



Neo-Colonialism in Africa: France's Ongoing Policy Influence and Its Impact on African Autonomy

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KEYWORDS

Military coup d'état;
 Françafrique;
 France's neo-colonialist
 tactics;
 Sub-Saharan Africa

ABSTRACT

In the wake of the Second World War, a wave of decolonization movements and national independence swept across the globe, and the former French colonies in Africa became independent in the following two decades, which at the same time marked the collapse of the French colonial empire. However, French influence persisted on this huge continent and continued to be felt in varied ways throughout Africa, particularly in West Africa and the Sahel region. In recent years, the fall of pro-French Governments in France's former African colonies has demonstrated the negative impact of its African policy on those countries, leading to a rise in the will of the African people to fight for genuine autonomy. This study aims to demonstrate how France continues to exert its influence over its former African colonies through a variety of means, including resource looting, financial control, and military presence, in order to realize its neo-colonialist strategy and ultimately reap beneficial results. This study also demonstrates a rational assessment of the decline of French influence in Africa and the presence of other world powers in Africa, as well as a hopeful view of the future of Africa's struggle for true independence and autonomy.

1. Introduction

While the Russo-Ukrainian War seems to be descending into an interminable and protracted war, the military coup d'état in the Republic of Niger, a former French colony in West Africa, which resulted in President Mohamed Bazoum being detained by his guards and placed under house arrest as well as the occupation of state television by Niger soldiers to declare the victory of this military coup d'état, has recently drawn attention to the African continent, which has previously received relatively little exposure. [1] At the same time, France took a strong stand against the coup d'état, with President Macron declaring that he would defend French interests in the Niger and ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) threatening military intervention in the Niger. While Mali, Burkina Faso and Algeria, have proclaimed their support for the coup d'état and declared that any external military intervention in Niger would be tantamount to a threat to them, the situation has appeared to be spiraling out of control for a time. This coup d'état, which took place in the region of the world where coup d'états occur most frequently, appears to be just another struggle for power, but it is actually a revolution and a fight against France's neo-colonialist tactics. Neocolonialism was introduced in 1956 to describe the special economic and cultural relationship between European countries and their former colonies after the Second World War. [2] In the 1960s, neo-colonialism was used by the Ghanaian politician Kwame Nkrumah in the context of the decolonization

movement in Africa. Neocolonialism is different from the traditional colonial strategy in that it controls a country and influences its political situation by economic means, cultural means, or "conditional assistance" rather than by using military force to conquer a nation. However, the slight difference in France's neo-colonial strategy is that it keeps a military presence in its former colonies in Africa through "Military Collaboration" or "Counter-Terrorism," while it maintains economic control over them through the circulation of the West African franc and the Central African franc as well as the exploitation of their mineral resources.

The military coup d'état in Niger in July was not an isolated incident; in fact, it was the eleventh coup d'état to take place in the Sahel region—also known as the "Coups d'état Belt"—since 2020. Actually, more coup d'états have occurred in French-speaking nations than in English-speaking ones in West Africa and the Sahel region, since 1990, accounting for 78% of the region's 27 coup d'états. [3] This raises the question of what France brought to these former colonies that has led to the current situation. The French presence in Africa has a long history. As early as the 17th century, the First French Colonial Empire established its first trading post in Senegal in West Africa, and in the following 18th and 19th centuries, the French colonial empire's territory in Africa was dramatically exaggerated, occupying a large amount of land in North Africa, West Africa and Central Africa, making it the largest occupier of colonial territory in Africa. In the aftermath of World War II, many of France's African colonies achieved independence during the decolonization movement and wave of national independence. [4] At first glance, it looked like that France had lost many of its colonies, and many Africans rejoiced in their countries' newly found freedom. True independence, though, remained elusive. Through a variety of tactics, France continued to impose control over Africa, creating the special and intricate "Françafrique" relationship. The word "Françafrique", which is composed of the words "France" and "Africa" in French, is used to describe the "close" relationship between France and its former African colonies. This "close" relationship has objectively brought economic and industrial progress to France's former colonies in Africa, as Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the first President of Côte d'Ivoire, used the term in recognition of France's positive role in the economic growth and political stability of Côte d'Ivoire. [5] But as it has become increasingly clear that France's negative impact on African countries outweighs its positive impact, the term "Françafrique" is now being used to criticize the "neo-colonialism" that France has imposed on its former colonies in Africa. The word "Françafrique" in the study of international relations can be defined as "France's political and economic influence to make Africa its sphere of influence or backyard", according to Maja Bovcon, a specialist in West African analysis. Based on a French linguistic interpretation, the word is made up of the adjective "Français" and the noun "Afrique", with "Français" denoting "French or France's". Thus, the literal translation of the word "Françafrique" can be "France's Africa," which is close to Maja Bovcon's interpretation from an international relations perspective.

2. France's neo-colonialist tactics in Africa

2.1 Resource Looting

The French resource plundering of West Africa today is focused on the robbery of natural resources, natural uranium is a perfect illustration for this case, as opposed to the colonial-era pillage of Africa's demographic resources. As the world's second-largest producer of nuclear power, France relies on nuclear energy for 70.6% of its electricity production. To maintain its nuclear power plants, France requires approximately 8,000 tons of natural uranium annually. Additionally, as one of the few nuclear-armed nations, uranium resources also hold significant military significance for the French military. [6] Therefore, natural

uranium plays an indispensable role in both France's civilian and military nuclear sectors. Niger, which produces 4.7% of the world's natural uranium, comes in third place behind Kazakhstan and Australia in 2021. In 2022, Niger provided natural uranium for over 103 nuclear reactors in 13 EU Member States, making it the second-largest natural uranium supplier to the EU. At the same time, Niger is the third largest natural uranium supplier to France between 2005 and 2020, meeting 19% of its demand for 56 nuclear reactors and 18 nuclear power plants.

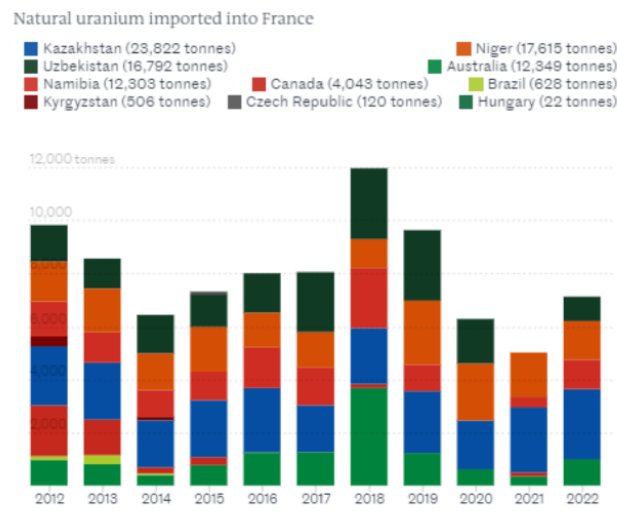


Figure 1 Natural uranium imported into France from 2012-2022. Technical Committee Euratom

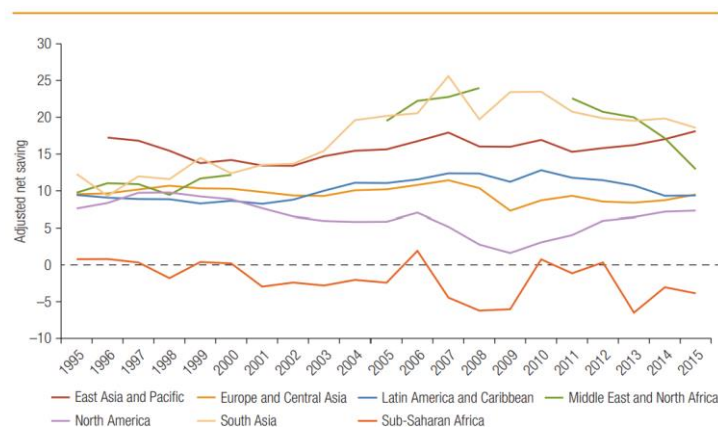
Despite having made a substantial contribution to France's nuclear energy development, Niger receives little in return, with about 85% of the country's people still lacking access to electricity, and only 12% of the proceeds from uranium exports going back to Niger. Additionally, the uranium mining industry in Niger generates sizable profits for Orano, the French nuclear energy group that is more than 90% state-owned, which owns more than 59% of three mines in the north of the nation: The Aïr mines, The Akokan mining site, and the Imouraren mine. According to a 2013 report by Oxfam, Niger gave the French organization Orano around 30% of the uranium it required, but Orano only paid Niger 7% of the total. Through negotiations with the Niger government, the corporation also obtained tax breaks worth tens of millions of euros. According to estimates, France, the main purchaser of natural uranium from Niger, purchases the uranium annually for an amount that is significantly less than market value — equal to 0.8 €/kg—while purchasing natural uranium from Canada for an amount that is comparable to 200 €/kg. [7] As one of the world's least developed countries and one of the poorest, with nearly 60% of its population living on less than 1\$ a day, Niger is ranked at the bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index, and the plundering of natural uranium, the Niger's main export, by France, has exacerbated the economic situation of this poorest of countries.

Niger is not the only country whose resources are being exploited by France. Gabon is the world's second largest producer of manganese after South Africa, and the French mining group Eramet has been present in Gabon for decades, its subsidiary Comilog extracting 90% of Gabon's manganese thanks to the world's largest manganese mine - Moanda mines. Manganese is widely used in electric vehicle batteries, and it has

been listed by the European Commission as one of the 23 key raw materials for the energy transition. [8] African countries are rich in natural resources, while France is highly dependent on African raw materials such as cobalt, uranium, copper, manganese, phosphate and bauxite. The import of these raw materials from Africa is essential for the development and operation of France's high-tech industries, aerospace, nuclear energy and weapons.... France's mining investments in Africa cover a number of countries, such as Gabon, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), etc. France's mining investments in Africa are also a major source of raw materials for the development and operation of its high-tech industries. French companies are also engaged in oil and gas extraction activities in several African countries. TotalEnergies, a giant French energy company, is present in Niger, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville and Côte d'Ivoire. France has invested heavily in the energy sector in these countries to access energy resources.

In 2018, the World Bank published a figure of Adjusted Net Saving (ANS) for all regions of the world. [9] ANS measures the true rate of saving in an economy after taking into account investments in human capital, depletion of natural resources and damages caused by pollution. Adjusted net saving, known informally as genuine saving, is an indicator that aims to assess an economy's sustainability based on the concepts of extended national accounts. If a country's net savings are positive and the accounting includes a sufficiently broad range of assets, economic theory suggests that the present value of social welfare is increasing. Conversely, persistently negative adjusted net savings indicate that an economy is on an unsustainable path. [10] Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where the ANS is negative, the World Bank concludes that Sub-Saharan Africa loses roughly \$100 billion of ANS annually. Although the depletion of natural resources is not the only indicator affecting the ANS, it is clear that natural resource depletion is one of the key factors in the negativity of the ANS in sub-Saharan Africa, a region rich in natural resources. The large-scale exploitation of natural resources by multinational corporations in the region is obviously not the right path for the sustainable economic development of the sub-Saharan Africa region. These multinational energy companies often include French energy companies.

FIGURE 2.12 Adjusted Net Saving, by Region, 1995–2015
percentage of gross national income



Source: World Bank calculations.

Note: There is a break for Middle East and North Africa because of a lack of data for many countries in the region for those years.

Figure 2 Adjusted Net Saving, by Region, 1995-2015, percentage of gross national income. World Bank calculations. (2018)

2.2 Financial Control

In addition to the plundering of Niger's uranium resources, France's economic plundering of Niger is also reflected in its fiscal and monetary policies. Niger, along with seven other West African countries, is part of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and uses the CFA franc as its currency. The CFA franc is pegged to the euro at a fixed exchange rate set by France and guaranteed by the French government. However, the French Ministry of Finance controls the issuance and printing of the CFA franc, the nations that use the currency pay a mint tax to France, 50% of the UEMOA's foreign exchange reserves must be held at the French central bank, and there is a sizable French presence on the central bank boards of West African nations. Therefore, despite appearing to be jointly managed by France and the central banks of West African nations, the West African franc's monetary system is in fact under France's de facto authority. UEMOA lacks monetary autonomy and the authority to issue additional currency, which makes it difficult for the governments to make loans and causes the economy to expand slowly. In addition, these countries have no control over the price of its currency and is unable to use the exchange rate to control the currency in the case of a financial crisis. Despite the obvious drawbacks, what is worse is that it seems difficult for these countries to move away from this currency. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which consists of 15 countries in West Africa (including UEMOA), announced plans to introduce the ECO currency in 2020. However, due to the epidemic and other circumstances, in 2021, ECOWAS member states decided at a summit that the ECO currency would not be introduced until 2027. Some economists have analyzed that one of the major influencing factors is the failure of the economic situation of the member countries to meet the convergence criteria. According to Macroeconomic Convergence Criteria Adopted by The Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Governments in 2015, member states are required to fulfill the following criteria to ensure macroeconomic stability when the single currency is issued.

Primary Criteria [11]

- (1) Ratio of Budget deficit (commitment basis, including grants) to GDP: lower than or equal to 3% of GDP.
- (2) Average annual inflation rate: less than 10% in short term and 5% as from 31st December 2019.
- (3) Central Bank financing of Budget Deficit: less than or equal to 10% of previous year's tax revenue.
- (4) Gross external reserves: greater than or equal to three months of imports cover.

Secondary Criteria

- (1) Nominal exchange rate variation: (+/- 10%).
- (2) Public debt to GDP ratio: less than or equal to 70%.

But unfortunately, until 2017, the ECOWAS member states did not reach the mentioned criteria. It is worth to note that the adoption of the CFA franc by West African nations decreases the risk of inflation, avoids significant exchange rate swings, and is objectively favorable to the stability of the region's economies and currencies. [12] From the standpoint of global trade, the peg between the CFA franc and the Euro can ensure merchants' faith in this currency, which promotes international trade and commercial cooperation. If ECOWAS members use the single currency ECO, which is not pegged to the euro, how will the ECO safeguard exchange rate stability, secure traders' confidence in this new currency, and win international backing? [13] [14] [15] All of these are worthwhile issues to consider. In addition to these difficulties, France's opposition to UEMOA member states participating in the ECO currency may be another reason why the

single currency may not be introduced in 2020. [16] According to economist Séraphin Prao, the execution of this project was somewhat hampered by Macron's trip to Côte d'Ivoire in 2019.

CRITERIA	TARGET	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Primary Criteria									
Ratio of Budget deficit (including grants on commitment basis, including grants)	≤3%	9	6	9	6	6	3	7	5
Average annual inflation rate	≤10%	12	12	12	14	14	12	11	11
Central Bank financing of the Budget Deficit	≥10%	12	13	14	13	12	13	12	15
Gross external reserves	≥3	14	13	13	14	12	13	14	14
Secondary Criteria									
Nominal exchange rate variation	±10%	13	14	14	13	13	12	12	13
Ratio of Public debt to GDP	≤70%	13	13	13	11	11	11	12	11

Figure 3 Number of Countries that Met the Convergence Criteria in ECOWAS. WEST AFRICAN MONETARY AGENCY (2017)

2.3 Military Presence

The French military presence on the African continent has a long history, as many French soldiers came to the continent during the colonial era to fight for the motherland and to open up colonies. Between 1960 and 2013, France conducted 31 military operations in Africa, all of them in Francophone countries. Between 1960 and 1994, France signed military agreements with 27 African countries, [17] [18] and these military interventions and agreements have played an important role in protecting France's economic and political interests on the continent, especially by keeping unpopular pro-French leaders in power. Today, the Sahel region, which is plagued by extreme poverty, backwardness, and regional conflicts, is a breeding ground for terrorism. France started military operations in 2012 and 2014 with the names "Operation Serval" and "Operation Barkhane" to combat terrorism. Armed forces were sent to the Sahel region to cooperate with the G5 Sahel in the fight against terrorism. Nevertheless, after years of counterterrorism operations, the French military has not made much headway, and if anything, the threat of terrorism has grown. Significant criticism has also been leveled at these efforts. The Minister of State of Burkina Faso, Bassolma Bazie, in his recent speech to the United Nations General Assembly, had suspected that the terrorist forces in the Sahel region were being financed by external forces such as France and the United States, and had continued to maintain a military presence in the region on the pretext of counterterrorism. [19]

However, as anti-French sentiment rises and the people of West Africa's desire for true independence and freedom increase, France has experienced significant defeats in the Sahel region in recent years. France left Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Central African Republic between 2022 and early 2023 as a result of anti-French regimes taking control in the Sahel countries and widespread protests. And on 24 September, two months after the military coup d'état in Niger, French President Macron announced that he would recall his ambassador in Niger and withdraw the 1,500 French troops in Niger to their homeland before the end of the year. As a result, only 1,000 French troops in Chad remain in the Sahel. But the withdrawal of French troops did not mean the complete disappearance of French military forces in Africa, in this continent, France still has five military bases, a total of 3,820 military combatants, and a small number of troops to participate in the European Union's operations in Africa and the United Nations peacekeeping missions. The presence of French troops on the African continent not only allows France to protect its expatriates but also gives it the ability to intervene at any time and in any place to defend its interests in Africa as well as

to continue to expand its influence. [20] In his address to the United Nations General Assembly, Bassolma Bazie also stated that one of the primary causes of the high number of coup d'états on the continent is the influence of certain nations and organizations that plunder resources, promote poor governance, and cultivate proxies in Africa, resulting in corrupt and ineffective governments and the suffering of the people. He added that " Coup d'états are just a result, and if we eradicate the causes, so will the results diminish."

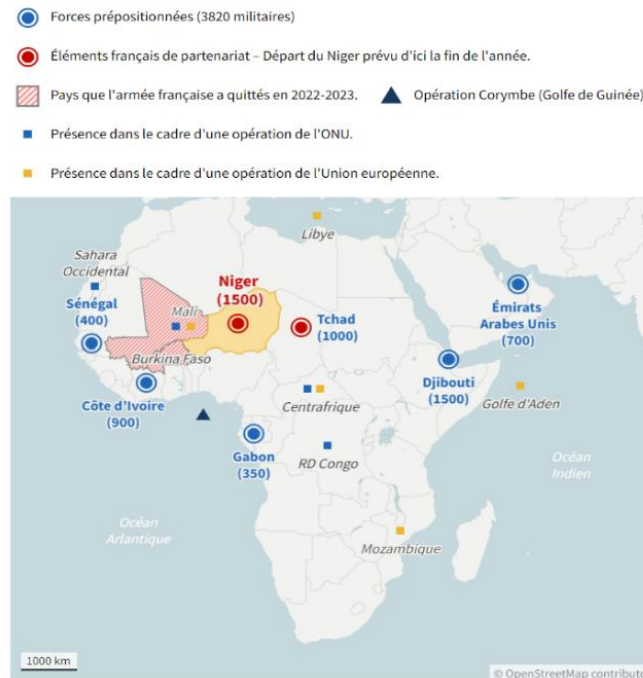


Figure 4 French military presence in Africa until 25 September 2023. French Ministry of Defence (2023)

3. Other factors

The loss of labour and talent is also one of the reasons why Africa has long struggled to develop. In the days of the slave trade, many Africans came to France as slaves. In World War II, the French Army of Africa contributed to the liberation of French soil and the victory of the Allied Forces, and many Africans were sacrificed as a result. After World War II, due to the high casualties caused by the war, the French government introduced many labour force from Africa for the needs of economic construction and national reconstruction, and many Africans from French colonies left their lands to work and participate in the reconstruction of France. However, in modern times, France's attraction to the talent and labour force of its former African colonial countries is mainly through its cultural and linguistic appeal. Because the official language of most of France's former African colonies is French, and the education system is also influenced by France, young people from France's former African colonies are more likely to choose to study and work in France, and are more likely to integrate into French society, and as a result, France has gained access to a relatively high-quality talent and labor force, whereas West African countries are facing a loss of talent and labor force. A number released by Campus France in 2022 indicated that, for a considerable amount of time, France has continued to hold its place as the preferred study destination for sub-Saharan African countries. In 2021–2022, 92,000 international students from these countries studied in France, a 40% increase over the previous five years.

As for the political dimension, France is often criticized for undermining the sovereignty of other countries through its influence. After the end of the Cold War, France used its aid policy to Africa as a foreign policy tool to change the political systems of certain African countries, and the most important principle of France's aid policy to Africa was based on the protection of France's economic interests, and France would consequently support a number of pro-French authoritarian governments and corrupt leaders. France provided military, technical and financial support to the Hutu Government during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, an act that tarnished its image both in Africa and in the international community. In recent years, President Macron wants to improve France's reputation in Africa, he is looking to develop a new narrative to improve France's relations with its former African colonies, and making efforts in the areas of economic, historical memory, and aid. But Macron's ideas have been constrained by some historical factors, France's internal political and decision-making structures, resulting in a rapid turnaround of France's policy in Africa that remains uncertain.

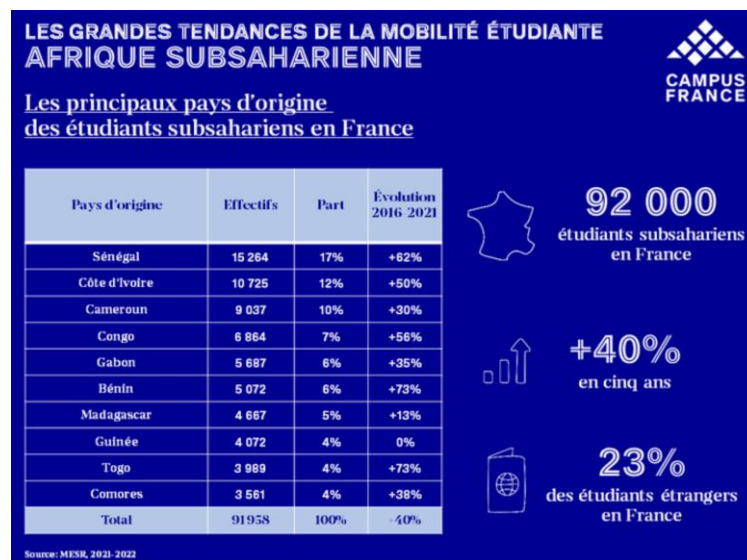


Figure 5 The major trends in Sub-Saharan African student mobility. French higher education and research ministry (2021-2022)

4. Other players

Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso signed a charter in the Malian city of Bamako shortly after the military coup d'état in Niger. The charter established a defense alliance and decided to form the Alliance of Sahel States with the goals of battling terrorism, organized crime, and common defense. This resulted in the formation of a "coalition against France" in West Africa as well as the dissolution of the G5 Sahel, which had been established in 2014. With the withdrawal of French troops and the sharp decline of French influence in the region, there is every indication that the region has come under the influence of the Russian Wagner Group, which seems to be behind the military coup d'états in all three countries of the Alliance of Sahel States. As Russia's agent in Africa, the Wagner Group, which operates mainly in Mali, the Central African Republic and Sudan, provides military combat support, security and military training services to its African clients. In return, the Wagner Group receives cash payments or resource concessions, such as logging rights and control of the gold mine. [21] Russia's influence on the African continent is not a recent phenomenon. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union used the African continent as the stage for its great power influence,

portraying itself as the liberator of African nations so as to help them to get rid of the influence of European colonizers, and as a result, some African people saw the USSR as a much more attractive partner to work with than the West. [22] To this day, the pro-Russian wave in Africa still exists, with two polls by Premise Data in August 2023 showing that Russia is trusted highly in a number of African countries, with more than 60% of the population in Niger identifying Russia as the most trustworthy country, while in Mali the figure is up to 71%. Against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Russia's rift with the West has grown deeper and deeper, and in order to break the West's diplomatic isolation, Russia has taken steps to continue to expand its influence in Africa to gain more diplomatic support at the United Nations. [23] At the second Russia-Africa Summit, the leaders of Burkina Faso and Mali declared their support for Russia's special military operation against Ukraine and the President of the Central African Republic said that the Russia-African Summit provides an opportunity for African countries to resist the hegemony of certain countries.

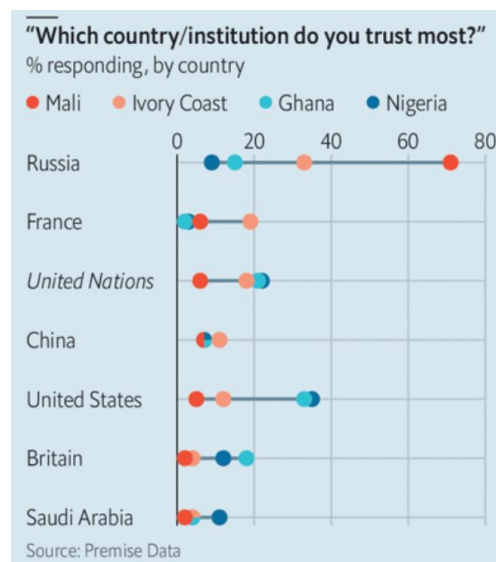


Figure 6 “Which country/institution do you trust most?”, by West African country(in%). Premise Data(2023)

In addition to Russia and France, the African continent is also a stage for the demonstration of the influence of other world powers, with China and the United States continuing to exert different influences on this vast continent at the same time. [24] China's influence in Africa has been demonstrated mainly through economic and trade cooperation and infrastructure construction. As early as the 1960s, China assisted Zambia and Tanzania in the construction of railroads. Between 2000 and 2020, China provided help to African nations in the construction of more than 13,000 km of railways, almost 100,000 km of highways, around 1,000 bridges, nearly 100 ports, and more than 80 large-scale power plants. [25] As for trade, China has held the position of Africa's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years, with China-Africa trade hitting a record \$282 billion in 2022, a 16.6% increase from 2021. In 2022, China's exports and imports to and from African countries all grew by more than 11% compared to 2021. Despite the fact that China's aid to Africa is not tied to any political conditions, there are still Western politicians who believe that Africa is falling into China's debt trap. [26] China denies this view and argues that China is dedicated to helping Africa get out of poverty. In 2023, a study by the CHINA AFRICA RESEARCH INITIATIVE at Johns Hopkins University in the United States of America showed that China was an active participant in the G20

Debt Relief Initiative, contributing up to 63% of the debt relief, and that China had contributed greatly to helping restructure the heavy debt burdens of some African countries. [27] [28]

Different from China, the United States, in addition to various economic and trade exchanges with Africa, has deployed 29 military bases in 15 African countries, with a garrison of about 6,000 troops, of which 13 are enduring bases and 16 are non-enduring bases. [29] [30] The African countries in which U.S. troops are stationed are mainly concentrated in East Africa and West Africa. It is undeniable that the presence of U.S. troops on the African continent, where terrorism is rampant, has played a positive role in combating terrorists, but the presence of U.S. troops on the continent must have its own geopolitical considerations. For example, U.S. military bases in East Africa can join those in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, giving the United States the ability to intervene at any time in the recently erupted Israeli-Palestinian war. The U.S.'s ability to quickly intervene in regional affairs and project capabilities to protect its own interests is made possible by the presence of American troops in Africa, but this interventionism also raises questions about potential interference with the sovereignty of African nations.

5. Conclusion

The African continent has indeed become a platform for major world powers to showcase their economic and military strength, as well as to compare the merits and drawbacks of their foreign policies. France's neo-colonial strategy, characterized by various forms of exploitation in West African countries, has exacerbated the burden on these nations, resulting in concerning economic conditions. Western nations' policies in Africa often exhibit a lack of due respect for the sovereignty of African countries, allowing global giants like Russia and China to steadily expand their influence with different policy paradigms. For African countries, international assistance and foreign trade and economic cooperation are important, but the political objectives of the Western countries that are embedded in such assistance and cooperation have a negative impact on the long-term development of these countries and pose a threat to their sovereignty and independence. Burkina Faso leader Ibrahim Traoré said at the recent 2nd Russia-Africa Summit, "A slave who cannot assume his own revolt does not deserve to be pitied." How Niger, West Africa, and the African continent can escape the fate of being enslaved by the great powers and interfered with by external forces and achieve real development is something that African leaders need to work hard to achieve.

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