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Chirac and 'la Françafrique': No Longer a Family Affair

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Since political independence, France has maintained a privileged sphere of influence—the so-called 'pré carré'—in sub-Saharan Africa, based on a series of family-like ties with its former colonies. The cold war provided a favourable environment for the development of this special relationship, as the USA saw the French presence in this part of the world as useful for the containment of Communism. However, following the end of the cold war, France has had to adapt to a new international policy environment that is more competitive and less conducive to the maintenance of such family-like ties. This article charts the evolution of Franco-African relations in an era of globalisation, as French governments have undertaken a hesitant process of policy adaptation since the mid-1990s.

Unlike decolonisation in Indochina and Algeria, the transfer of power in Black Africa was largely peaceful; as a result, there was no rupture of relations with the former colonial power. On the contrary, the years after independence were marked by an intensification of the links with France. Official rhetoric often referred to the great Franco-African family and the term 'la Françafrique' testified to a symbiotic relationship in which 'Africa is experienced in French representations as a natural extension where the Francophone world and Francophilia merge' (Bourmaud, 2000). In fact, a wide variety of terms have been coined to describe this special relationship: the countries concerned have traditionally been described as 'les pays du champ' or France's 'pré carré', while the network of actors linking France to Africa have been variously characterised as 'la Françafrique', 'le Paris-village africain', the 'complexe franco-africain' and 'l'État franco-africain'.[1]

This article will identify the key features of the international context that made the development of this special 'family' relationship possible and review the main distinctive characteristics of French African policy in the immediate post-colonial period. It will then explain why the end of the cold war and the challenges of globalisation made a new approach to Franco-African relations indispensable, even if

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some within France's African policy-making community apparently believed for a few years that it was possible to continue much as before. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and France's implication in the events leading up to it, finally destroyed any such illusions and provoked a recognition that its traditional approach to African policy no longer brought the same returns to France as it had in the past. The hesitant attempts by Paris to develop a new African policy against the backdrop of a much changed international situation will then be examined, firstly during Chirac's *septennat* (1995–2002), much of which was marked by *cohabitation* with Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, then more forthrightly but in practice just as uncertainly, under the stewardship of his activist Foreign Affairs Minister Dominique de Villepin during the early years of his second presidential mandate. In conclusion, it will be shown that, despite this renewed activism since 2002, the pressures on, and uncertainties surrounding, France's 'family' relationship with Africa have not diminished.

The International Context of French African Policy 1960–90

The smooth political transition in Black Africa was facilitated by the fact that, after the Second World War, a francophone elite had emerged that was dependent for its status and position of influence on France. This was the essential prerequisite for the continuation of close relations between the former *métropole* and its ex-colonies, as it was to this loyal elite that France was able, for the most part, to transfer power at independence (see Chafer, 2002a).

As the heads of small, weak, fragmented, multi-ethnic states with little in the way of natural resources to exploit, no trained army and a small local police force, the new political leaders had no interest in breaking off relations with the former colonial power. Moreover, self-interest was underpinned by cultural and emotional affinities. Educated in French schools, they cut their political teeth in the National Assembly of the Fourth Republic, where many of them had sat as *députés* and in some cases even served as ministers. During this time, they also formed friendships with French political leaders and officials and had no interest or desire to withdraw their collaboration at independence. The two best-known examples of this stance were Léopold Sédar Senghor and Félix Houphouët-Boigny, respectively the first presidents of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. For its part, France under General de Gaulle had no desire to break its links with Africa. No enthusiast for colonial rule, de Gaulle nonetheless saw the maintenance of a sphere of influence in Africa as crucial to French grandeur, to his vision of France as a world power in the post-colonial world.

The attitude of the USA was of crucial importance here. Against the background of the cold war, Washington saw France's continuing presence, in a part of the world that it did not know well, as desirable to ensure that the region did not fall into the clutches of Moscow. Thus, while the USA saw the maintenance of a French sphere of influence as essential to the containment of communism in Africa, France saw its *pré carré* as a means of containing 'Anglo-Saxon'—for which read American and British—influence.

As far as British influence was concerned, France need not have worried as British governments had decided that western Africa was peripheral to its strategic priorities in the post-colonial world, leaving France as the only major power in the region. Thus emerged a division of responsibilities that suited both France and the USA for the duration of the cold war, but which began to break down once the cold war had ended. This de facto partnership has given way to a more competitive, and conflictual, relationship and Franco-American divisions over the appropriate response to the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York have further exacerbated latent tensions between the two countries in Africa.

'Keeping it in the Family'

If a favourable international context was the essential prerequisite for the successful conduct of French African policy, it does not help us to understand why it was so successful for so long. The essential point here is the multi-layered approach, which combined an impressive array of 'official' policy instruments with a complex range of unofficial, family-like, and often covert, relationships (see Médard, 1997, pp. 22–24). The close inter-linking of these features and support for them at the summit of the French state was the key to their success. The official *conduits* of Franco-African relations included the Franc Zone, which tied the French franc to the currencies of over a dozen African countries at a fixed rate; the existence of an independent Ministry of Cooperation, with a seat on the Council of Ministers, which was both a visible sign of France's continuing commitment to Africa and an important channel for French development aid (two-thirds of which went to France's former colonies in Black Africa); the cultural, technical and military cooperation accords, which most ex-colonies signed with France on independence and which provided for French teachers and other specialists, such as military advisers, to work for African governments and set the framework within which French military interventions were undertaken; and finally, the fact that, with the establishment of the Fifth Republic, African policy effectively became the *domaine réservé* of the president (Chafer, 2002b, p. 346). These official links were accompanied by a range of semi-official and unofficial family-like ties that are epitomised by the Franco-African summits, instituted in 1973, which bring the French president together with African and French political leaders in an annual celebration of their special relationship. Their meetings have traditionally been more like a family gathering than an official summit meeting, as there is no published agenda and they issue no final communiqué.

Three other features were key to the success of French African policy during this period. First, the political will existed across the political establishment, on both the Left and Right, to pursue an active, interventionist policy in Africa, unencumbered by feelings of colonial guilt that for many years held Britain back from playing a more prominent role on the continent. To understand the political motivation behind the determination to carve out a sphere of influence in Africa after independence, we need to return to the Suez crisis of 1956. The US withdrawal of support for

the Franco-British military operation in Suez served to convince France's governing elites that, if France were to remain a world power, then it would need to achieve greater autonomy of action vis-à-vis the USA. Thus, whereas Britain decided it could only remain a world power by hanging on to Washington's coat-tails, the French decisions to develop an independent nuclear strike force, to build a strong Europe on the foundation of Franco-German cooperation and to maintain a privileged sphere of influence in Africa were the cornerstones of de Gaulle's policy to maintain France's world status—its grandeur—in the post-colonial era, the dawn of which he now increasingly saw as inevitable. Black Africa was thus one of the key pillars of his strategy of grandeur and he, like the French political leaders who came after him, mobilised an impressive array of policy instruments to ensure its implementation. The strategy of grandeur was the product of a concept of power that was centred on an active, interventionist nation-state and linked to territorial control and military strength. The roots of this concept of power lay in the colonial era but they continued to be manifest in francophone Black Africa well into the post-colonial era: indeed, the frequency of French military interventions, an average of one a year from 1960 until the mid-1990s, showed that France continued to see itself as 'the guarantor of stability and a hegemonic power' in the region (Brüne, 1994, p. 56). It was this activist, interventionist view of the French state that formed the basis of the 'Gaullist consensus' on African policy, which stretched across the political spectrum of France's governing parties from the Right to the Socialists.

Secondly, French governments during this period developed a distinctive discourse on Africa to justify their policy to public opinion both at home and abroad. This centred on the newly coined concept of *coopération*. Untranslatable into English, the term denotes something specifically French that is both far more wide-ranging in its compass and more ambiguous in its meaning than its most commonly used English equivalents: development aid or assistance. First, it is linked to the spread of French influence across the world. As Prime Minister Georges Pompidou put it in 1964: 'la politique de coopération est la suite de la politique d'expansion de l'Europe au XIXe siècle' (cited in Michel, 1993, p. 221). In this respect, it is a means of promoting French language and culture, of securing markets for French goods and, most importantly, of projecting French grandeur. Secondly, there was, contained within the notion of *coopération*, a recognition that this could no longer be achieved within a colonial context. France, as de Gaulle himself had acknowledged, needed to move away from the outdated colonial system towards 'une coopération féconde et amicale' (de Gaulle, 1970, p. 263). Finally, implicit in the notion of *coopération* is a sense of France's ongoing historic responsibility to promote the development of its former colonial 'family', but based henceforth on the idea of a partnership between sovereign states for their mutual benefit. As a discourse, it simultaneously appealed to notions of grandeur, to pragmatic self-interest, to France's sense of historic responsibility and to moral imperatives of solidarity with one's fellow human beings in poor countries, and underpinned the notion of a special 'family' relationship with Africa.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the close interlinking of state, party and personal interests, and indeed often the blurring of the boundaries between them, were crucial to the success of this relationship, which was underpinned by a series of *réseaux* (personal networks).[2] Its defining feature was that, although it was state centred insofar as it depended on state-to-state relations, it was underpinned by a dense web of personalised, family-like relations. The *réseaux* were pioneered most notoriously by Jacques Foccart, who combined his role as de Gaulle's right-hand man in the Gaullist movement, and subsequently the Gaullist party, with his positions as special adviser to the President on African affairs and his responsibility for liaison with the secret services. Until his removal by President Giscard d'Estaing, he was thus at the centre of a series of informal and formal networks that allowed him 'to make use of both political contacts and business connections to further his influence in French circles, while his official responsibilities allowed him systematically to cultivate the friendship of African leaders' (Médard, 1997, p. 25). The point of convergence of these networks was at the very summit of the French state, within the Élysée palace itself, which meant that Foccart enjoyed a position of exceptional power. He was able to mobilise, when necessary, the considerable economic, diplomatic and military resources of the French state in support of his initiatives, while his political position provided cover and legitimacy for his various activities, both legal and illicit. The funds to support these networks and their activities came largely from the *coopération* budget, which was subject neither to parliamentary scrutiny nor public debate but was simply rubber-stamped by the National Assembly (Bossuat, 2003, p. 433). This lack of accountability, another trait of the 'family' relationship, led to corruption, with politicians and officials becoming involved in business activities that often took the form of state racketeering.[3]

It was thus a special kind of relationship, not at all in line with true French Republican ideals, in which the interlinking of state, party and personal interests made it possible to present a set of policies and interventions as serving the wider national interest, that in practice brought major benefits to particular interest groups and small sections of the population in both France and Africa. The international prestige of the Gaullist state was enhanced by the group of loyal allies in Africa that looked to France for support and sustenance, while the Gaullist party received much of its funding from the recycling of part of the *coopération* budget, which found its way back to the party's coffers via Africa. A number of French companies, notably the state-owned oil company, Elf, which was established under de Gaulle with a brief to secure French access to oil, achieved the strategic objective set for it in Africa and also brought handsome returns to its directors and funding for the Gaullist party.[4] For African leaders, on the other hand, membership of the Franco-African 'family' provided economic, political, and if necessary military, support, from which they and the small French-speaking elites to which they belonged were the main beneficiaries.

This interlinking of state, party and personal interests in French African policy outlived de Gaulle and ensured that a wide range of political and economic stakeholders had a vested interest in maintaining France's *pré carré* in Africa.

However, the international and domestic political conditions in which this relationship had developed changed radically in the 1990s.

French African Policy in the Global Era

A favourable political environment, together with the political will and resources to sustain it, ensured that the special relationship described above endured for more than 30 years after independence. However, all of these began to be in short supply in the 1990s. The end of the cold war provoked a rapid transition to multi-partyism in Africa, creating a less stable policy environment. The political fragmentation and increased conflict that ensued in several west and central African states, combined with the debt crisis and economic failure, threatened French influence and increased the potential cost to France of maintaining its *pré carré*. As a result, the restoration of stability and security became an overriding priority, not only for France but for the international community in general. Against this background, traditional, French-style unilateral interventions in the politics of African states became fraught with risk, as the situations in Rwanda (1990–94), the Central African Republic (1995–96) and the former Zaire (1994–97) demonstrated.

Simultaneously with these developments, the policy environment became more competitive as globalisation gathered pace and the major industrial powers jockeyed for economic and political advantage, no longer constrained by the imperatives of cold war politics. In this new environment France has grown increasingly concerned about 'Anglo-Saxon' activity in Africa. The Clinton-backed African Growth and Opportunity Act (2000) sought to promote the development of new markets and investment opportunities for US business. This increased interest in Africa did not translate into any coherent policy to extend US diplomatic or military influence, but did give rise to a perception in Paris of growing competition between French and US economic interests on the continent.[5] French fears of increased US activity in Africa were further exacerbated in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, as the USA turned to Africa in its search for more secure sources of oil than its traditional Middle East suppliers.[6] France is also concerned at the renewal of US political interest in Africa, born out of the Bush Administration's war on terror and exemplified by the State Department's 2004 Pan-Sahel Initiative. At the same time, however, the new, post-1990 world order that is driven by economic globalisation and dominated by the ideology of international liberalism has created new opportunities for French business, notably through the privatisation of public services, the award of construction contracts and the winning of concessions to exploit Africa's agricultural, oil and mineral resources. In this context, the exercise of French military and political power in support of political allies, which derives from the notion of an interventionist state and is the traditional hallmark of the French presence in Africa, has become less important as a means of projecting French influence.

Finally, the European Union (EU) has become increasingly important as a policy actor in Africa (Krause, 2003). Following the mid-term review of Lomé IV (1995),

political conditionality became part of EU development policy and was fully integrated as one of the pillars of EU development policy with the signing of the Cotonou Agreement in 2002. This was new, since Lomé I–III had been presented as 'technical' agreements covering trade and development assistance between the EU and African, Caribbean, Pacific countries. The political dimension was seen as the domain of the member states. By the end of the 1990s, this had irrevocably changed and the EU, which now explicitly sought to promote the spread of Western-style multi-partyism and liberal democratic institutions through its development policy, increasingly encroached on what had been the policy-making prerogatives of the member states. This further reduced the space for a distinctive French national approach to African relations of the type described above.

Alongside these international developments, changes in Paris were also affecting the context within which French policy-making on Africa was formulated. First, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent democratic revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, questions began to be asked in France about the desirability of maintaining close relations with authoritarian regimes that had poor human rights records. Questions were also asked about the value and effectiveness of French development aid, which had signally failed to promote economic take-off in Africa despite 30 years of *coopération* policy (see for example Brunel, 1993). However, it was French implication in the events leading up to and in the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide of 1994 that provoked the most far-reaching re-evaluation of French African policy. Although domestic criticism of French involvement in Rwanda was, as usual, relatively muted, there was widespread, and well-publicised, condemnation of France's role by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (see in particular Human Rights Watch, 1995). As a result, members of France's governing elites and sections of the French press increasingly questioned the benefits to France of the relationship (see for example Rocard, 1998).

Secondly, the post-1990 era saw the breakdown of the 'Gaullist consensus' that had been the foundation stone of French African policy and thus of 'la Françafrique'. This has manifested itself at a number of levels. First, the period has been marked by two periods of political 'cohabitation', between a president of the Left and a prime minister of the Right (Mitterrand–Balladur, 1993–95) and then between a president of the Right and a prime minister of the Left (Chirac–Jospin, 1997–2002). In each case, the prime ministers, who were keen to assert their authority over African policy, challenged the Fifth Republic tradition of Franco-African relations as a presidential *domaine réservé* (see below). Secondly, the Gaullist movement has fragmented and with it the Gaullist *réseau* that was one of the key pillars of 'la Françafrique'. For example, the falling out between Chirac's and Balladur's supporters lay behind the bringing to trial of directors of the Elf oil company.[7] The break-up of the Foccart *réseau* into competing networks run by supporters of Mitterrand, Chirac and former Interior Minister Charles Pasqua explains their transformation from a network whose central *raison d'être* was the promotion of a certain notion of the French state and French grandeur (while also promoting their own private interests), into private

lobbies 'that pursue their own objectives, whether or not these objectives implicate the state' (Smith & Glaser, 1997, p. 25). This growing competition between rival *réseaux* and the corruption to which it gave rise are an essential backdrop to understanding how the system degenerated and crisis emerged in the 1990s.

Thirdly, the French political class itself has fractured. The prevailing ideology of economic neo-liberalism and the promotion of market values, competition and private enterprise represent a challenge to the notion of an interventionist state that was central to the political culture of France's governing elites of both Left and Right until the mid-1980s (Bourmaud, 2000). This consensus has fragmented, with the result that, even though France's governing elites continue to believe in the need to promote 'une certaine idée de la France', they are nonetheless divided between those who accept the values of economic liberalism and are prepared to accept a less interventionist role for the state and those who, while recognising the constraints imposed by economic globalisation, nonetheless continue to believe strongly in the need for state activism to defend French interests, especially in France's 'backyard', its privileged sphere of influence in Africa. This has had consequences for French African policy, as the former group attach less importance to 'old-style' French interventions and manifestations of French power in Africa than the latter. The demands of realpolitik ensure that divisions between these groups are neither straightforward nor clear-cut when it comes to making decisions on specific issues, yet this fragmenting of the ideology of France's governing elites is an important element in any explanation of the difficulties, and the political tensions, that have underpinned French attempts to define a new African policy since the mid-1990s. It is also a key underlying factor behind the sapping of the political will to sustain 'la Françafrique'.

Finally, as the political will to sustain France's African *pré carré* declined, so also were the resources available to maintain it eroded. There was a sharp reduction in the bilateral development aid budget between 1995 and 2001, in both value (down from 4,137 billion euros to 2,653 billion) and percentage terms (the proportion of bilateral aid to multilateral aid went down from 73% to 59.7%) (Observatoire Français de la Coopération Internationale [OFCI], 2003). The result was a very significant decline in the resources available from the French state to maintain the Franco-African special relationship and the *réseaux* that both underpinned and lived off this relationship.

From Mitterrand to Chirac: The Search for a New African Policy

President Mitterrand appeared to signal a significant change in French African policy, when he promised in his speech to the 1990 La Baule Franco-African summit that French aid would henceforth be distributed as a priority to countries making progress towards democratisation. Yet most commentators are agreed that in practice nothing much changed in French policy, initially at least (Cumming, 1996). The last years of the Mitterrand presidency were thus in many ways a period during which French African policy marked time. The main exception was the decision to devalue the Communauté Financière d'Afrique (CFA) franc by 50%, which was taken by his

Prime Minister, Edouard Balladur, in January 1994. This produced an immediate reduction in the cost to France of its African policy. Balladur was also in the forefront of those promoting the so-called 'Abidjan doctrine', whereby budgetary support for African states became conditional upon the prior conclusion of structural adjustment agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. This required states in the *pré carré* to restructure their economies in accordance with the principles of international liberalism (Bourmaud, 1996). Importantly, the adoption of the Abidjan doctrine marked an end to one of the distinguishing features of the Franco-African 'family' relationship—the provision of financial assistance to the *pays du champ* without any formal economic conditions attached. From now on, only countries undertaking an IMF/World Bank-sponsored reform programme were eligible for aid.

If the January 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc was the first significant new policy initiative towards Africa in response to the post-cold war policy environment, it was the Rwanda genocide of that year that marked the real watershed in French African policy. France had provided support to Habyarimana's extremist Hutu regime from 1990–94, then departed along with other Western powers when the genocide started, and subsequently sent a military intervention force to Rwanda in the summer of that year. Presented as a humanitarian intervention to stop further killing and save lives, Operation Turquoise was widely criticised by international NGOs for, in practice, providing a safe haven and an escape route for the *génocidaires* into Zaire. As a result, old-style, unilateral French military interventions in Africa were discredited. Not only this, but France could do nothing to prevent the English-speaking Rwanda Patriotic Front from taking power in Kigali. The result was the replacement of a pro-French government with a new government that was hostile to France and the loss of Rwanda from the Franco-African 'family'.[8]

It was now clear that African policy as traditionally conceived was no longer bringing the expected benefits to France. A new approach was required that would meet the needs of the new policy environment while preserving French power and influence on the continent. The election of Jacques Chirac to the presidency in 1995 provided the opportunity for just such a change. Chirac had a long history of interest and involvement in Africa, which dated back to his period as a civil servant in Algiers during the Algerian war (Giesbert, 1997). However, his first initiatives on Africa following his election suggested continuity with the past rather than change.

A consistent feature of Gaullist and neo-Gaullist foreign policy is to present France as a champion of Third World, and in particular African, interests. In line with this tradition, Chirac continued to make visits to Africa during the period of *cohabitation*. His first official visit overseas as president was to France's traditional allies in Africa: Morocco, reportedly to thank King Hassan II for his donation of five million euros to his election campaign, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon and Senegal (Verschave, 2002, p. 197). A year later, on the occasion of Hassan's official visit to Paris, Chirac raised a few eyebrows when he praised the king for his human rights record, at the very time when he was being criticised for his treatment of political prisoners in the Tazmamart

prison.[9] In that year he also went to Namibia, Angola, South Africa and Mozambique, and in 1999 to Guinea, Togo, Cameroon and Nigeria, which he supported as a future permanent member of the UN Security Council. Chirac was responsible for the 1997 decision to support Zaire's dictatorial leader, President Mobutu, long after his other traditional backers, including the USA and the former colonial power Belgium, had decided to abandon him to his fate. The result was French diplomatic isolation (Chafer, 2002b, p. 349). Also in 1997 he was accused of backing the return to power of his friend and ally, the former Congolese dictator Denis Sassou Nguesso, after France had fallen out with the incumbent president Patrick Lissouba, whom it had not forgiven for trying to loosen the stranglehold of the Elf oil company over his country when he became president in 1992.[10] And he refused to support the proposed merger of the Ministry of Cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was seen by its proponents as essential if France was successfully to modernise its African policy.

However, these early signs of interest in Africa from Chirac could not conceal the significance of the changes that had taken place in the international and domestic political environment in which French African policy was made. Unilateral military actions were now far riskier in the context of state fragmentation and even collapse in Africa, because of the risk of being drawn into the continent's internal conflicts. Thus, after a series of mutinies by the Central African Republic army in 1996, Chirac supported the Government's decision to close France's military base there, to avoid its troops being drawn into the imbroglio in that country.[11] Moreover, although France supported the embattled Mobutu to the end, it did not send a military force, partly because of the political risks to France and partly because such unilateral interventions no longer benefited from international acquiescence in the aftermath of Rwanda.

With the advent of a renewed period of *cohabitation* in 1997 that saw President Chirac forced to share power with Socialist Prime Minister Jospin for the full five-year period of legislature, the notion of Africa as a presidential *domaine réservé*, where the President both called the policy shots and was the unchallenged spokesman on French African policy, was again called into question. One illustration of this was Jospin's refusal to send troops to Côte d'Ivoire in December 1999 to support President Konan Bédié, who had just been overthrown in a military coup. President Chirac's African adviser, Michel Dupuch, wanted to intervene in support of Bédié, who, with French support, had succeeded long-time French ally Félix Houphouët-Boigny as President in 1993. But Jospin overruled him.[12] This went against the tradition of African policy as a presidential *domaine réservé* and can be seen as a further step towards the normalisation of French policy and away from the traditional family-like relationship.

The domestic and international pressures described above have made it more difficult for France not only to act alone but also to speak with a distinctive voice on Africa. On the international stage, France has, quite logically, made itself the champion of multilateralism. Not only is this the only way for a medium-sized power that does not enjoy a special relationship with the USA to maintain influence, but also burden-sharing represents the only possibility to meet the costs of its desire to maintain a global role, in a world in which the USA is the only superpower.[13] This is reflected in

its new approach to Africa. Alongside its Abidjan doctrine, which aims to share the economic costs of its African policy, France launched a policy initiative in 1997 with a view to spreading the risks of its military policy in Africa. Called RECAMP (Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix), this French-sponsored peace-keeping programme aims at enabling Africans to take greater responsibility for the maintenance of security and participate more fully in peace-keeping on the continent. At the level of the EU, France emerged in the late 1990s as the largest contributor to the European Development Fund (OFCI, 2003), a development motivated in part by its intention to retain significant influence over EU policy on Africa; and at the 1998 Franco-British summit in St Malo it announced its intention of cooperating more closely with the UK on African policy. Finally, France, along with the UK, was one of the key sponsors of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a multilateral initiative launched in 2001 to mobilise resources for a new development partnership between the West and Africa. In February 2002 Chirac organised a conference of 13 African heads of state in support of the NEPAD.[14] He also regularly spoke up for African interests in international fora such as the UN, G8 and EU meetings. All of these represent clear signs of France's decision to move away from a unilateralist approach to Africa. While these changes were essential if France were to maintain its influence on the continent, they were also indicative of the end of the old-style 'family' relationship and of a specifically French approach to, and discourse on, Africa.

France's new African policy was summed up by Prime Minister Jospin in a speech in Dakar in December 1997 as 'not to do less but to do better'. Yet, as Rachel Utley has shown, it was at the time 'hard to avoid the impression that France *does* wish to do less, and to gain greater credit for it' (Utley, 2002, p. 146). The French military presence in Africa was being scaled down, the will to intervene had diminished, and French bilateral development aid, for so long one of the cornerstones of its *coopération* policy, underwent a sustained decline during Jospin's premiership.[15] At the same time, he presided over the absorption of the Ministry for Cooperation, which had traditionally been considered by African leaders of the *pays du champ* as 'their' ministry, into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a measure that Chirac had opposed only two years earlier.[16] Finally, the notion of *pays du champ*, considered too redolent of the outdated notion of a French colonial 'backyard', was abandoned in favour of the Zone de solidarité prioritaire (ZSP). All countries in the zone, which was extended to include 54 countries in the developing world, of which 44 were in Africa, would henceforth be eligible for French aid. This further diluted the family-like relationship with Africa, as the 44 included former British and Portuguese colonies that were not part of France's traditional sphere of influence.

Renewed French Activism in Africa Since the 2002 Elections

Within six months of his re-election, Chirac's new Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, flew to Madagascar to repair relations with the new President,

Marc Ravalomanana, and shortly afterwards organised a business conference in Paris for the new Malagasy Prime Minister to brief investors. He also moved to cement relations with France's longstanding ally and oil supplier, Gabon, and visited six West African countries in an effort to break the deadlock in war-torn Côte d'Ivoire. As for Chirac, he went to South Africa for the Johannesburg Earth Summit, where he declared his support for South Africa as a future permanent member of the UN Security Council, then in 2003 to Mali and Niger. In the same year he took the exceptional step of inviting African leaders to the G8 Evian summit. Among those invited were presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, with whom he is in regular telephone contact.[17]

This new pattern of presidential visits and contacts is symptomatic of a move away from the traditional *pré carré* as the privileged sphere of French influence in Africa, based on political-military power and the disbursement of public development aid through a policy of *coopération*. This is the product, firstly, of the new policy environment that has resulted from globalisation, which has led to a reassessment of French interests in Africa. These are increasingly conceived primarily in terms of economic interest, and especially the exploitation of business opportunities and the guaranteeing of secure access to strategically important raw materials, notably oil. This lies behind the growing importance attached to South Africa, Nigeria and previously Angola in Franco-African relations.[18] President Mbeki's visit to Paris in November 2003 and his invitation to address the National Assembly, a rare privilege for visiting heads of state, were clear indications of the growing prominence in Franco-African relations of South Africa, which is now France's most important trading partner on the continent. The focus on business links is a key feature of France's new African policy: Chirac's invitation to 10 business leaders to accompany him on his visit to Mali and Niger and his decision to host a reception for business leaders on the occasion of President Mbeki's official visit to Paris were entirely in keeping with this new emphasis in French African policy. Reflecting this, a key focus of the work of the new Direction générale de la Coopération internationale et du Développement (DGCID), which was formed out of a merger of the old Cooperation Ministry and the cultural relations department of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, is to assist French consultants and companies to win multilateral contracts; and at the Élysée, the Service Afrique (formerly Foccart's Africa cell) now employs a former Banque de France man, Bernard Diguet, with a brief to look after French business interests in Africa. Indeed, French companies such as Bouygues, Bolloré and the Lyonnaise des Eaux have been very successful in winning contracts for major African development projects and in taking over public service utilities that IMF/World Bank-sponsored structural adjustment programmes have forced African governments to privatise.[19]

At the same time, the increased priority attached to economic and business links is accompanied by a renewed emphasis on the promotion of French culture. Thus, the DGCID has prioritised the promotion of French culture over development issues, a point that is reflected both in the organisational structure of the new Directorate—it has three sections working on cultural promotion and only one working in

the development field proper—and in its spending, only some 20% of which goes to the latter.[20]

Secondly, the move away from the *pré carré* as the focus of French African policy is the product of changed realities in Africa. In the context of state fragmentation and collapse, privileged bilateral relations with individual countries are increasingly unlikely to guarantee stability and security, as the problems in Côte d'Ivoire and the Great Lakes have demonstrated. As we have seen, old-style, unilateral, military interventions were discredited by the widely criticised interventions in Rwanda from 1990–94 and have largely ceased, to be replaced by regionally based, peace-keeping and peace enforcement initiatives.[21] It is now recognised that external interventions, in order to be effective, need to take place at the regional, rather than individual country, level.[22] The French-led RECAMP initiative, which is intended to provide support for regional solutions to Africa's security problems, is an attempt to address this issue, while providing a vehicle for maintaining French influence on the continent. There is also a recognition that, if France wishes to achieve its aim of promoting security and stability as a prerequisite for development, this can only be achieved by cultivating relations with the whole of Africa rather than through an exclusive relationship with a privileged *pré carré*. Thus, for example, the annual Franco-African summits are no longer confined to the *pré carré*: every African president, except Colonel Gaddafi but including, to the UK's dismay, Robert Mugabe, was invited to attend the 2003 summit in Paris.

The third sign of France's new approach to Africa is the continuing uncertainty over the future size of the aid budget, the traditional cornerstone of its *politique de coopération*. President Chirac pledged at the 2002 Johannesburg summit that France would raise aid levels to the UN target figure of 0.7% of gross national product by 2012. Official figures do, moreover, appear to suggest an increase in the aid budget since 2001. Yet similar promises of dramatic increases in aid have been made, and broken, many times before, notably under Mitterrand; and closer scrutiny tells us that most, if not all, of the latest increase is in practice being used for debt reduction, the so-called C2D (contrats désendettement-développement) programme, while traditional French allies such as Senegal have seen the amount of aid they receive decline substantially.[23] Of the five countries that have so far signed C2D agreements with France, none belongs to the traditional *pré carré*, and of the seven expected to qualify in 2004, only Cameroon and Madagascar are *pays du champ*.[24] Not only has the aid budget declined, but the French *coopération* effort has been further hampered since the DGCID took over the work of the old *coopération* ministry by the haemorrhaging of personnel who used to work in development cooperation. These staff often had a deep knowledge of, and commitment to, Africa and formed part of the dense web of ties that bound France to Africa. So too did *coopérants*, many of whom worked in Africa as an alternative to military service. Their number has also declined dramatically in recent years, representing a further erosion of the family-like links that used to exist between France and Africa. Moreover, the *coopérants* who have been lost to Africa have not been replaced by an influx of volunteers working

for French NGOs. French *coopération* policy has typically focused on state-to-state aid and the Government remains reluctant to work with civil society actors in the way that successive governments have in the UK. French governments have never embraced the idea of involving civil society actors and NGOs in the development process; indeed, the proportion of French aid to Africa channelled through NGOs, which in any case traditionally represents a very small proportion of French aid, is currently in decline, both in volume and as a proportion of total aid.[25] The reduction in state support for Africa has not therefore been compensated by increased involvement at the level of civil society; France has no equivalent of the Peace Corps and USAID, which maintain a significant US presence on the ground in Africa promoting grassroots development initiatives.

Conclusion

The Franco-African special relationship, encapsulated in the term 'la Françafrique', emerged in a specific historical context that came to an end in the 1990s. The defining feature of this relationship was that it was state centred, although it was operationalised through a dense web of personal ties and affinities and underpinned by a series of semi-official and unofficial *réseaux*, such as that coordinated for many years by Jacques Foccart. This article has shown that the international and domestic context that sustained the relationship for so many years has now changed, with the inevitable result that the nature of the relationship itself has also changed. Today, economic and business links, combined with a renewed emphasis on cultural *rayonnement*, have increasingly replaced state-to-state links, that were rooted in the projection of French power through political and military activism, as the hallmarks of the Franco-African relationship.

Yet at one level, old 'statist' habits die hard and France's governing elites remain reticent about embracing wholeheartedly the agenda of international economic liberalisation, in African policy as in other areas of policy. There is still an Africa cell at the Élysée, with advisers whose brief is to advise Chirac on African policy: no other continent receives this special presidential attention. The cell also plays a key role in maintaining France's links with its closest allies in Africa: Bongo (Gabon), Eyadema (Togo) and Biya (Cameroon) are three examples of African leaders who continue to occupy a special position in French African relations. In presidential speeches, the discourse of the special relationship also lives on.[26] However, none of this can disguise the fact that the old affectivity has gone, as the first post-independence generation of French and African leaders has handed over to a new generation of political leaders. In Côte d'Ivoire, President Gbagbo's supporters promote Ivoirian nationalism with talk of a 'new decolonisation' from France (Doza, 2003). Even in Senegal, whose links with France stretch back to the seventeenth century and whose special relationship with France was personified by its first president, who became an *agrégé* and a member of the Académie Française, the new generation of political leaders under Abdoulaye Wade has sought to diversify the country's foreign relations in order to reduce

dependency on France (Chafer, 2003). More generally, the new generation of African leaders has become increasingly irritated by, and less willing to accept, France's self-proclaimed role as Africa's advocate on the world stage. Meanwhile in Paris, old Africa hands who worked for the former *coopération* ministry, whose careers were spent in Africa and who both embodied the Franco-African special relationship and constituted a reservoir of expertise on Africa, are retiring and not being replaced by a new generation of Africa specialists. Moreover, with student visas increasingly difficult to obtain, fewer and fewer students from the old *pré carré* are going to university in France, often preferring to study in the USA instead (Sot, 2002). As a result, the dense web of relationships that bound France to Africa and underpinned the old 'special relationship' has declined.

In the light of this, two major questions arise. Is France and Africa still 'a family affair'? And if it is not, is 'la Françafrique' still pertinent as a notion, harking back, as it does, to an old, state-centred relationship with the *pays du champ* that was both underpinned and promoted by a dense web of personal links and affinities? To be sure, the conditions which enabled this special relationship to develop and endure for some 35 years after independence have gone for ever. Moreover, the old—pre-1990—aid regime, which was about creating and maintaining dependency, has been replaced by a new regime that is supposed to be about moving towards self-sufficiency and promoting economic and political liberalism. Recognising this, France has adopted the so-called 'Abidjan doctrine', which in effect 'internationalises' African countries' economic dependency, insofar as they must have reached prior agreement with the IMF if they wish to request French aid, while reducing the French state's political freedom of manoeuvre to pursue a distinctive African policy. All African countries in the ZSP that have concluded an agreement with the IMF are now eligible for French support. As a result, the term 'la Françafrique', encapsulating the notion of a family-like relationship, is increasingly inappropriate. The old Franco-African bloc is definitively splintered and France, it seems clear, is in the process of abandoning its old 'family' relationship with Africa in favour of a more pragmatic, more hard-nosed—and more fashionable—case-by-case approach to its African relations.

Notes

[1] Originally coined by Houphouët-Boigny, the term 'Françafrique' has come to denote the illicit, often corrupt, nature of Franco-African relations; see Verschave, 1998. The other terms are used respectively by *La Lettre du Continent*, *passim*; Bourmaud, 1996, p. 433; and Dozon, 2003, pp. 231–278.

[2] The origin of the term 'réseaux' lies in the Gaullist Resistance networks coordinated by Foccart during the Second World War.

[3] See for example Pierre Péan (1984) on the relationship between Gabon's Bongo family and the Elf oil company, in 'Procès Elf: la politique perdue de rue', *Libération*, 15 Nov., 2003.

[4] *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Apr. 2000, p. 24.

[5] *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Mar. 1998, pp. 20–21.

[6] *Africa Confidential*, 8 Mar. 2002, pp. 6–7.

[7] 'Le retour des Mitterrand's boys sur l'Afrique', *La Lettre du Continent*, 18 Jan. 2001.
[8] Rwanda was not originally part of the 'family' as it is an ex-Belgian colony.
[9] 'Quand Hassan II cite Jean Jaurès . . .', *Le Monde*, 9 May 1996.
[10] *Africa Confidential*, 20 June 1997, pp. 3–4.
[11] 'Le départ de l'armée française . . .', *Le Monde*, 20 Aug. 1997.
[12] Interview with J.-F. Bayart, *La Croix*, 27 Dec. 1999.
[13] 'M. Chirac défend un monde multipolaire', *Le Monde*, 24 Sept. 2003.
[14] 'Chirac l'Africain', *Afrique-Asie*, Mar. 2002, p. 7.
[15] See http://www.senat.fr: 'Projet de loi de finances pour 2002- Tome III' and 'Projet de loi de finances pour 2001- Tome IV'.
[16] *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Mar. 1998, p. 21.
[17] *Africa Confidential*, 6 Dec. 2002, pp. 5–6; 'Mission spéciale Niger/Mali', *La Lettre du Continent*, 23 Oct. 2003.
[18] Paris/Luanda relations have been soured by the "Angolagate" affair involving illicit arms sales to Angola, see *Africa Confidential*, 9 Mar. 2001, p. 8.
[19] 'Monopoles privés de l'eau et de l'électricité', *La Lettre du Continent*, 1 Feb. 2001; 'Bolloré/Maersk: entente cordiale sur le rail', *La Lettre du Continent*, 8 Nov. 2001.
[20] Personal communication, 24 Aug. 2003.
[21] The recent military intervention in Côte d'Ivoire appears to contradict this, although this can be explained by the necessity to protect the large (20,000) French community and France's extensive economic interests, rather than by any renewed French enthusiasm for intervening in Africa. It has support from the UN and the Economic Community of West African States.
[22] Dominique de Villepin, speech to the IHEDN, 13 June 2003, available at: http://www.ihedn.fr/Pages/Pages_Actu/FICA2003_Discours.html.
[23] French aid to Senegal declined from 82m euros in 1999 to 36.3m in 2002; see *Africa Confidential*, 25 June 2004, p. 7.
[24] The budget forecast for 2004 is that 138.5m euros will be allocated to the C2D. The first five countries to sign C2D agreements with France were: Mozambique, Uganda, Bolivia, Tanzania and Mauritania; those expected to qualify in 2004 are Rwanda, Malawi, Nicaragua, Cameroon, Ghana, Madagascar and Honduras; see http://www.senat.fr/rap/a03-076-3/a-03-076-314.html.
[25] Cumming, 2001, pp. 150, 377; Smith, 2004. According to Smith less than 1% of French development aid was channelled via NGOs in 2001—'cinq fois moins que ses voisins' —and only a quarter of French NGO spending went to Africa, down from 46% in 1999.
[26] For example at the 2003 Franco-African summit (Ayad, 2003).

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