a feeling among both Africanists and policymakers that perhaps a revolution in Africa was not as far in the future as had been expected" (p. 523). After the 1958 attempted coup in France and the collapse of the Fourth Republic, Charles de Gaulle returned to power in France after a 12-year retirement and would essentially become a dictator as he drafted a new constitution. Those in the new Fifth French Republic realized that continuing the costly police actions to maintain dominance of the colonies was becoming unsustainable. As cited in Daniel Bon & Karen Mingst's (1980) "French Intervention in Africa: Dependency or Decolonization," Charles de Gaulle (1971) wrote in his *Memoires d'Espoir*, "it could be seen that the change from colonization to modern cooperation... has a great chance of being successfully carried through in such a way as to bring to France not only a reduction in costs (of maintaining colonies) that have become unjustifiable but also fruitful promises for the future" (p. 7). De Gaulle's solution was to hold a referendum in France's African colonies on either full independence or association within a francophone community. All countries except Guinea would accept to join the French Community, effectively ending colonialism.

3. THE ERA OF FRANCAFRIQUE, 1960-1994

Figure 2. CFA franc currencies

(retrieved from: <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/01/27/francophone-africas-cfa-franc-is-under-fire>)



Economist.com

While claiming to equally represent its twelve African member states and France, the Community's constitution imposed restrictions on the sovereignty of African states and reinforced France's dominance. This was achieved by assigning crucial responsibilities, such as foreign affairs, defense, currency, economic policies, and control of raw materials, to the "Domaine Commun"—an area of shared authority. However, while the African member states did not reject the Community outright, they were hesitant to implement its provisions fully, ultimately leading the French Community to end before it was truly given life by 1960 (Grimal, 1985). Nevertheless, despite the French Community's failure, France maintained its sphere of influence on its former African empire during the Cold War using three core elements. First, by having a fixed exchange rate for the CFA franc, the French franc, and later the euro, with around 14 African states in the CFA franc zone.¹ The second element comprised a system of French experts and advisers stationed at the state level in African nations in financial, institutional, and educational capacities. The final and most important tactic for maintaining French influence was the presence of the French military in several permanent military bases throughout West Africa (Valin, 2015). In "France as the Gendarmerie of Africa, 1960–2014" (Vallin, 2015), Victor-Manuel Vallin writes, "consider the 1961 defense accords signed between France, Côte d'Ivoire, Dahomey, and Niger. Article 1 stated that those four republics would "assist each other to organize and carry out their defense," and Article 4 added that the three African countries would grant the French Republic the right to "freely dispose of the military facilities needed to carry out defense ... concerning circulation in the territories, air space, and territorial waters. ... The use of port, maritime, river, road, rail and air transport infrastructures and the postal and communication network" (p. 81). The agreements enabled Paris to intervene in internal or border conflicts in any involved nations within the French sphere of influence.

French involvement in African affairs during the 1960s and 1970s was primarily driven by Jacques Foccart, the head of the "Cellule Africaine" in the French presidency. The Cellule Africaine was a secretive organization that coordinated French policy towards its former colonies in Africa. Foccart did not solely rely on military interventions but often involved mobilizing troops in the capitals to prevent further violence. A prime example was in Dakar, Senegal, in 1962, when French-led loyalist Senegalese troops halted a coup by mobilizing local French units. The French military prioritized maintaining public order, and under Foccart's leadership, military intervention was seen as a means to achieve political solutions. However, France did not always intervene automatically to protect friendly regimes. For example, in 1964, France sent paratroopers to Gabon to restore President Léon M'ba to power after a group of rebellious officers kidnapped him. In contrast, when Colonel Jean-Bédél Bokassa seized power in the Central African Republic in 1966, France remained inactive and adopted a wait-and-see strategy instead of sending troops. Likewise, in 1963, Paris declined to intervene in Congo-Brazzaville to support Fulbert Youlou's regime during internal political turmoil. The Cellule Africaine also had powerful connections to African leaders that were essential for French policy and diplomacy. The president of Ivory Coast from 1960 to 1993, Houphouët-Boigny, was a close friend of Foccart. This friendship made Ivory Coast a reliable French ally for decades (Whiteman, 1997). Foccart's approach was focused on maintaining France's economic and strategic interests in Africa while also preventing the spread of communism on the continent.

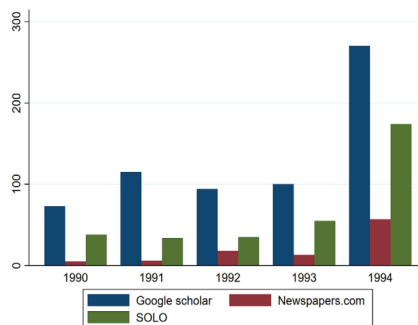
Under president François Mitterrand from the early 1980s until the end of the Cold

1 The exact number of countries in the CFA franc zone varied through the years.

War, France adopted a “systematic interventions” policy in the francophone sphere, utilizing jets to conduct brief airstrikes to achieve military objectives. Despite being a socialist and having previously criticized his right-wing predecessors’ African policies, President François Mitterrand’s stance on Africa during his first term was reminiscent of conservative de Gaulle’s policies two decades earlier, particularly with regard to the activities of the *Cellule Africaine*. Mitterrand relied on military intervention more frequently than Foccart, particularly in Chad, where three successive operations—Tacaud, Manta, and Epervier—were carried out between 1978 and 1986, mostly during Mitterrand’s tenure. French interventionism in sub-Saharan Africa occurred within the broader global context of the Cold War; newly independent states were being rapidly transformed into peripheral proxy battlefields between the United States and the Soviet Union.

4. THE END OF FRANÇAÏRIQUE, 1994-2008

Figure 3. New publications including the words ‘CFA franc’ (Dillner, 2022)



Data: Google scholar, Newspapers.com, SOLO Bodleian Libraries

The year 1994 was one of critical importance to *Françaïrique*, with four events occurring in that year that would have permanent impacts on the system: the funeral of Houphouët-Boigny (Whiteman, 1997), the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc, which has been described as “a betrayal and the first sign of this abandonment by France” (Chafer, 2003), and the disastrous 1994 French intervention in Rwanda (Quilés, 1998). The 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc is an illustrative case where France had no good policy option due to economic realities. The value of the CFA franc had been pegged at a fixed rate to the French franc since 1945, and the exchange rate had been the same since 1948. This had led to extreme stability in the inflation rates of *Françaïrique* countries compared to other African countries, but the CFA franc had always been overvalued compared to the French franc. In 1948 France still had total control over Africa and used the overvaluation of the CFA franc to increase Africa’s imports and decrease their exports. By 1994, France was still enjoying the benefits of their exports’ increased competitiveness in Africa. However, with increasing discontent in Africa over economic stagnation, France realized that this 1948 rate could not be sustained forever. The CFA zone countries would be unable to develop functioning economies with constant trade deficits, and the opinion of France would turn sour. This made a devaluation the obvious solution, strengthening France’s allies while improving

relations and ending cries of economic imperialism. Thus, in January 1994, the CFA franc was devalued by 50% overnight. As expected, this had beneficial long-term economic effects for the countries of the CFA zone (van den Boogaerde & Tsangarides, 2005; Dillner, 2022). What France did not expect, however, was the immediate wave of unrest and anti-French sentiment that would arise from this massive economic shift. Riots almost immediately broke out in the streets of Senegal (Noble, 1994; Creevey et al., 1995) as prices instantly almost doubled and wages failed to keep up. Africans blamed their local governments for allowing the devaluation, but above all, they blamed France.

Since 1960, France has mostly kept their influence in Africa quiet. It was by no means a secret, but most residents of *Françafrique* would not frequently think about the system or France's role in it. This all changed with the devaluation of the CFA franc. Suddenly, *Françafrique* was the top news headline across Africa and was almost universally derided. Africans now experienced the lack of sovereignty their countries had had since 1960. A foreign country claiming to be their ally had deeply and negatively affected their personal lives without serious input from Africans or their governments, and France failed to explain the devaluation as helping them in the long term. This economic adjustment was nothing short of a diplomatic catastrophe for France, permanently shaking Africa's faith in the *Françafrique* system. Ironically then, France's attempt to improve the economic state of her African allies resulted in success on that front, improving their ability to act independently from France and reducing their dependence on French development aid, but also destroyed Africa's opinion of France and motivated them to use their newfound economic power to move away from *Françafrique*. In one double-sided move, the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc destroyed France's political and economic ties with Africa, which had been sound for over 30 years.

Although France by the end of January of 1994 had already lost the edge of their economic and political ties with Africa, they still had a deep military presence in the region and often personal ties with the leadership and elites of African countries dating back to the colonial days. However, by 1994 over 30 years had passed since the colonial administrations that would later become the independent governments of African nations had been handpicked by the French, and these handpicked leaders could no longer be depended on to support France. In 1994 this was symbolized by the funeral of Houphouët-Boigny, which was heavily attended by French guests. In "The Man Who Ran *Françafrique*" (Whiteman, 1997), Kaye Whiteman writes, "[t]hus Houphouët-Boigny's funeral in February 1994 seems in retrospect almost like an act of mourning for the death of a relationship" (p. 8). With the death of Houphouët-Boigny, Ivory Coast was no longer a stable and reliable base of operations. Houphouët-Boigny was only one very important man, but his death and funeral were part of a continuing trend: as time continued to pass, the francophone elites of Africa that France had long been able to depend on for support were growing old and dying. Foccart's death in 1997 would be another blow to this thread of French control over Africa.

The final tie binding the *Françafrique* system together, the military presence of France, was also dealt a significant blow in 1994. The Rwandan genocide began in April 1994 and ended in July of the same year with hundreds of thousands of civilians killed. Rwanda was a nation at the periphery of *Françafrique* with a UN and French peacekeeping force, who both failed to stop the genocide (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022; Quilés, 1998). Additionally, some accused the French presence as being guilty of either being complacent in or actively abetting the Rwandan genocide (Cameron, 2015; Lal, 2007), which substantially damaged France's reputation as a peacekeeper in Africa and international support for the

continuation of their activities (Vallin, 2015).

The shock of 1994 triggered an immediate change in policy. France reduced its military presence in Africa, and the pervasive attitude of paternalism France held toward its former colonies began to fade, with France encouraging other organizations to assist France in policing Africa. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), an association of West African countries that considerably overlaps with *Françafrique*, began participating in military interventions after 1990, particularly after 1994 (Tavares, 2011). France continued intervening unilaterally during the rest of the 1990s. However, after the French casualties in Ivory Coast in 2004, the French policy on interventions shifted, with France no longer viewing unilateral interventions as a viable solution to problems in Africa (Gegout, 2018). In addition, after 2001 the United States and the United Kingdom began establishing a military presence in the region that encouraged French divestment (Chau, 2008; Vallin, 2015). Throughout the middle 2000s, *Françafrique* began to seem like an outdated term—no longer signifying France’s strong relations with Africa, the only remnant of which was the fixed exchange rate between the euro and the CFA franc, which ECOWAS planned to replace anyway with a new currency also pegged to the euro called the *eco*, now guaranteed by the EU rather than France (Mati et al., 2019).

5. THE WAR ON TERROR, A FRANCO-AMERICAN FOREVER WAR 2008-2020

On 28 February 2008, French President Nicolas Sarkozy delivered a speech, saying:

It is not France’s role to maintain armed forces in Africa indefinitely; Africa has to take responsibility for its security problems ... This does not mean in any way that France is disengaging from Africa. It’s the exact opposite. I want France to work more closely with the African Union on building the collective security system that Africa needs. (Vallin, 2015, p.7)

President Sarkozy’s statement reflects France’s policy to avoid direct unilateral military intervention and instead work through international organizations such as the United Nations and ECOWAS (Shurkin, 2014). Additionally, France promoted the emergence of the European Union (EU) as a minor international actor in Africa during the early 2000s. As a result, the EU has conducted various military operations in Francophone Africa, including Operation Artemis in 2003 in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Operation EUFOR (European Union Forces) Chad/CAR five years later. These operations have provided international visibility for the discrete European defense policy (Vallin, 2015). However, France often provided most personnel and acted as the lead nation. For example, in Operation Artemis, France supplied 900 of the 1400 personnel (Trouw, 2003).

France’s waning influence in Francophone West Africa was also challenged by China’s growing presence in the region. China’s exports to most of France’s former colonies surged, while French commercial dominance receded. Chinese firms were awarded prominent projects like the Soubré dam in Côte d’Ivoire. Beijing aimed to extend its economic presence in the region, with Senegal serving as the “gateway to West Africa.” China positioned itself as a fresh alternative to France’s allegedly neo-colonialist Western approach (Bayes, 2020).

Despite France’s commitment to avoiding unilateral involvement in African interventions, on January 11th, 2013, the country found it necessary to take immediate action in response to the rapid advance of jihadist forces associated with al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Tuareg

rebel groups toward the population center of Mali. The weakness of the Malian army and the speed of the offensive, which left no time to wait for the efforts of senior officers who had evaded the purge in March 2012, made it clear that swift action was needed to protect the population and combat the threat of terrorism (International Crisis Group, 2013). Although France did not have a robust legal basis for launching a direct and offensive military intervention in Mali, the appeal for military aid from Mali's government to a willing ally gave legitimacy to Operation Serval. In "The End of Operation Barkhane" (Doukhan, 2022), Dr. David Doukhan writes, "[t]he French force was supported by several European countries who had sent troops as part of the operation in order to curb the wave of refugees into Europe due to the political instability in Africa" (p. 4). Furthermore, ECOWAS's endorsement helped justify France's military intervention in Mali from a political standpoint, both domestically and internationally. Notably, the African Union, European Union, United States, and even China supported the intervention in Mali (International Crisis Group, 2013).

By the middle of 2014, Operation Serval successfully halted the jihadist advance on Bamako, and a peace agreement would be agreed upon between the Mali government and the Tuareg rebels. On May 25, the French military began to pull out from Mali, leaving behind only a limited number of troops whose objective was to aid the central government in maintaining its authority. France announced the end of Operation Serval on July 15, 2014, as a Malian and French victory. Starting from August 1, 2014, Operation Serval was transformed into Operation Barkhane, focusing on regional operations in the Sahel. In collaboration with troops from Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso, French troops assisted the local military forces in their fight against radical Islamic organizations at the local level. (International Crisis Group, 2022).

6. THE END OF THE FOREVER WAR, 2020-2023

The global shift in the war on terror for France and the United States can be traced back to 2020. By then, the war in Afghanistan had become the longest in US history, with victory being no closer than it had been fifteen years before. Similarly, French operations in Mali had been dragging on for over five years with no end in sight and little progress made since the end of Serval in 2014. France may have had an opportunity for a victory in 2020 during a conflict between al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). During this period, the French military recommended an offensive, but the political capital did not exist after twelve years of combat (Doukhan, 2022). The US had no similar opportunity. Both countries lacked any coherent plan for how to terminate the conflicts they were in. Only two contradictory and unrealistic objectives guided US and French actions: One was minimizing expenses and casualties at any cost, and the other was rejecting anything short of total victory—an old mentality of never negotiating with terrorists (Kannan, 2019). These two goals were incompatible: Total victory against jihadists in the Sahel and Afghanistan was always possible, but the costs would be immense. Public support for this did not exist in France or the US. After 2011, US and coalition forces continuously downsized in Afghanistan while the goal was still supposedly victory (Dobbin et al, 2019). The death warrant for Afghanistan was effectively signed in 2020 when the US agreed with the Taliban to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan (Biden, 2021; Walldorf Jr, 2022). This might be perceived as the end of the US' desire for total victory. However, the US did not attempt to secure any sort of agreement between Afghanistan and the Taliban to coexist after the US withdrawal, showing that the US wanted the Afghani

military to secure complete victory against the Taliban; they were simply taking the goal of minimizing costs to its logical conclusion by fully pulling out.

Barkhane, and with it the remaining skeleton of *Françafrique*, was dealt its final blow over a year after the Afghanistan decision. The government of Mali was overthrown for the second time in nine months in May 2021, and the government of Chad was overthrown in April 2021, followed in January 2022 by Burkina Faso. These countries were three of France's G5 Sahel allies, and in less than one year, a decade of French stabilization and democratization efforts had been wiped out (International Crisis Group, 2022). The Afghan government also collapsed in April 2021 (Biden, 2021). Suddenly, with Afghanistan under the control of the Taliban, French counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel became futile. The entire goal of the war on terror had been to wipe out terrorist groups and ensure no safe havens existed for attacks to be launched against the West. Now, an entire country was opened as a terrorist haven. The West had lost the war on terror, but France still fought it. From this point, France was eager to disengage as soon as possible. After the multitude of coups and the Afghanistan debacle, it no longer had any confidence in the allies it had trained for years, but the Sahel had also lost most of its strategic importance to France. Mali demanded French forces leave the country, and France was happy to oblige. Mali hired the Wagner Group to replace these French forces and has generally pursued closer ties with Russia (Roll, 2022).

Between the withdrawal of French forces and March 2023, jihadist forces have not made any stunning advances in the wake of governmental instability like in 2013, but the situation has deteriorated significantly. So far, Mali has continued to accept the presence of troops from the UN. However, with the hostility of Mali towards the West and even its African neighbors, the possibility of these forces being withdrawn remains a mouthwatering prospect for jihadist forces. Mali's own military is weak, and although the Wagner Group has had some success in Africa (Raleigh et al., 2010),² it is unlikely they would be able to prevent jihadist forces from taking control of Mali in the absence of the UN forces. In January 2023, Burkina Faso also demanded that France leave the country, and France obliged. Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali have formed a diplomatic bloc around opposition to France and alliance with Russia. Although Burkina Faso is not yet known to have brought in Russian private military companies (PMCs), it seems likely that they will follow Mali's tracks (Al Jazeera, 2023b). Chad and Mali have now agreed with ECOWAS' demands to phase out their military dictatorships. However, Mali has already delayed a constitutional referendum scheduled for March 19th, 2023 (Al Jazeera, 2023c),³ and it seems increasingly unlikely that the government will seriously commit to democratization. Chad is the lynchpin of West African security, having the largest army of the Sahel nations and contributing vast amounts to multinational peacekeeping operations for its size (United Nations, 2022; IISS, 2023). However, even Chad's commitment to democratization efforts can be called into question. The Junta originally agreed to spend no more than 18 months in power, which has now been extended to October 2024, more than two years past the previous deadline (Hairsine & Schwikowski, 2022). So far, ECOWAS, the African Union, and the international community have tolerated this. At least one coup has been attempted since this extension (Al Jazeera, 2023a), meaning the stability of Chad is not guaranteed.

2 This citation is for ACLED data, but the data is being continuously updated: <https://acleddata.com/terms-of-use/>

3 This news came out on March 10. The situation will likely continue to develop in the very near future, but March 10 is the latest that we will be considering any new developments.

Figure 4. Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram attacks, 2019 January to March.
(Raleigh et al., 2010)

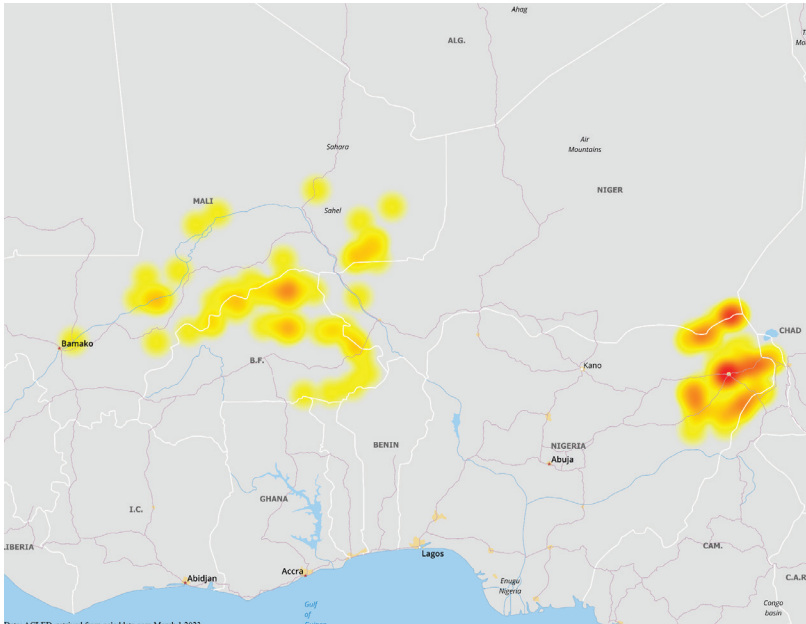
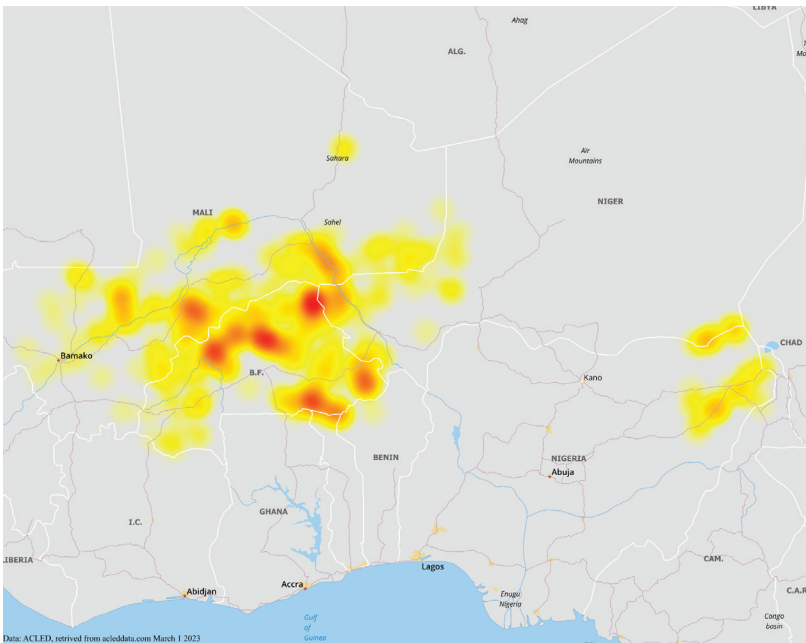


Figure 5. Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram attacks, 2023 January to March.
(Raleigh et al., 2010)



7. AFRICA'S FUTURE WITHOUT FRANCE, 2023-

As of March 2023, the political situation in West Africa is continuing to develop. Stabilization efforts in Chad, Mali, and Burkina Faso are currently not going well, and given the history of the region, we believe that either ECOWAS or the African Union will simply accept the continuation of the military dictatorships in these countries for the foreseeable future, or they will collapse. ECOWAS could attempt to force democratization with sanctions or by withdrawing international forces. Both could cause instability, or these countries could collapse independently due to an internal coup. ECOWAS have already shown themselves as weak-willed negotiators by allowing Chad and Mali to extend the timelines of their democratization processes. No other actor has a significant interest in the democratization of the Sahel nations at this point, so we believe ECOWAS will take the pragmatic approach of simply allowing these countries to remain under military dictatorships until the general situation in the Sahel improves. This does not rule out the possibility of these countries collapsing and/or being taken over by jihadist militants, but it does make it less likely.

France's position in West Africa continues to crumble. France's actions in the past three years have signaled that they are no longer interested in West Africa, and Mali and Burkina Faso's actions have signaled that this is mutual. Even the most persistent remnants of *Françafrique* such as the CFA franc zone are bound to disappear soon. Mali and Burkina Faso continue to use the CFA franc despite having hostile relations with France, but the West African eco is expected to replace it as regional currency by 2027. For African countries, abandoning the CFA has been a priority since 1994, but France had previously had the power to delay these plans. Now, with ECOWAS seeming willing to work with Mali and Burkina Faso and with France encouraging African monetary independence, the 2027 deadline seems likely to be met. At that point, France will cease having any unusual economic influence over West Africa (France24, 2021).

Militarily, France still maintains a presence in Niger and Chad. These commitments are permanent for now, but France's policy of no longer interfering with the governance of African countries means that Niger and Chad could at any moment have a coup that leads to the immediate withdrawal of French troops. Even if this does not happen, France will not engage in any frontline combat with their remaining troops and will continue to reduce their numbers. French bases in Gabon and Senegal are unlikely to be withdrawn, so that France can maintain through experience and proximity some military capability in West Africa. France's current political trajectory dictates they are unlikely to use these, but in the far future, a change in French policy could potentially allow France to resume military interventions. For as long as the CFA franc exists, France will continue to have some economic influence over West Africa, but with France adopting the euro, which the CFA is now pegged to, this influence is shared by the rest of the EU. Politically and militarily, France is no longer a major player in West Africa, and their role will only continue to shrink in the next decade.

A power vacuum emerges with the impending end of *Françafrique*, the filling of which has not yet been fully realized. A few actors are interested in the region: the European Union, China, Russia, and ECOWAS. Before 2020, the European Union was ramping up efforts to assist France in Barkhane; with Barkhane collapsing, EU and German-led initiatives have instead begun to attempt to replace France's position in the region, especially in the economic and humanitarian sectors (ECOWAS, 2020). China covets France's former title as an economic imperialist in West Africa, and their Belt and Road Initiative works

towards this (Lokanathan, 2020). However, China has not shown any desire to get militarily involved in the region, which is a significant weakness when attempting to gain influence in such a war-torn region. Russia's motives for being involved in the region are not entirely clear, but it is obvious that they are not afraid of getting their hands dirty. The Wagner Group's presence in the Sahel has increased regional instability. There is concern that Russia may sponsor coups in countries like Chad and Niger, which could cause significant issues for ECOWAS and the EU.

Additionally, China and Russia appear to be natural allies in the region, with China having economic power and Russia having military influence, raising the possibility of joint domination. It is currently unclear whether there is direct coordination between the two countries. However, Russia's already powerful presence in the region will likely strengthen in the future. ECOWAS wants stability and democracy in West Africa, but the organization is currently struggling to deal with the wave of instability after 2020. ECOWAS is weak for many reasons, and with lackluster support from the West, they are unlikely to be able to fill the power vacuum France has left. Their commitment to democracy has already been subverted by the multitude of coups in the Sahel that the organization cannot properly deal with due to the risk of these nations collapsing. Militarily, the ECOWAS Standby Force cannot deal with the increased activity of jihadist militants in the region, which will only worsen as member nations hold forces back for their defense (ECOWAS, 2022). Instead, Russia has usurped France's position of being the most potent military force in West Africa, and China has done the same in the economic sector. With Western disinterest and the weakness of ECOWAS, these actors will only be getting stronger.

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