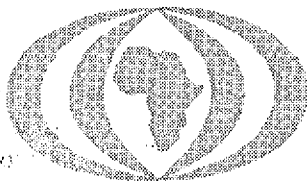


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MITTERAND'S AFRICA POLICY : MUCH OF THE SAME

Despite President Mitterand's rhetoric, French African policy has undergone only minor changes since the Socialist victory in 1981. This Brief Report examines the following:

1. Political Interests
2. Security Interests
3. Economic Interests
4. France and southern Africa

1. POLITICAL INTERESTS

Like his predecessors, President Mitterand has a strong feeling towards Africa; he was a junior minister for Overseas France (French Territories) in the Fifties and, not surprisingly, has retained the tested structure which has successfully governed French-African relations.

The Socialists have maintained the African "cell" in the Elysee Palace (originally created by de Gaulle), which allows African leaders direct and privileged access to the French President. The annual Franco-African Summits have been retained and they have become a revitalised instrument in the relations and following the OAU impasse, they are also an instrument in inter-African relations.

Traditionally this annual Summit has been a sounding board for the development and formulation of French African policy. African states have used the meeting as a forum to influence both Paris and the EEC, and the informal value of these meetings has been far more significant than their formal dimension. At the October 1982 Conference, 36 African (including 20 non-Francophone *) states were represented.

* Strictly speaking, a definition is impossible, but for our purpose countries within the CFA Franc Zone and Zaire have been considered Francophone.

Despite some early suggestions to the contrary, Mitterand has not sought significantly to change French policy in Africa; if anything, he has sought to expand French influence beyond the "Francophone Club".

Hopes of achieving more formal state-to-state ties with African countries are complicated by African political life which tends to be highly personalised. The main vehicle for the policy continues to be direct contact with heads of government. To avoid too close an identity with entrenched autocratic leaders whose style of government, particularly in respect of democracy and human rights, is in conflict with the Socialist position, a new, more formal, approach has been attempted. In practice this has been difficult to achieve, and despite severe domestic criticism of the governments in Zaire and Gabon, both Presidents Mobutu and Bongo have been received at the Elysee. On the other hand, exiled African opposition groups - who expected significant support from the Socialists - have been disappointed, although it is probable that the Socialist Party has maintained contact with some of these movements.

Thus, despite the rhetoric, the approach to Africa has been pragmatic and flexible and has sought to generate a general climate of confidence, with France frequently asserting that it will fulfil all its obligations.

For their part, African leaders have pointed to the ambivalence of French policy, but their dependency on Paris makes further action difficult. One of Africa's trouble spots, Chad, provides a good example of traditional French pragmatism. While the Socialist Party strongly criticised early French interventions in that country, the Mitterand Government was represented in the multilateral peace-keeping force which was dispatched to Chad in early 1982.

2. SECURITY INTERESTS

At his election Mitterand reiterated that Paris would continue its military role in Africa, thus underscoring the view that defence commitments are the cornerstone of the Franco-African nexus. In practice this means that France is second only to Cuba as a supplier of external combat troops on the continent. The number of French troops varies between 7 000 and 13 000 (depending on definition), and these are stationed in Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Gabon, Djibouti, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Zaire. In total, Paris has defence treaties with 6 African states and is said to have co-operated with a further 24. In addition, there are 2 Indian Ocean basing facilities at Réunion and Mayotte (French overseas territories).

Furthermore, the government has a strong intervention force which can rapidly be despatched to Africa (as in Shaba I and II). France also continues to train African armies and organise joint manoeuvres, as for example the end of 1982 arrangement with Senegal and Morocco.

The French military commitment towards Africa pursues four important goals:

1. To be on tap to supply military and technical assistance to African governments, at their request;
2. To secure the French economic and commercial presence, and to protect French citizens in these countries;
3. To underpin the existing French presence (landing rights, bases, troop locations, etc), and allow for the logistical support of fresh supplies; and
4. To counter limited aggression against allies.

Since the Independence tide, direct intervention by the French army in Africa has been commonplace: Gabon (1964), Chad (1968 and 1975), Djibouti (1967, 1974 and 1976), Mauritania (1977 - 1978), the Central African Republic (1975), and Shaba I (1977) and II (1978).

To distance itself from the image of "Gendarme of Africa", the French Socialist Party has developed "Project Africaine" which favours French military co-operation on the assumption that the defence treaties are re-negotiated. However, in practice, no agreement has been re-negotiated, nor has there been a reduction of French troops in Africa since Mitterand assumed power. It is therefore difficult to speculate on whether the French would, as has happened in the past, intervene militarily to maintain protégés in power, or to topple discredited leaders. While French officials are tightlipped on this issue, the country's rapid intervention force is still deployed and this is regarded as an indication that Paris can flex its muscles in areas of Africa where it enjoys great power status.

Mitterand's former Minister of (African) Co-operation and Development, Jean-Pierre Cot, outlined the Socialist dichotomy thus: "... we intend to strengthen our military co-operation ... the presence of French troops in Africa does not seem a normal thing. But we must maintain them as long as there are no African relieving troops".

The main theme of President Mitterand's regional military policy aims to dispel African fears of intervention, while permitting the idea of a "presence" as opposed to "interference". African states of various ideological colouration have responded with more than resignation to this state of affairs. For example, at the Franco-Zairean Summit President Mobutu stated that "Paris is the guarantor of Africa's security ... and defender of the continent's economic interests". Furthermore, when the French Prime Minister visited Mauritius in December 1982, he was told that the new Mauritian Socialist Government did not consider France a foreign power in the region.

The French Secret Service has also played a prominent role in Africa, for it is the personal instrument of the French President. Recently, however, instead of following official French foreign policy, the Service attempted to draw France into a full scale war with Libya over the Chadean issue. This debacle, plus bureaucratic tension, has led to the dismemberment of the Service's Africa section by the Mitterand government.

3. ECONOMIC INTERESTS

France's economic relations with the so-called "Francophone Club" are all-embracing and hinge on the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) franc. Through the system, Francophone states are tied to the fortunes of the French franc. The double devaluation of the French franc since Mitterand came to power, has affected the CFA franc, causing some damage to poorer Francophone countries.

Furthermore, Francophone countries are obliged to pay for their important imports - like oil - in US dollars (or other hard currencies) and this significantly increases their foreign debt, weakening their terms of trade. On the other hand, oil-exporting states (Gabon, Cameroon, and Congo [Brazzaville]) have benefited from the CFA arrangement. Their export earnings in CFA francs have increased by over 40% against the French franc since 1981. The CFA Zone does, for its part, provide a captive market for the hard pressed French economy: for example, between 40% and 60% of imports by Francophone African states are of French manufacture.

Trade is thus centred on the countries using the CFA franc. Africa accounts for 10% of total French trade and French exports to Africa were over US \$ 12 billion - two-thirds of this amount going to French-speaking Africa. French imports from Africa stood at about US \$ 10 billion, providing France with a favourable balance.

On the other hand, France now is unable to provide for all the requirements of the Francophone states, and recently West African states within the club have diversified their economic links to other western states. One method of diversification is through the Lomé arrangements of the European Economic Community, and directly with the US.

Direct French aid has increased under Mitterand from 0,36% to 0,7% of GDP. Significantly, a large proportion of this assistance is "tied" aid and much of it is channeled to the payment of salaries of technical and administrative experts and advisers. There are approximately 300 000 French expatriates involved in this type of endeavour in Francophone Africa. Indeed, the Ivory Coast is an interesting example of the changing pattern of French involvement. At independence there were 20 000 Frenchmen in that country, and there are now three times that number. Some economic theorists attribute the relative success of Francophone Africa to the presence of these experts.

4. FRANCE AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Mitterand victory was not enthusiastically received by the South African Government. The Socialist Party programme called for the severing of all ties with South Africa and accused South Africa of occupying Namibia illegally. Notwithstanding this rhetoric, however, the Mitterand government did reaffirm its willingness to honour all existing contracts.

The most important of these was the construction of the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, near Cape Town, which is being built by a consortium of three French firms. In addition, it has been speculated that France has already delivered quantities of enriched uranium for Koeberg.

Despite pressures on the Socialist Government, Mitterand's attitude towards Pretoria has thus been pragmatic. For instance, the proposed rugby tour of South Africa was called off, but there has been no talk of economic sanctions. In fact, French-South African trade appears to be booming, with a trade surplus in France's favour. Currently, French exports to South Africa are mainly mechanical, electrical and agricultural equipment. French imports from South Africa are coal, inorganic chemicals, fruit, vegetables, and precious stones. In addition, France purchases significant amounts of manganese, titanium, coal and uranium. French investment in South Africa amount to about 7,6% of her total foreign investments (July, 1981), and some suggestions are that this investment is still on the increase.

With regard to Namibia, there has recently been a fracas in French-South African relations. France is a member of the so-called "contact group" which orchestrated Security Council Resolution 435, intended as the basis for Namibian independence. Recently, a UN-sponsored conference on the disputed territory was held in Paris and the French Foreign Minister, Claude Cheysson, after denouncing South Africa, indicated that France might be willing to reconsider her membership of the contact group. In response to Cheysson's provocation, the South African Foreign Minister, through the Administrator-General of SWA/Namibia, engineered what some have seen as a diplomatic snub towards the French Ambassador in Lüderitz.

However, despite these gestures, France continues to import uranium from the Namibian Rössing Mine in which a French company has a 10% stake. Furthermore, a contract for the construction of a new meat refrigeration plant, at Walvis Bay, and a new abattoir, at Gobabis, has been signed between a French company and a Namibian concern. The contractor for this undertaking is said to be a leading French Communist millionaire, and this suggestion neatly encapsulates the lack of a consistent line by the French on these matters.

The ambivalence of the Socialist position on Africa has not been achieved without some degree of tension inside policy-making circles in Paris. For example, the Minister of Co-operation and Development, Jean-Pierre Cot, resigned in December, 1982, after denouncing Mitterand's Africa policy as neo-colonialist and saying it had a disregard for human values. Cot had been particularly opposed to the South African link, while his replacement, Christian Nucci, a traditional bureaucrat, is thought to be a pragmatist.