

POLICY BRIEFING

# France and Africa: Analysis of their relationships from the colonies to present days

## Abstract

The paper focuses on the analysis of the relationships between France and Africa, starting from a brief excursus on the colonial period.

Everything starts with the description of the French diplomatic network, followed by a general overview on the colonialization of the African continent by France. The focus then will be put on the specific historical analysis of three republics: The Republic of Mali, the Republic of Niger and the Republic of Senegal.

For each country there will be presented its profile and the description of the more recent events happened, ending with the use of information collected in a short diplomatic diary from November 2017 to January 2018.

Personal remarks will conclude the analysis.

This policy briefing is an initiative started by Mrs. Karen Visani in her course of Science Diplomacy as a student's work.

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## 1. France: country profile

**Area:** 643,801 sq. km

**Natural resources:** coal, iron, bauxite, zinc, uranium, arsenic, potash, fluorspar, fish.

**Population:** 67,106,161 – population growth rate 0.39% (2017).

**Capital City:** Paris

**Government type:** semi-presidential Republic

**Language:** French (official at 100%), declined regional dialects.

**Religions:** Christian Roman Catholic (63-66%), Muslim (7-9%) Buddhist (0.5-0.75%), Jewish (0.5-0.75%), other (0.5-0.1%), none (23-28%).

**GDP:** 2.826 trillion US dollars (2017).<sup>1</sup>

**Flag:**



Figure 1: French map

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/graphics/maps/fr-map.gif>

France today is one of the most modern countries in the world and it is a leader among EU nations. It plays an influential global role as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, NATO, the G-7, G-20, EU, and other organizations. France rejoined NATO's command structure in 2009, reversing De Gaulle's decision to withdraw French forces from it in 1966. Its cooperation with Germany in recent decades has strengthened the EU integration.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 The French diplomatic network

French diplomacy operates towards a lot of different countries:



Figure 2: Diplomatic ties of France around the world

[https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/jpg/activite\\_reseau\\_diplo\\_en\\_cle826246.jpg](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/jpg/activite_reseau_diplo_en_cle826246.jpg)

<sup>1</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (US), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fr.html>

<sup>2</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (US), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fr.html>

The French diplomatic network<sup>3</sup> is based on a series of bilateral relations (embassies and consular sections) and multilateral relations (with international bodies like the EU, UN, UNICEF and OCDE). Its missions are:

- The protection of all French interests in all fields
- The establishment of peace, security and human rights
- The organization of globalization to foster the sustainable development
- Administration and protection of French residents abroad

Other aims are also the diffusion of French culture worldwide and the defense of Francophony.

Ministers:

- Jean- Yves le Drian as Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs since May 2017.
- Nathalie Loiseau as Minister for European Affairs
- Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne as Minister of State attached to the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

## 2. Colonialism

### 2.1 A General overview

As beforementioned, this paper focuses on recent diplomatic events developed between France and Africa, but before describing them it is better to give some information concerning the French colonization process in Africa.<sup>4</sup>

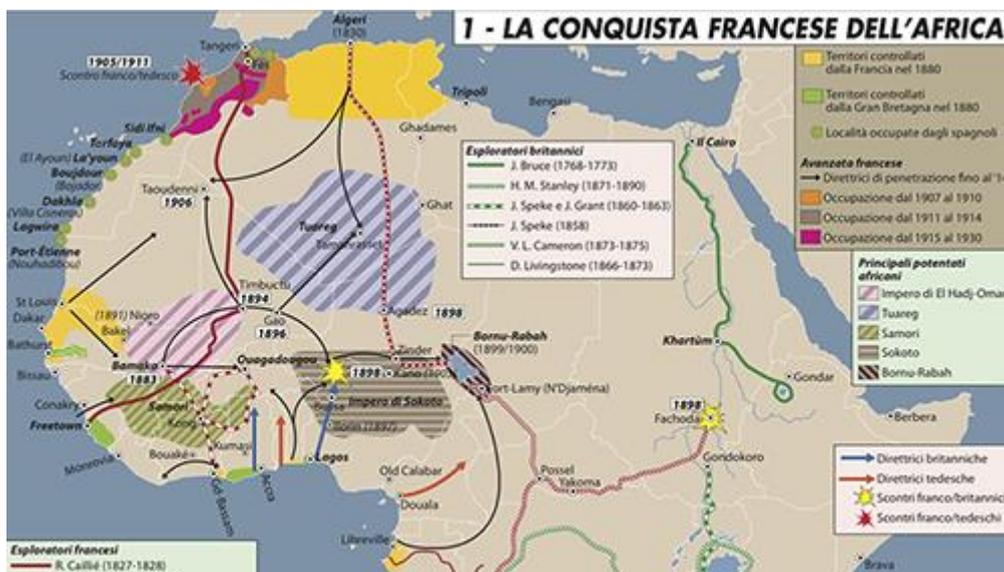


Figure 3: French conquer of Africa

[http://www.limesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/adv\\_022.jpg](http://www.limesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/adv_022.jpg)

<sup>3</sup> France Diplomatie, *The Ministry and its Networks*, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/graphic-activity-of-the-french-diplomatic-network-abroad/>

<sup>4</sup> Limes Online, *La Conquista Francese dell’Africa*, Giugno 2012, <http://www.limesonline.com/la-conquista-francese-dellafrica/35648>

The French presence in Africa dates to the 17th century, but the main period of colonial expansion came in the 19th century with the invasion of Ottoman Algiers in 1830, conquests in West and Equatorial Africa during the so-called scramble for Africa and the establishment of protectorates in Tunisia and Morocco in the decades before the First World War.

To these parts of German Togo and Cameroon were added, assigned to France as League of Nations mandates after the war. By 1930, French colonial Africa encompassed the vast confederations of French West Africa, and French Equatorial Africa, the western Maghreb, the Indian Ocean islands of Madagascar, Réunion, and the Comoros, and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. Territories in sub-Saharan Africa were treated primarily as colonies of exploitation, although only Algeria drew many European immigrants.

Throughout Africa, French rule was characterized by sharp contradictions between a rhetorical commitment to the “civilization” of indigenous people through cultural, political, and economic reform, and the harsh realities of violent conquest, economic exploitation, legal inequality, and sociocultural disruption. At the same time, French domination was never complete. As in all empires, colonized people throughout French Africa developed strategies to resist or evade French authority, subvert or co-opt the so-called civilizing mission, and cope with the upheavals of occupation. After the First World War, new and more organized forms of contestation emerged, as Western-educated reformers, nationalists, and trade unions pressed by a variety of means for a more equitable distribution of political and administrative power.

These demands for change spurred the process of decolonization after the Second World War. Efforts by French authorities and some African leaders to replace imperial rule with a federal organization failed, and following a 1958 constitutional referendum, almost all French territories in sub-Saharan Africa claimed their independence. In North Africa, Tunisian and Moroccan nationalists were able to force the French to negotiate independence in the 1950s, but decolonization in Algeria, with its million European settlers, came only after a brutal war between 1954 and 1962. Although formal French rule in Africa had ended by 1962, the ties it forged continue to shape relations between France and its former colonial territories throughout the continent.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2 A more detailed focus

In this part specific relationship between France and three African States are described: The Republic of Mali, Niger and Senegal.

## 2.3 The Republic of Mali

Mali is a landlocked state located in the Sahel region of West Africa. The territory was colonized by the French and was part of l’Afrique Occidentale Française (French West Africa, or AOF). The Atlantic slave trade spread north into Malian territory and did not draw to a close until the early 20th century. French colonial rule altered the political economy of the region with vast agricultural development projects as well as the introduction of legal codes and state administration that endure to this day. Mali gained independence from France in 1960 as the Mali Federation (joined with Senegal), before separating and becoming the Republic of Mali in September 1960.

Three Republics have succeeded in Mali between 1968 and 1992. The last one has been established in 1992. Alpha Oumar Konaré was elected president and served two five-year terms in office. ATT was elected President in 2002, but he was overthrown by a coup d’état in March 2012 just a month before presidential elections were to be held to determine his successor. Since the coup, Mali’s secular government has been threatened by political infighting and the

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<sup>5</sup> Ruth G., Sessions J., *French Colonial Rule*, Oxford Press, February 2016.

reinvigoration of various jihadist elements in the north following a flood of arms into the country in the aftermath of the fall of Libya's leader, Muammar Qadhafi. After two decades of relative stability, Mali is witnessing a humanitarian crisis, with over four hundred thousand refugees and internally displaced peoples. Mali's tremendous cultural heritage is at risk as unrest envelops the occupied north, where venerated mausoleums have been destroyed by armed jihadists seeking to purify the practice of Islam in Mali.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.4 The Republic of Niger

The French colonization in Niger started in 1880. In 1899 the territory was organized again by France, and the occidental part of the territory was joined to Senegal, while the other part was dependent on Dahomey. In 1911 the Country was ruled by the General Governor of West French Africa and in 1922 it became "Colonie du Niger". The decolonization process started in 1956 and after the referendum in 1958 Niger became an autonomous Republic in the French Community. The full independence was achieved in 1960 thanks to Hamani Diori, who became President of the Republic during the same year. He was re-elected in 1965 and in 1970 and he has the possibility to rule Niger because of this. In 1974 a coup d'état was lead, because of water scarcity, related to the economic crisis. Different coup d'état were led until 1983, and because of this in 1984 there was the start of the democratization process with a new constitutional charter, approved in 1987.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.5 The Republic of Senegal

The establishment of Senegal as a French colony is merely one part of the French colonial effort in west Africa during the 1880s and 1890s. By 1895 there are no fewer than six French colonies in the region, covering a vast unbroken stretch of the continent. In that year they are grouped together as French West Africa. Among them Senegal is the colony with the strongest French presence. Dakar, founded by the French in 1857 on the mainland opposite the island of Gorée, becomes the capital of the territory in 1902. Senegal therefore remains at the center of France's west African empire, until all the separate colonies win their independence in 1960.

The first president of independent Senegal, after the dissolution of French West Africa, is an experienced and distinguished politician within the French system. Léopold Senghor has been a socialist deputy for Senegal in the national assembly in Paris since 1946, and has played a part in drafting de Gaulle's new constitution of 1958. In 1963 he provides Senegal with a constitution, modelled to some extent on de Gaulle's, with executive powers in the hands of the president. Senghor himself remains in office until resigning at the end of 1980. Senegal joined with The Gambia to form the nominal confederation of Senegambia in 1982. The envisaged integration of the two countries was never implemented, and the union was dissolved in 1989. The Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance has led a low-level separatist insurgency in southern Senegal since the 1980s.

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<sup>6</sup> Wing S., *Mali*, Oxford Press, May 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Decalo S., Abdourahmane I., *Historical Dictionary of Niger (Historical Dictionaries of Africa)*, Maryland, Scarecrow Press; 4<sup>th</sup> edition, June 2012

### 3. Recent events

In this area recent events characterizing The Republic of Mali, Niger and Senegal are described, starting from their country profiles.

#### 3.1 The Republic of Mali

**Area:** 1,240,192 sq. km

**Natural resources:** gold, phosphates, salt, limestone, uranium, granite, hydropower.

**Population:** 17,885,245 – population growth rate 3.02% (2017).

**Capital City:** Bamako

**Government type:** semi-presidential Republic

**Language:** French (official), others.

**Religions:** Muslim 94.8%, Christian 2.4%, Animist 2%, none 0.5%, unspecified 0.3%

**GDP:** 40.98 billion US dollars (2017).<sup>8</sup>

**Flag:**



Figure 4: Malian map  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/graphics/maps/ml-map.gif>

The Sudanese Republic and Senegal became independent from France in 1960 as the Mali Federation. When Senegal withdrew after only a few months, what formerly made up the Sudanese Republic was renamed Mali. Malian returnees from Libya in 2011 with the spread of the civil war, exacerbated tensions in northern Mali. The war in Libya, which brought about dire consequences for Mali's stability. Qaddafi was a major financial and political supporter of the Malian regime. Moreover, Qaddafi acted as a Tuareg patron and his demise meant the end of external control over Tuareg groups. Although his support was instrumental, Qaddafi was able to control these groups by using financial leverage, and used them to serve his regional interests. He mediated an agreement between Malian and Nigerien Tuaregs with their respective governments in 2009.

Tuareg ethnic militias rebelled in January 2012 after the recognition of the independence of the Azawad Region, which comprises the territory of Northern Mali, Niger and the Southern part of Algeria. Intensive mediation efforts led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) returned power to a civilian administration in April with the appointment of Interim President Dioncounda TRAORE. The post-coup chaos led to rebels expelling the Malian military from the country's three northern regions and allowed Islamic militants to set up strongholds. Hundreds of thousands of northern Malians fled the violence to southern Mali and neighboring countries, exacerbating regional food shortages in host communities.

EU's attention to the crisis rose only after the north fell in the hands of Islamist groups. Indeed, France decided to intervene only when Jihadist groups took over the strategic town of Konna, located 600 km from Bamako, and started heading southwards. This crisis represented a problem for the stability of both Europe and Africa in general. The

<sup>8</sup> Central intelligence Agency (US),  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>

international military intervention to retake the three northern regions began in January 2013 and within a month most of the north had been retaken. During the same month France decided to intervene in the region to solve the situation with the help of MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali). The French-led military intervention pushed back Jihadist forces in their desert strongholds, but this represents only a phase of a longer conflict. The challenges at hand remain daunting. Moreover, the strategy on the Sahel and the French intervention in Mali revealed that terrorism still represents the most important prism through which European actors read the situation on the ground.

Although the EU has tried to provide a comprehensive response to the ongoing crisis in the Sahel, its policies were immediately weakened by the eruption of the crisis in Mali. what the EU can do is to support actively the reinforcement of the Malian national security forces, bringing the military back under civilian control, providing funds and aid to easing economic pressure and using these tools as a way to increase pressure on the Malian authorities to create a more inclusive political environment.<sup>9,10</sup>

Still nowadays, according to the Amnesty International report of the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017, the situation is unchanged. Everything rotates around the need to solve a conflict based on the spread of terrorism in the area<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2 The Republic of Niger

**Area:** 1.267 million sq. km

**Natural resources:** uranium, coal, phosphates, gold, salt, petroleum

**Population:** 19,245,344 – population growth rate 3.19% (2017).

**Capital city:** Niamey

**Government type:** semi-presidential Republic

**Language:** French (official), Hausa, Djerma

**Religions:** Muslim 80%, other (includes indigenous beliefs and Christian) 20%

**GDP:** 21.62 billion US dollars (2017).<sup>12</sup>

**Flag:**



Figure 5: Niger's map  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/graphics/maps/ng-map.gif>

After the independence from France, military rule controlled the area until 1991, when multiparty election were made and they resulted in a democratic government in 1993. Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world with minimal government services and insufficient funds to develop its resource base. The largely agrarian and subsistence-based economy is frequently disrupted by extended droughts common to the Sahel region of Africa. A Tuareg rebellion

<sup>9</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (US)

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>

<sup>10</sup> Cristiani D., Riccardo F, *From Disfunctionality to Disaggregation and Back? The Malian Crisis, Local Players and European Interests*, IAI Working Papers, 8 March 2013.

<http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1308.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International, *Mali: Gruppi Armati minano la Sicurezza*, 22 September 2017

<https://www.amnesty.it/mali-gruppi-armati-minano-la-sicurezza/>

<sup>12</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (US)

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ng.html>

emerged in 2007 and ended in 2009. Niger is facing increased security concerns on its borders from various external threats including insecurity in Libya, spillover from the conflict in Mali, and violent extremism in northeastern Nigeria.

As far as the diplomatic diary taken between November 2017 and January 2018 is concerned, France has been involved in different activities concerning Niger, like for example on the 21<sup>st</sup> November, after the terroristic attack of Boko Haram to a mosque in Nigeria, France has given again its support to the military forces of Niger, and Chad, in order to fight against terrorism in these places.

In fact, recent events in Niger show that the area that goes from Mali to Niger itself represents a real Insecurity Ring, as defined by the United States. Measures taken have not improved the situation and refugees continue to cross the borders. In the country cocaine trafficking is extremely diffused and there's a great quantity of Uranium, a particular substance useful in order to produce weapons of mass destruction. This is the reason why the Security Council, that includes Africa, gives particular attention to the country and French military basis have the control of the activities in the area. As beforementioned, principal problems here are related to drug trafficking and terrorism (jihadism in the Sahel region), and until they won't be solved, the situation will remain unchanged.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.3 The Republic of Senegal

**Area:** 196,722 sq. km

**Natural resources:** fish, phosphates, iron

**Population:** 14,668,522 – population growth rate 2.39 % (2017).

**Capital City:** Dakar

**Government type:** presidential Republic

**Language:** French (official), Wolof, Pular, Jola, Mandinka, Serer, Soninke

**Religions:** Muslim 96.1%, Christian 3.6%, animist 0.3%

**GDP:** 43.07 billion US dollars (2017).<sup>14</sup>

**Flag:**



Figure 6: Senegalese map  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/graphics/maps/sg-map.gif>

Senegal remains one of the most stable democracies in Africa and has a long history of participating in international peacekeeping and regional mediation. Senegal was ruled by a Socialist Party for 40 years until Abdoulaye WADE was elected president in 2000. He was reelected in 2007 and during his two terms amended Senegal's constitution over a dozen times to increase executive power and weaken the opposition. His decision to run for a third presidential term sparked a large public backlash that led to his defeat in a March 2012 runoff with Macky SALL, whose term runs until 2019. A 2016 constitutional referendum reduced the term to five years with a maximum of two consecutive terms for future presidents.

<sup>13</sup> Prashad V., *Le macchine da Guerra che strangolano l'Africa*, United States, October 2017.

<https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/vijay-prashad/2017/10/31/sahel-trafficienti-militari-stati-uniti>

<sup>14</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (US)

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sg.html>

As far as the diplomatic diary is concerned, on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November 2017 the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa has taken place. M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, has taken part to it. Each year the forum brings together heads of state and ministers, as well as many public and private stakeholders working for the continent's peace and security. M. Jean-Yves Le Drian has reiterated France's resolute commitment to security and the fight against terrorism in Africa, particularly in the G5 Sahel framework.

The Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs is especially committed to the smooth progress of the forum, and he has made a strong personal contribution to promote it since it began in Dakar in December 2014. Senegalese President Macky Sall decided then to organize it annually. The fourth forum this year is devoted to the continent's new strategic challenges ("Current security challenges in Africa: finding integrated solutions"). Discussions focused on several themes including terrorism and violent extremism, Africa and emerging security challenges, migration and security challenges, the fight against terrorist financing, maritime security and safety in Africa, as well as cybersecurity, information governance and the digital space.<sup>15</sup>

Another important element taken from the diplomatic diary shows that between the 15<sup>th</sup> January and the 15<sup>th</sup> March there will be an appeal to launch new projects between Senegal and France. This initiative wants to strengthen the already existent partnership between these two countries, started in 2013. 229.000 euros are allocated for the year 2018 to support the local economic development, including culture and tourism; the strengthening of the digital sector and the sustainable development of agriculture and climate.<sup>16</sup>

Even if it has taken place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February (outside the diplomatic diary), it is important to mention the GPE meeting in Dakar (Global Partnership for Education), headed for the first time by both French President Emmanuel Macron and President Macky Sall. It is the first time that a meeting like that is co-headed by a developed and a developing country, with the presence of 7 African Presidents and 50 Ministers of Education. The aim is to allocate more than 110 billion dollars and only from France 200 million euros to foster the spread of Education in Senegal and in other 66 developing countries.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Personal Remarks

French politics has always been based on the intervention. From the military point of view France has always had a position of cooperation with USA, in order not only to mutually exchange technological expertise, but also to receive support to French missions in Africa. This is because even if France operates with EU states in the strengthening of the military interventions, there is scarcity of resources.

France has always considered itself as a model for African countries, because of the colonialism period. France tends to be blamed for giving just security solutions to African countries and not other solutions related to economic problems or social problems. However, it thinks of being the only actor that helps erase the terrorist threats from the continent. This happens because of different causes, but surely the primary one is the fact that France needs African energy sources, even if it is trying to implement all the energy policy agreements like the Paris Agreement.

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<sup>15</sup> France Diplomatie, *Peace and Security in Africa: Participation of Jean Yves Le Drian in Dakar*, 12 November 2017 <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/africa/events/article/peace-and-security-in-africa-participation-of-jean-yves-le-drian-in-the-dakar>

<sup>16</sup> France Diplomatie, *Politique Etrangère de la France*, 2018 <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/action-exterieure-des-collectivites-territoriales/appels-a-projets-et-fonds-en-soutien-a-la-cooperation-decentralisee/appel-a-projets-franco-senegalais/article/appel-a-projets-franco-senegalais-2018>

<sup>17</sup> France Diplomatie, *Politique Etrangère de la France*, *Thème du Développement*, February 2018 <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/aide-au-developpement/evenements-et-actualites-sur-le-theme-du-developpement/evenements-et-actualites-sur-le-theme-du-developpement-2018/article/partenariat-mondial-pour-l-education-conference-de-financement-2-02-2018>

For example, Niger is extremely important because of its production of uranium, necessary for the use of nuclear power in France.<sup>18</sup>

So, what can be understood from the analysis of recent events is that France is extremely committed in different fora to support the development of the African continent and to erase terrorism. They are its main concern, maybe even because it feels itself responsible for the destiny of lands that some years ago still belonged to it.

What I have noticed while taking my diary, is that France constantly publishes articles on its official diplomatic website concerning its support (both moral and military) to all countries hit by conflicts, in order to help them and this sometimes has been criticized by other countries, stating that its position is based more on morality rather than on effective help.

Emmanuel Macron has stated “the challenge of Africa, it is totally different, it is much deeper, it is civilizational, today. What are the problems in Africa? Failed states, complex democratic transitions, demographic transition [...]”. This means that if we want really to help Africa, we have to make a revision in the system between donors and needy states.

According to the French President a Marshall Plan for Africa wouldn't work because this type of plan was addressed to EU economies, devastated after the Second World War, and it isn't a coincidence that the Marshall Plan overlapped with the creation of NATO. France, the United States and the other international players do not have sufficient strategic interests to affect change in Africa. Engagement with Africa needs to be thoughtful, well-planned and long term and they have to avoid falling prey to unhelpful generalizations or post-colonial attitudes that are often reflective of Europe's own challenges rather than those affecting the nations and people of Africa itself.

The French President has added that “yet, based on the continent's troubled history and the ongoing exploitation by foreign powers, the west must acknowledge its role in Africa's problems and develop programmes as meaningful for Africa as the Marshall Plan was for Europe”.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Darnis J.P., *Francia/Italia Scenari Strategici Bilaterali*, Documenti IAI, Febbraio 2016.  
<http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai1602.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Plitcha M., *Macron's Africa "Problem": Will a Marshall Plan for Africa Make a Real Difference?*, Pubblicazione IAI, Roma, 1 Agosto 2017.  
[http://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/macrons-africa-problem#\\_ftn4](http://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/macrons-africa-problem#_ftn4)

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