

# The lies and secrets of French imperialism

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The coups in sub-Saharan Africa have opened a new era for the African peoples rising against French imperialism. It is not going to stop and will impact all of Africa and the wider world. The African people, particularly the youth, have had enough of the neo-colonial yoke under which France has kept their countries for more than 60 years after the so-called “decolonisation.” They now want to rule their own countries themselves and start to develop their economies.

The trigger for this [second wave](#) of the African revolution was the total failure of the Barkhane Operation, which was supposed to get rid of terrorism in the Sahel, itself a direct product of the destruction of the Libyan state by the NATO intervention in 2011. But instead of solving it, terrorism spread from Mali to Burkina Faso and Niger with terrible human consequences for the local populations.

It is not only the Western military occupation of the Sahel that Africans want to get rid of but also the whole Françafrique system, which has been stifling their countries for 60 years.

Their example will undoubtedly inspire the people of other African countries, which are bound to rise up. The tide has changed in their favor. Colonialism is over, and neo-colonialism needs to end too.

After the independence wave of the 1960s, France kept control over its ex-colonies through a system of hidden relations. This article will concentrate on the French people's ignorance about what really happens in Françafrique. This ignorance explains the virtual inexistence of any anti-imperialist movement against it.

### **French so-called 'decolonisations'**

After WWII, [in which many colonial troops were sacrificed and sent to the front line to defend France], demands for an equal liberation from the yoke of French oppression inevitably emerged in the colonies. In its wake, a colonial massacre, still officially not recognized, took place in 1944 in the barracks of Thiaroye, Senegal. Hundreds of West African soldiers who demanded their military pay on their return from France were machine-gunned.

On May 8th, 1945, a demonstration to celebrate France's liberation from Nazism in Setif, Algeria, developed into demands by Algerians for their own liberation from France. In total, 40,000 Algerians were killed.

In WWII, France claimed to be fighting for liberation against fascism and national oppression by the Nazis. However, they denied the same rights to their colonies. This attitude extended across the political spectrum, including the left, into post-war France.

François Mitterrand was the real pioneer of Françafrique. As the Minister for Overseas Affairs, he considered the war in Indo-China was at an impasse for French imperialism and advocated a focus on Africa. He promoted the idea of autonomy rather than independence. He wrote in 1952, in a similar way to the socialist leader Jules Ferry in the late C19th, who favored colonization: “France will be African, or it won’t exist.”

For his part, General De Gaulle was absolutely against autonomy, not to mention independence. The French Empire in 1954 had to face up to the French military defeat at Diên Biên Phu in Vietnam and the beginning of the Algerian Revolution. Imperialism also started to be shaken by the colonial revolution. De Gaulle finally had to admit, in the late 1950s, that it was better to grant power to the colonies rather than be forced to lose them. But he made sure it was independence only on paper.

De Gaulle was a full-blooded colonialist at heart. In 1959, he said, “Indigenous people are not yet mature enough to govern themselves.” His concern was maintaining France’s position in the world, i.e., preserving the French empire in a world split by the Cold War between two superpowers.

So when the colonies got their formal independence from France, they had to sign the [Agreements of Cooperation](#), which preserved France’s economic, monetary and military domination. Independence was emptied of its meaning. France, behind the scenes, kept managing the governments, the police forces, and the intelligence and maintained its military bases. Importantly, these agreements allowed France to intervene to “restore internal order militarily.” Also, France had its secret police and

mercenaries.

De Gaulle designed the 1958 French constitution, which gave birth to the 5th Republic. According to it, the president is in charge of foreign affairs. Matters of war or a military intervention are not decided by ministers and even less by parliament. They are worked out in “the African cell” (la Cellule africaine) linked to the president at the Elysée. De Gaulle’s unofficial councilor, Jacques Foccard, built a whole network of personal relationships with the heads of African states and other key persons, which through corruption, tied them to French interests. Secrecy was the rule. The Foccard network is still intact and has been active with all the subsequent presidents, whether from the left or the right. Even though since Sarkozy, they all declared that “Françafrique was over.”

### **A culture of secrecy and silence**

The proportion of what is told and what is hidden about Françafrique is like an iceberg: 10% visible and 90% illegal and unspeakable. In 1998, François Xavier Verschave, who disclosed the system of Françafrique, wrote a book calling it “the longest scandal of the Republic.” Françafrique amounts to a complete denial of sovereignty. French interference in many areas involves manipulations, clandestine committees, repression, African coups, and assassinations of Pan-Africanist leaders. All of this is hidden, distorted, and kept secret. Many archives have still to be declassified, like the French collusion in the Rwandan genocide, torture in the Algerian war, or the assassination of Thomas Sankara.

In exchange for letting France plunder their own countries, African dictators have financed the election campaigns of many French politicians: Chirac, Sarkozy, Mitterrand, and others. The dozens of suitcases of cash recently found in Gabon President Ali Bongo’s son’s house after the coup in Gabon are not an abnormality but have been a common practice for decades.

Freemasonry was also used to build the French administration in the colonies. Here again, it is a secretive network that distributes positions not only in the institutions but in the economy, like Total, Elf, Bouygues, or Bolloré. Under the 3rd and 4th French Republics, twenty-eight ministers of the Colonies and Overseas ministries were freemasons. Freemasonry claimed to be based on so-called ideas of “progress, humanism and brotherhood,” aiming at “civilizing” the whole world and developing the colonies. Many African heads of state on independence were former Freemason MPs in the French National Assembly.

The vast majority of the French population is ignorant of all those dirty deals. There is indeed a battle of communication. It is not only that Pan-Africanists and anti-colonialists such as Frantz Fanon have been ostracised in France, but the media has also been prevented from exposing evidence. For example, the journalist Pierre Péan, who revealed the diamonds offered by CAR dictator Bokassa to Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and later on in the 80s denounced the secret networks of Françafrique, narrowly survived a murder plot.

Control over information and its manipulation is part and parcel of French strategy in Africa. At the beginning of the 20th century, France launched newspapers to praise its actions in Africa. Any paper that criticized colonization was, of course, banned.

The justice system has also failed to correct the record of assassinations in France: notably, the murder of Oute Bono, an opponent to the Chadian regime, in Paris in 1973 or Dulcie September in 1988 in Paris. Both ended up with dismissals (non-lieu). Later, Bernard Borrel’s death in Djibouti was disguised as a suicide. Bob Denard, France’s favorite mercenary for 40 years, was accused, among other things, of murdering the Comorian President in 1989 but was later acquitted.

## **Colonialism and racism in France**

This new rise of anti-imperialism, culminating with the threat of military intervention in Niger, was met with hardly any support in France, with some exceptions, such as comments by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Only the West African diaspora has been mobilizing, particularly the Senegalese, around the arrest of the opponent Ousmane Sonko.

How do we explain the absence of solidarity towards Africa, the backyard of French imperialism?

Beyond the lack of information, there is disinformation. When a French-backed African dictator is interviewed, even from “left-wing” papers, he is never asked questions about his crimes or the looting of his country. In 2008, the army in Cameroon shot demonstrators, killing more than a hundred. It was reported in the French media as hunger riots when it was against a change in the constitution.

Along with that, racist and colonialist ideologies are widespread in France. [Toussaint Nothias](#) notes that the Western, particularly the French, media narratives about Africa are full of colonial clichés. The events are not covered as political; the focus is usually inter-ethnic rivalry and the role of local leaders. Not only is it racist, but it is also infantilizing. They conclude by blaming Africans for what has been done to their continent by external powers.

In 2005, the right-wing party UMP proposed an amendment to a bill on education, saying that the “positive rôle of colonisation” should be taught at school. It provoked such an outcry that Chirac turned against the majority in his party and successfully requested the constitutional council to rule the amendment unsustainable.

The institutional racism which is so deeply rooted in France must be related to its foreign policy. The police attacks in the quartiers populaires belong to the long history of imperialist domination. Since 2005, the police have been using methods against the black youth, such as curfews like during the Algerian war in Paris

against their great-grandparents. New techniques have been added, like drones. Islamophobia, once again raging through the government with the banning of the abaya at school in September, was also a war tool to humiliate Muslim women during the Algerian revolution. Ceremonies were organized where they were forced to unveil publicly. The abaya affair must be linked to the very severe repression which fell on the black youth, often very young, after the massive uprisings following [Nahel's Merzouk's murder](#). The appalling way the French state treats the [undocumented workers](#) to exploit them, which amounts to "modern slavery," is part of this post-colonial and racist management of the populations on becoming French ex-colonies.

France has never treated Africans as equal human beings, whether they live in Africa, have moved to France, or are descendants of former migrants like the youth in the suburbs. When the coup happened in Niger two months ago, the French elite reacted by saying: "we are going to lose Niger," as if Niger was still part of France.

Macron is the proud offspring of this colonialist mentality. His arrogance knows no limit. In 2017, he humiliated the then-Burkinabe president at a [speech](#) in Ouagadougou. In 2020, in the paper Jeune Afrique, he repeated the old neo-colonial phrase: "between France and Africa it must be a love story". This attitude does not work anymore. Africans won't accept being lied to. They are not children to whom one talks, appealing to feelings. They want equality and to build their continent with their own hands.

## **Towards the end of an epoch of French imperialism**

France conceived neo-colonialism as a prolongation of colonialism, a source of eternal exploitation. It has fiercely been clinging to its old empire when, in fact, it was more and more losing ground.

The decline of the French empire is reaching its final point. The [book](#) entitled, "An

Empire Which Does Not Want to Die, a history of Françafrique" spells it out clearly. Economically, France has lost its control over Africa, although militarily, it reinforced it through its presence in the Sahel. This is precisely what triggered the three coups in Mali, Burkina, and Niger. Instead of eliminating terrorism, ten years of imperialist military occupation of the Sahel has led to its extension in the three countries. This explains why the people massively supported the coups. The people aspire to self-determination and sovereignty. It means deciding not only what type of society and economy they want to build, i.e., one that responds to basic human needs, but also which partners they will trade and cooperate with.

They also understand that African unity is the key to reaching their goals. First, in defending their countries from potential imperialist attacks, France will certainly not give up the idea of military intervention. To be militarily ready is, therefore, absolutely necessary. In the last week of September, a coup was foiled against Ibrahim Traore, president of Burkina Faso. Mali, Burkina, and Niger, aware of this risk, had already signed a military pact a month earlier.

Fundamentally, these countries are now able to escape dependence on France. An alternative has been building up for two decades, with China at the economic level and Russia militarily in the last decade. A multipolar world is underway, especially more recently with the strengthening of the BRICS. Africa has a role to play in this new world in transition.

Undoubtedly, imperialism will put as many obstacles as possible, but as Ibrahim Traore put it: "Africa's time of slavery to Western regimes is over, and the battle for full independence has begun... either homeland or death".

"Africa's time of slavery to Western regimes is over, and the battle for full independence has begun." - Ibrahim Traore (President of the Transition of Burkina Faso)

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