Reforms and Revision in Franco-Africa Relations, 1945-2015

By

John George Etire
Department of History, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama, P.M.B 74. Yenegoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
Email: etirejohn1960@Gmail.Com
&
Kingdom E. Orji
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
Email: orjiekekingdom@gmail.com

Abstract

The French colonized a greater part of Africa and established the French empire. The French aim to spread its culture, language and civilization to these colonies. They introduced the policy of assimilation to turn Africans to black Frenchmen. However, this policy was not taken too far when the French changed from assimilation to association. The policy of association was abandoned in 1946 in the Loi Cadre Gueye which turn every colonist to citizens of France in the new French Union. But in 1958, De Gaulle introduced reforms which led to the establishment of the French Community with the exception of Guinea who opted to remain independent. At independence the French signed military pact with the Franco-Africa client states for the protection of the African territories and their incumbent governments from possible internal subjugation from the opposition. In order to maintain this, the French built several military bases across Africa. That notwithstanding, the end of the Cold War brought new thinking among French leaders who feel Africa was not too important in international relations. These set of French leaders tried to reform the basis of Franco-Africa relations to suit their thinking. These politicians worked to reorder the foundation of Franco-Africa relations but later found out that they could not carry out such ideas without losing their position in Africa. Some of these leaders felt Africa is not viable and wanted to shift their focus to multilateralism but later reverted to the status quo by resuming their security obligations in Africa. Some of these French leaders felt democracy is too sophisticated for Africans and instead decided to support despots rather than unknown new democratic leaders in Africa who may not be amenable to their policies in Africa. However, the French leader's reforms were influenced by the end of the Cold War and the emergence of a globalised world.

Keyword: Franco-Africa relations, French leaders, Cold War, Client States and Reforms.

Introduction

The French desires more than any other nation to disseminate her language and culture to other parts of the world. From the beginning, the French followed a policy which seek to turn Africans into black Frenchmen in the four communes of Senegal, where Africans even had the right to elect a deputy to the French National Assembly in Paris.

The French pursued a policy of assimilation which sought to transfer the civilization of France to its African territories.

The inhabitants of the four Senegalese communes, the towns of St. Louis, Goree, Rufisque and Dakar, were given French citizenship, governed under French law and through French political institutions, municipal councils and a general council.

They studied French history, French literature and French morals and way of life. Following the conquest of vast areas in Africa during the scramble and the fear of domination of non-white from the colonies in the parliament, the French did not extend the commune system to the enlarged areas. However, the French abandoned the assimilation policy for a new policy called association.

Under the association policy, all Africans outside the communes were classified as subjects who were not protected by French law nor had any say in government through municipal or general council, subjects were totally subjected to the autocracy of colonial officials who could demand their labour without pay and jail term without trial, Webster and Boahen (1980). That notwithstanding, the "Association Policy" remained the official French policy from around 1900 to the Loi Lamine Gueye of 1946 by which all Africans were declared citizens of France. This signaled the Collapse of the policy of association and the birth of the French Union. In the French constitution of1946, the status of subject was abolished, forced labour was ended. Each colony was to have a representative assembly to be represented in the National Assembly in Paris.

Further reforms were undertaken in 1958; when General Charles de Gaulle emerged as the President of France. He initiated a new constitution whose aim was to transform the French Union to the French Community. The new constitution was subjected to a referendum in September, 1958.

Each of the French colonies in Africa was asked to vote "Yes" or "No" in the referendum. "Yes" meant approval to become an autonomous republic within the French Community. "No" meant attaining independence and moving out of the French Community. De Gaulle

made it clear that any colony that voted "No" would lose French economic and technical aid. In all, Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea, campaigned for the Guineans to vote "No", he was successful as 95 percent of Guineans voted "No".Guinea was the only country which automatically gained independence under the 1958 referendum. Guinea ceased to be member of the French Community. Because the French never really wanted to free her francophone colonies, Sekou Toure was reprimanded by the French leader. President De Gaulle of France ordered the withdrawal of all French personnel in Guinea, Webster and Boahen (1980). In the new French constitution which they drew up, the French empire was reorganized. It now consisted of metropolitan France and the overseas territories. Each colony was given its own autonomy with its own elected representatives to the French Community.

However, many Africans were not satisfied and so continued to ask for equal rights between Africans and Frenchmen.

The French believed the economies of the colonies should be tied to those of the imperial power in such a way that the imperial power benefited. For example, according to a theory called Colonial Pact by the French,the colonies must provide agricultural export crops for the imperial country and buy its manufactured goods in return.

However, the French African countries were forced to buy and sell in French markets even when they could do so more profitably elsewhere. While on the other hand the Colonial Pact did not oblige France to buy from her colonies, Webster and Boahen (1980). That is, if Ghanaian cocoa was cheaper the French could buy it to the loss of their colony. Thus, the Colonial Pact was binding on the colonies but not on the imperial country.

The French also had several military agreements with its client states in Africa. They built several military bases for the purpose of protecting African dictators and it's economic interests in the continent.

French Economic Interests in Franco-Africa Relations

Economically, the French framed the economies of its colonies to suit the interest of the metropolitan country. The colonies were tied to the economy of the metropolitan country in such a way that the CFA is used in all French speaking African states and Guinea Bissau with its Central Bank in Dakar, Senegal, a common currency backed by the French Treasury, Ogunsanwo (2015). In Ivory Coast and other French Africa territories the most lucrative commercial and industrial enterprises were in the hands of Europeans and a large share of the profits being repatriated to France. European industries finances are kept in

European owned banks. Large salaries were paid to European managers who spend it in European clothing shops, Cafes, night clubs and cinema, Webster and Boahen (1980), all of which in turn make their own remittance back to France.

Because of the vagaries of the Cold War, the French believe that concentrating development assistance to their client states in Africa, will create and tighten economic, political and social bonds between France and her client states in Africa, Goldstein and Pevehouse (2012). The French during the Cold War concentrated its development assistance mainly to its African client states. They never cared if these resources were properly used. What matters was just be amenable to their interests and policies.

French Military Guarantee in Africa

At independence, each of the newly independent former French colonies signed a pact with Paris under which France was committed to the military defence of the new African States should the need arise in future. This arrangement allows the stationing of a French military contingent on the territory of the new states, Ogunsanwo (2015). It meant that, whatever military actions that was taken by France in the former colonies where their troops have been stationed cannot be described as a hostile intervention. One major reason for the many French military bases in Africa was the Cold War between the east and the capitalist west. France being a key player in world's capitalism fear the spread of socialism into its former colonial territories. The French had provided security guarantee to her client African countries for many years. The French security for African countries was backed by series of French military bases across Africa. They had started with independence and rolled on until the government got caught up trying to implement its informal guarantee defending the Hutu regime in Rwanda in 1994, Collier (2010). The French security guarantee in Africa before the Rwandan debacle was that any coup attempt that has got out of hand would have been put down by the French troops but on the occasion of the coup organized by General Guei against the government of President Bédié of Ivory Coast, the French choose not to intervene because the coup did not pose any danger to their national interests in Ivory Coast.

Franco-Africa Relations and Reforms in the 1990s

The end of the Cold War had ignited new thinking, reforms and changes in French policy toward Africa in the 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union triggered a wave of socio-economic issues which affected many countries in the continent. The political and economic changes in Eastern Europe and as it may affect African countries was first noticed in January 1990 by the French Minister of Cooperation, Jacques Pelletier,when he warned that the changes taking place in Eastern Europe would have effect on Africa,

Kroslak (2004). This was because the changes in political and economic spheres in these countries will demand more money from the West for democratization and economic reforms, thereby leading to shortages of funds for development assistance. The collapse of the bi-polar world has given birth to a globalized world order with new forms of international relations and new ways of doing business among nations of the world. The changes during the period was also triggered by certain domestic developments in France.

1. The economic strength of the Franc Zone
2. A succession of leaders who did not recognize the importance of Africa in international relations.
3. The consequence and media coverage of the Rwanda genocide opened the eyes of the French leaders on Franco-Africa relations.
4.

The political scandal in Rwanda also helped to awaken the French public of the decay in Franco-Africa relations. The reforms was also encouraged by certain developments in Africa, some of these problems are the debt crisis, economic failure, political instability and conflict and humanitarian crisis which made involvement very costly. The end of the Cold War and later the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa shifted the interest and support of major Cold War actors away from Africa, which had been of some strategic importance to the West, Iheme (2019). This situation left African nations vulnerable to insurgencies arising from hitherto suppressed demands by the masses in most African countries. In addition to this was the French support for Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997 which discredited and isolated France. The consequences of French support for the Hutus in Rwanda and the support for Mobutu had allowed for the establishment of certain rules previously non-existence in relation to French policies in Africa.

The Franco – Africa Summit in La Baule

President Francois Mitterrand Launched the reform agenda in France`s bid to reform French policy on Africa at the Franco–Africa summit in La Baule in 1990. He warned African leaders at the conference, that France will link its contribution to efforts designed to lead to greater liberty and democracy, Smith (2008). However, this was tackled with kid gloves and thus its democratic demands and the attempt to protect economic interests will in the future be in conflict. The French government maintained a paternalistic attitude towards the governments in Africa. President Jaeques Chirac, for example, considered democracy to be a luxury for Africans and in February 1990 declared himself in favour of the One-Party system in Africa. Even with the declaration at la Baule to help with democratization, while continuing bilateral relationship and military assistance, French-Africa politics was marked by financial assistance for undemocratic regimes and a commitment to rescue them whenever their internal security seemed threatened. This was

the case in Rwanda before the pogrom in 1984, which about 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred. It was also true that the French aided the Hutu government in Rwanda by giving more than enough development assistance which led to the deprivation, marginalization and exclusion in the politics of Rwanda, William (2016). These coupled with the imminent invasion by the Tutsis from Uganda and Congo was to lead to the escalation of the Rwandan crisis. The French leaders of this era believed that democracy is not a good system for Africans. This was in accordance with what Bernard Debre, Minister of Cooperation (November 1994 to May 1995) said "democratization in Africa leads to instability and institutional weakness. We must therefore encourage, assist and help stabilize those regimes and leaders who are progressing on the path to democratization at their own pace", Kroslak (2004). For example, President Habyarimana of Rwanda made promises to democratize but only implemented a half–hearted democratization process, Williams (2016). Despite the change in French policy towards Africa, the French did not support the newly established democratic party but rather maintained close links with authoritarian elites that committed genocide in 1994. Though, some of the French leaders like Jacques Chirac denounced pseudo–democracy and coup d'état, France continued to retain its ambiguous relationship to democracy on the African continent.

Multilateral Approach to Franco-Africa Relations

Because of the implication of economic and social changes resulting from the collapse of the Berlin wall, the French reformers moved further deeper into multilateralism in a way to share the cost of developing its African client states and the security needs in the continent. However in September 1993, President Balladur set out to take La Baule a step further by proclaiming what was later called the "Abidjan Doctrine". This doctrine differentiated clearly between aid linked to specific development projects involved in education, sanitation or equipment and aid not related to specific projects which would be conditional on a prior agreement with the World Bank and IMF. Although, this was in line with spirit La Baule, it was Balladur that pushed for the restructuring of African economies according to the emerging global economic system. At this point the European Union (EU) became the forum for development aid for French government, Kroslak (2004). The major objectives of this measure was to keep the economic advantages without paying much.

To make sure that African economies worked in favour of Paris, French leaders of this era resorted to a monetary arrangement in the Franc zone and the CFA Franc aimed at controlling the issuance and circulation of currency, their monetary and financial regulation, their banking activities, their credit allocation, budgetary and economic policies. With the control of the African Central Bank, monetary and financial policy remained in the firm grip of the French. Prime Minister Edouard Balladur incorperated the

liberal economic approach based on two major issues namely: The devaluation of the CFA Franc and the opening up of Franco-Africa policy to non–Francophone countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. This meant the reallocation of French resources in areas outside the Franc Zone. However the collapse of the African economies resulting from these measures put a great pressure on the economy of France because of the cost of assisting bankrupt African States. These drastic measures signified a move away from the old method of relationship between France and its client states in Africa. That notwithstanding, African leaders were not prepared for these changes and saw these reforms as sudden, unilateral and therefore a let down on the African states.

In the area of debt relief, France cancelled the arrears of debts owned by the client states. President Jacques Chirac in 1995 announced the conversion of the depth of four African countries into investment in exchange for a reduction in their external debts. Paris also cancelled 60 percent of its voluntary contributions to UN agencies which negatively affected many development projects, e.g the fight against HIV/AIDS, Kroslak (2004). These adjustments led to the reduction of French development assistance to the continent.

However, Chirac and other reformers of the period fearing China, USA and other industrialized countries taking over their place in Africa, decided to make a u-turn. They came to speak more of bilateralism and to increase development assistance in the Francophone countries. That notwithstanding, the French rather preferred to support African initiatives notably, NEPAD. The French agreed that they made a lot of mistakes in the past in Franco-Africa relations that needed to be adjusted without dismissing the reforms. The French Leaders felt that they have lost contact with Africa and the 1990`s was one marked by an error of judgment.

Multilateralism and French Military Involvement in Africa

Before the reform of the 1990`s, two types of military involvement existed in Africa. One was the military cooperation, i.e, giving military support to African states. This form of military cooperation involves arms transfers, technological transfers or military industrial cooperation which was controlled by the Ministry of Cooperation. However, when it concern deployment of troops, the mandate and command came from the Ministry of Defense. These defense and military cooperation agreements sustained French dominance on the continent and was made a tool to intervene in African internal affairs in the name of regional stability. Most Francophone countries are tied to France through these agreements which benefited most dictatorial regime in the continent. The multilateral approach to these defense agreements affected these defense arrangements. France, due to

the forces of globalization hope to form a European Rapid Reaction Force and to have closer understanding with NATO.

The French leader during this period realized that the internal upheavals that spread across African countries could ferment more serious problem if France should hold on to its defense agreements with its client states in Africa. These reason led to the redefinition of its security operations in Africa and the underbelly of the defense reforms of 1994 and 1996. France was the only country to maintain military bases throughout Africa. Troops from the bases could be deployed in cases of internal upheavals or external aggression against any African State. However in 1990's the French started downsizing the number of its troops and closing down most of its military bases in the continent. This was due to the vagaries of the new world order after the end of the Cold War and the resentment of French military presence on the continent. The truth about the French involvement in security issues in the continent was that the traditional approach to African security was maintained in Paris until its failure in Rwanda. The different military agreements between France and its client states and the political and economic involvement of France on the continent has encouraged the French army to intervene at least Thirty times in Africa since 1963. What was most important in these intervention was that the French army intervened when their economic and political interests is threatened.

Multilateralism and French Peace Keeping Initiatives in Africa

Because of the criticism relating to the Rwanda pogrom and the French support for Mobutu Sese Seko and its eventual isolation, the French now targeted at regionalizing African security. Thus, regional organizations were seen to have better potentials to play a greater role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the continent. In order to achieve these aims, France decided to allocate more resources to the OAU's conflict prevention programme and to the ECOWAS peacekeeping mission in Guinea-Bissau. France provided both logistic and a daily allowance of $16 for each soldier, Galadima (2019). The allowance was considered as part of France's assistance to Africa. The French supported regional arrangements for African security concerns because it hoped to reduce the risks and costs as well as share responsibilities among its European partners. Encouraged by the St. Malo Conference, a trilateral peacekeeping agenda was launched in 1997 which united the efforts of three peacekeeping initiatives: RECAMP (Reinforcement des capacities africaines de maintien de la Paix), ACRI (Africa Crises Response Initiative) and BMATT (British Military Advisory and Training Teams) insisting that France cannot assure the security of its African client States, Kroslak (2004). However, the French intention is to contribute to peacekeeping and international security through it's cooperation with the countries that are found in the areas where France has strategic interests. Though, the end of the Cold

War inflamed reforms in Franco-Africa relations, reformers took careful steps, especially the government of President Chirac and reverted to bilateralism by being heavily committed to economic and geopolitical considerations. Efforts to alter Franco-Africa relations through multilateralism was dwarfed by the traditional interests of France in Franco-Africa relations. This was evident in the recent intervention in the Ivory Coast and the Ituri region of the DR Congo and the intervention in the Mali crises in 2013 on the permission of President Francois Hollande, Ogunsanwo (2015). The French were also involved in mediating peace between Liberia and its neighbours including Ivory coast and the Francophone states through the good offices of the United Nations and regionally through the standing mediation committee of ECOWAS which organized several peace talks and encouraged the warring sides to meet independently, Enuka (2015). This was in a way to settle the difference between the Francophone and Anglophone countries on the resolution of the Liberian crisis. These renewed interventions by the French was because the French reformers later realized that France has lost its pride in Africa and seek to reassert its position by combining traditional relationship with the reform agendas of the 1990's.

Conclusion

The changes in Franco-Africa relations were engendered by the end of the Cold War and the emergence of French leaders who do not recognize the importance of Africa in the international community. The changes were also influenced by certain factors such as the scandal in the Rwandan pogrom which France was indicted for supporting a government that committed genocide. It was also influenced by debt and economic problems in the client states. In all the French new policy for Africa never lasted for too long when French leaders like Chirac reverted to the status quo considering the importance of African territories to France. Francophone Africa had characteristics that would otherwise have made it prone to warfare. But the actual incidence was much lower than would have been expected. The military guarantee significantly reduced the risk of conflict. For example, when Chad exploded into civil war, rebels reached the gates of the presidential palace. As the crisis unfolded the French position rapidly shifted. Initially the French announced that they had no intention of intervening militarily. Within a week they had thought better of it and issued a security guarantee, that the rebels would be repelled by French forces unless they withdraw. The rebels without hesitation withdrew. This was made possible because of the French military bases in Africa. Despite the fact that French policy on Africa has been altered over the years, French interests and influence on the continent remains significant. Many traditionalists remain to defend French interests in Africa. Chirac and de Villepin searched for a compromise between the reforms introduced by Balladur, Juppe and Jospin and the more traditional bilateral approach that has marked French policy on Africa.

Chirac clearly wanted to assert France's role in Africa after several years of disconnect. This was especially visible in the interventions in Ivory Coast, Ituri in DR Congo and Chad.

References

Webster, J.B. and Boahen, A.A. (1980). The Revolutionary Years: West Africa Since 1980, Longman Group Limited, London.

Ogunsanwo, A (2015). Selected Essays on Politics and International Relations, Concept Publications Limited, 77, Shipeolu Street, Palmgrove, Lagos, Nigeria.

Goldstein, J.S. and Pevehouse, D.F. (2012). International Relations, 10th Edition, Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, Longman Pearson, U.S.A.

Collier, P. (2010). Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places, The Bodley Head, Vintage Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge road, London SWIV 2SA.

Iheme, F (2019). The Role of ECOWAS in conflict management in S.G. Best (ed), Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa, Spectrum Books Limited, Spectrum House Ring Road, P.M.B. 5612 Ibadan Nigeria. Pp. 252-294.

Smith, B.C (2008). Understanding Third World Politics: Theories of Political change & Development, 2nd Ed, Palgrave MacmillianHoundmills, Basingstoke, Hamsphire RG 216XS and 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

William, P.D (2016). Wars & Conflict in Africa, Policy Press, Cambridge.

Kroslak, D. (2004). France's Policy Towards Africa: Continuity or Change in I. Taylor and P. Williams, Understanding Africa's place in World Politics, Routledge, 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX 14 4 RN. Pp.65-81.

Galadima, H.S (2019) Peace Support Operations in Africa in S.G. Best (ed), Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa, Spectrum Books Ltd, Spectrum House Ring Road, P.M.B. 5612 Ibadan Nigeria. PP. 295-328.

Enuka, C. (2015). Confict and Peacekeeping in Africa: The West Africa Peace Initiative, 1990-1997, Arise and Shine Press, 6 C.M.O Shopping Complex, Regina Caeli Road, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.