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Research article

“FRANÇAFRIQUE” SYSTEMIC CRISIS

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Abstract. Recent global geopolitical shifts have deformed the postwar world order. These tectonic shifts mark the beginning of the end of French dominance in West and Central Africa, changing dramatically the layout of international relations in the region that has always been considered France’s zone of interests. There is a rapid degradation and disintegration of the French military-political system known as “Françafrique”, the essence of which lies in the latent ties between the corrupt elites of the Fifth Republic and certain African countries that are dependent on their former metropole both economically and politically. The purpose of this article is to examine the collapse of this system as a whole and its constituent parts in order to come closer to understanding how the destruction of its individual fragments causes the crisis of interconnected structural elements of the entire system. Within the framework of a short article, it is only possible to outline a general approach to considering the problematic situation, based on the theoretical and methodological approach, which implies a systemic analysis of the object, i.e., the phenomenon of “Françafrique”. Recently, a number of works have appeared devoted to various aspects of this problem (the change of elites in African states, the disappointment in the effectiveness of the former metropole’s Africa policy, the reduction of the French military presence in the Sahel and Central Africa, the failure of the military operation Barkhane, the collapse of the Fifth Republic-inspired military-political blocs of African countries). The novelty and relevance of this work lie in demonstrating the need to study these trends in their integrity and interrelationship. This approach requires a comprehensive study of the causes, course, results, and consequences of the collapse of the military-political system of “Françafrique” as part of a future large-scale study of this phenomenon.

Keywords: Africa, France, “Françafrique”, French African policy, French military bases, military coup, coup, Sahel, Central Africa, operation Barkhane, geopolitical shifts

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INTRODUCTION. THE “FRANÇAFRIQUE” PHENOMENON

The eighth President of the Fifth Republic of France, Emmanuel Macron, inherited from his predecessors a certain tradition of relations with African countries that were

once French colonies. The specific French model of neocolonialism was called “Françafrique” in the 1960s. Initially, it was conceived as a latent mechanism to control the implementation of the French neocolonial strategy.

This military-political phenomenon is difficult to define. In its first approximation, it is a system of informal links between the political, financial, diplomatic and military structures of the Fifth Republic and the corresponding structures of the African satellite countries. It is a network of military-political and economic influence, a set of lobby groups, mechanisms designed to implement French political, economic and military strategy on the African continent.

Punitive expeditions, political assassinations, organizing coups d'état, fomenting tribal conflicts, and direct armed intervention in the affairs of quasi-states have been commonplace in Françafrique for many decades. Encouraging corruption, secret deals, backroom arrangements, and bribery of statesmen all became familiar tools of French covert diplomacy in Africa.

Commenting on the information that after World War II almost all the “masters” of the Élysée Palace received huge bribes from the leaders of African states, a French Foreign Ministry official, who wished to remain anonymous, once said: “There is such a concept – ‘Françafrique’. It is not an association, it is not a union of states, it is some understanding that the former French colonies in Africa, or rather, their leaders have a special relationship with the leaders of France and can count on Paris for help even in the most difficult times”.¹

In the preface to Patrick Pesnot’s seminal work, “Les Dessous de la Françafrique”, the editor succinctly describes this phenomenon: “Since the independence of these countries, Paris has imposed its tutelage on them and done everything to protect its economic and political interests... To realize these ambitions, successive French governments have used all the means at their disposal: coups d'état, dirty tricks by the secret services, garrisons left in African countries as a legacy of the colonial past, military expeditions... But these invasions have sometimes led to bloody episodes and massacres for which France is responsible” [Pesnot 2011: 5].

The system operates through a variety of methods: criminal offenses (arms trafficking, drug trafficking, money laundering); appropriation of raw materials and humanitarian aid; and sex scandals used as a means of blackmail. When the need arises to seize the natural wealth of African states (oil, uranium, or other strategic raw materials), political assassinations, incitement of tribal conflicts, etc. are used.

In addition to special services to keep satellite countries within its sphere of influence, the Élysée Palace uses mercenaries – the Foreign Legion, which has a long trail of war crimes on the African continent. An example is the infamous “king of mercenaries, mercenary of kings” Bob Denard, who, despite his proven involvement in at least five coups d'état, died peacefully in his bed.

It should be noted that soldiers of the French army often fight under the guise of mercenaries. According to the Minister of Cooperation, Charles Josselin, “many mercenaries today wear uniforms very similar to those of yesterday... These guys are fighting wars on our behalf, with our money, without feeling the need to inform us”².

¹ Zubov N. France continues to “milk” colonies in Africa. *Kommersant Vlast*. 19.09.2011. (In Russ.). <http://kommersant.ru/doc/1761267> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

² Verschave F.-X. Le Crime Continue. Retranscription de conférences-débat données par F.-X. Verschave, président de Survie de 1995 à 2005. *Survie*. 2000. <http://survie.org/publications/livres/article/le-crime-continue> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

French intelligence made extensive use of military corporatism and nepotism against the military leaders of African states, who were often brought to power by agents of French intelligence. Using clandestine networks of influence, Paris imposed a series of mostly secret military agreements on its former colonies. When France's fundamental interests on the African continent were threatened, this power did not hesitate to use overt military force. Military intervention has always been a crucial part of the activities of the *Françafrique* networks in Africa.

Many African countries have long been tied to Paris by military agreements that, until the mid-2000s, included provisions allowing the French military to intervene in sovereign states "to maintain internal order". These provisions were invoked by French politicians to protect a puppet ruler experiencing "political difficulties" at home. Later, some of these provisions were challenged and partially abolished (which does not prevent the dispatch of "limited military contingents" at the invitation of the presidents of certain countries). French military bases have been stationed at various times in Djibouti, Senegal, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Gabon in order to carry out gendarmerie functions.

"FRANÇAFRIQUE" IN THE MIRROR OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

In French historiography, a number of monographs, pamphlets and articles have been published on "*Françafrique*", under the auspices of the human rights organization *Survie*, whose founder and President until 2005 was François-Xavier Verschave. The authors, who actively collaborated with this organization, wrote works dedicated either to the functioning of "*Françafrique*" as a whole, or to its activity in certain countries and at certain periods of its history.

First of all, these are the fundamental works of F.-X. Verschave himself, in which the reader finds a detailed account of the most scandalous manifestations of "*Françafrique*", these "crimes without punishment" [Verschave 2000]. The views of this researcher on the evolution of the phenomenon of interest to us and its possible metamorphoses can be found in the book "From *Françafrique* to *Mafiafrique*" [Verschave 2004], his understanding of the "logic of absurdity" in the African policy of the Élysée Palace is presented in his work "*Françafrique*" [Verschave 1998]. F.-X. Verschave became a cult figure for French scholars and publicists opposing neocolonialism and racism in France. As Pierre Laniray wrote in a book dedicated to this remarkable researcher and public figure, "thanks to him, the crimes of *Françafrique* became public" [Laniray 2006: 224].

The reasons and objectives of French military interventions on the African continent in the post-colonial period are the subject of papers by Luckham R. [Luckham 1982] and Raphael Granvaud [Granvaud 2009].

Characteristics of the *Françafrique* policy during the term of office of this or that president, in addition to the work of "Black Chirac" by the aforementioned F.-X. Verschave [Verschave 2002], are considered in the works of Samuel Foutoyet [Foutoyet 2008], Fabrice Tarrit, and Thomas Noirot [Tarrit, Noirot 2014]. The African policies of four French presidents (Charles de Gaulle, Georges Pompidou, Giscard d'Estaing, and François Mitterrand) were the subject of a study by Claude Wauthier [Wauthier 1995]. In the special *Survie* dossier, we find documents on François Hollande's 2015 trip to African countries³.

³ Tournée africaine de Hollande: diplomatie, business et dictatures. *Survie*. 30.06.2015. <https://survie.org/themes/francafrique/article/tournee-africaine-de-hollande-4972> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

Separate publications by French researchers are devoted to the crimes of the French intelligence services in various countries and regions of the African continent. The works of Laura Coret [Coret 2005], François Graner [Graner 2014], Kev Gnanouillet [Gnanouillet 2009] reveal the secrets of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The role of France and the French army in those terrible events was discussed by members of the Civil Commission, created on Survie's initiative in 2004. The reports of the members of this Commission, documents, and eyewitness testimonies are presented in Gnanouillet's book [Gnanouillet 2005]. Later, the chairman of this Commission, Giraud de la Pradelle, published a book [Pradelle 2005], which names French politicians, officials, bankers, and military officers who were personally responsible for the Tutsi genocide. In Jean Guisnel's work [Guisnel 2006], the reader finds much of interest in the Élysée Palace's latent support for the Biafra separatists and France's goals in the Nigerian war.

The collective work of the associate members of Survie, led by Juliette Poirson and Fabrice Tarrit [Poirson and Tarrit 2013], reveals the dark sides of the French army's intervention in the Republic of Mali in 2013. In Yanis Thomas's book [Thomas 2016] the author talks about the destructive role of French diplomacy and the special services of this country in the recent history of the CAR.

There are also a number of pamphlets published under the Survie label. The collective work by a number of French researchers entitled "A Little Guide to Françafrique" describes the activities of French intelligence in France's former colonies and the most odious politicians who have tarnished their reputations by collaborating with Françafrique's networks⁴. The analytical reports, "Françafrique: Diplomacy, Business and Dictators" and others, describe the Élysée Palace's support for African dictators and criminal economic schemes⁵.

In addition to the publications prepared by members of the Survie association, we should first of all mention the fundamental work "Secret History of the Fifth Republic" [Faligot, Guisnel, Kauffer *et al* 2006], prepared by a team of authors (including Roger Faligot, Jean Guisnel, Rémi Kauffer, Renaud Lecadre, and François Malye). Among the authors not formally associated with Survie, I will also name Pierre Péan. His book "African Scams" reveals the corrupt schemes generated by the Françafrique system and describes the links between the Élysée Palace and the corrupt African rulers of the first two decades of the "sovereign existence" of the former French colonies [Péan 1983]. Later, this author published the work "The Republic of Suitcases" [Péan 2011] on the blatant facts of corruption in the Élysée Palace.

Jean-François Bayard lifted the veil on the backstage of François Mitterrand's African policy [Bayard 1984]. In Georges Chaffard's book, the reader discovers a particular view of the Gaullist policy and practice of decolonization of Black Africa, quite different from the one officially adopted in the Fifth Republic [Chaffard 1965].

In Russia, the pamphlet by military journalist Ivan Konovalov is also devoted to the "Françafrique" [Konovalov 2014]. As the title of the work suggests, the author emphasizes the military interventions of the Élysée Palace in its former colonies. Certain aspects of the "Françafrique" problem are discussed in the monographs of Ivan Krivushin [Krivushin 2015], Natalia Vysotskaya [Vysotskaya 2006], Natalia Podgornova [Podgornova 2015], as well as in monographs [Sidorova 2013a; 2013b; 2022] and articles [Sidorova 2012] by

⁴ Petit guide de la Françafrique. Un voyage au coeur du scandale. *Survie*, 2015. <https://survie.org/publications/brochures/article/petit-guide-de-la-francafrique-3746> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

⁵ France-Afrique. Diplomatie, Business & Dictatures. *Survie*, 2009. <https://survie.org/publications/brochures/article/diplomatie-business-dictatures> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

Galina Sidorova and in her work as a member of the creative team [Troyansky, Karpovich, Sidorova 2022]. The work of Lyubov Sadovskaya [Sadovskaya 2013] is also relevant to the topic of our interest. Two monographs [Filippov 2017; 2023] and a series of articles by Vasily Filippov are devoted to the military, political, and criminal actions of the Françafrique networks in West Africa. Finally, in 2024, the Institute of Europe published a collection of, unfortunately, rather lapidary articles devoted to the current African policy of France (edited by Sergei Fyodorov) [Fedorov 2024].

CRISIS OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN THE SAHEL

The policies and practices of “Françafrique” were only possible if the corrupt political elites of the African countries, totally dependent on the Élysée Palace, remained in power. What is happening now is not a revelation for the French political class. As early as April 2020, experts from the Paris-based Center for Analysis, Forecasting and Strategy (Centre d’analyse, de prévision et de stratégie, CAPS) sent the French President a report entitled “The Pangolin Effect: The Coming Storm in Africa”. Its authors urged Macron to prepare for a “long-term destabilization” in Africa in the context of an “impending crisis of societies and states.” Prominent French diplomats expressed well-founded fears that the coming crisis could destroy “fragile regimes” in the Sahel and Central Africa. They believed that the coronavirus could become “a political virus that (...) will demonstrate the inability of these states to protect their populations.”⁶ At the same time, the CAPS analysts pointed to the particular vulnerability of “some economically weak and politically unstable francophone countries, which are less reliable and structured than others.” The experts warned that “comparing certain states whose policies are failing (the Sahel and Central African countries) with other African countries with stronger institutions (such as Rwanda or Senegal) would be ‘unfavorable’ for the former.” According to prominent politicians and diplomats, the “comparison effect” could become an additional conflict-generating factor and lead to a change of political elites.⁷ As the events of recent years and months have shown, the conceptual provisions of this document have proved prophetic.

Losing faith in the ability of the French to stop the bloody massacre in his country, the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadera, came to the conclusion that a radical change in foreign policy orientation was necessary. The result was an agreement on military cooperation between Moscow and Bangui. And in early 2018, what journalists called the “Russian invasion” took place. A military aircraft from Russia brought GRU officers and instructors from a private military company to Bangui. Russian military specialists achieved in a year what the French had been unable (or unwilling?) to do for many years. The situation in CAR was stabilized, and the most acute conflicts were extinguished. At the end of 2022, the last French soldier left the CAR⁸. A monument to the Russian military was erected in Bangui.

The importance of these events cannot be overstated. They marked the beginning of the decline of French dominance in West Tropical Africa. A precedent was set that showed

⁶ "L'effet pangolin": la tempête qui vient en Afrique? Note. NDI-2020-0161812. *Centre d'Analyse, de Prévision et de Stratégie, Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, République Française*. 24.03.2020. https://academia.edu/42929949/L_effet_pangolin_la_tempe_te_qui_vient_en_Afrique (accessed: 14.06.2024)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Les derniers soldats français ont quitté la Centrafrique. *Le Monde*. 15.12.2022. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/12/15/les-derniers-militaires-francais-ont-quitte-la-centrafrique_6154562_3212.html (accessed: 30.05.24)

Africans that the neocolonialism of the Fifth Republic could and should be resisted. The political crisis of 2020–2021 in Mali was a continuation of the degradation of the *Françafrique* system. Two military coups organized in the republic by high-ranking officers of the Malian army, who had just been retrained in Russia, ended with the removal of President I.B. Keita from power. E. Macron failed to fulfill his promise, made immediately after his inauguration in 2017, to protect this creature of the Élysée Palace with a “strong military arm.” The streets unanimously supported the rebel military: Malians were tired of the corruption of officials and the inability of the authorities to resist the aggression of Islamist terrorists. But most importantly, they realized that France was not fighting Islamist extremism in the Sahel, but protecting its own economic and political preferences. In May 2021, after a brief period of political turmoil in the country, Mali’s Constitutional Court declared Assimi Goita the President of the country. Malians massively supported the new leader, and most favored increased military cooperation with Russia. Mass demonstrations took place near the Russian Embassy, where participants appealed to V.V. Putin asking for help in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel.

A new serious blow to France’s position in West Africa was the series of military coups in 2022 in Burkina Faso. They were also strongly anti-French and pro-Russian. The coup of January 23, 2022, led to the arrest of President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. He was accused of failing to resist jihadist aggression and neglecting the needs of the army. As in the Central African Republic and Mali, the citizens of the country supported the military, which initiated the change of power. Once again, the refrain of the street actions was the need to replace French soldiers with military specialists from Russia. On October 2, another coup took place. The military, led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, seized power. As soon as he announced the change of power in the country, a large crowd went to the French embassy and tried to set it on fire, and the Russian tricolor was hoisted on the roof of the building instead of the French flag.

Thus, during the first five years of E. Macron’s rule, a serious breach has appeared in the French zone of influence in tropical Africa, with three states demonstrating a clear unwillingness to tolerate the intrusive “care” of the Fifth Republic. And in other countries in the region, the rejection of France’s African policy, in particular the presence of soldiers with the chevrons of the French armed forces on the territory of sovereign subjects of international law, is becoming more and more evident. The failure of the Élysée Palace’s African policy became obvious at the end of the first term of E. Macron’s presidency.

But in the summer of 2023, two new military coups took place in the French zone of influence. They were very similar in appearance, but very different in essence. The July coup in Niger was strongly anti-French and provoked a sharp diplomatic conflict between France and Niger. The coup led to the arrest of the President of this state, Mohamed Bazoum, a loyal creature of the Élysée Palace. The initiator of the coup, General Abdourahamane Tchiani, was declared head of the transitional government. There was no doubt about the political sympathies of the country’s citizens: during demonstrations in support of the new government, the inhabitants of the capital waved Russian tricolors and demanded the liquidation of French military bases in Niger.

At the end of August 2023, the military announced its seizure of power in Gabon. The putsch was provoked by the results of the elections, according to which President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba was re-elected for a third term. This usurper had ruled since 2009, and before him, his father, Omar Bongo, ruled Gabon from 1967 to 2009. This “king of corruption” was a favorite of the Élysée Palace. He lavished generous bribes on the French political elite in appreciation for their political support. This rebellion differed from the military coups of 2023 due to a number of circumstances. The transitional head of state,

General Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, did not oppose the French presence in the country. However, we emphasize that all these anti-government uprisings in the Sahel countries led to a radical change in the ruling elites under the control of the Fifth Republic.

FRENCH MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFRICA

Despite repeated assurances by French leaders that the days of the “*Françafrique*” policy are over, that France “loves Africa”, and that it will only use “soft power” in its relations with African countries, these relations have always been based primarily on the bayonets of French soldiers. To this day, four military bases are permanently stationed in France’s former colonies: in Djibouti, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Gabon.

French military base in Gabon. It has existed since the formal independence of this country. This long-standing military cooperation has always been based on the mutual interests of the French political elite, which received huge bribes from the Bongo clan, and the corrupt officials who actually usurped power in Gabon. An adviser to the now-ousted President A. Bongo long ago characterized the essence of his country’s relationship with the Élysée Palace this way: “The French defend our system against internal and external threats. In return, we support French policies in Africa.”⁹. This attitude allowed the Bongo clan to remain in power for more than half a century and the French military to feel at home in Gabon. This mutual interest gave their “brothers-in-arms” reason to believe that “Gabon is central to France’s military presence in Africa.”¹⁰. In recent years, Gabon has remained a haven for French troops who left the Sahel as a result of anti-French military coups. In May 2014, French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian announced the redeployment of 900 soldiers from Senegal to Gabon (only 330 troops remained in Senegal at the time, down from 1,200 in 2010). As a result, more than 1,270 French troops were stationed at Camp de Gaulle (Libreville). The base became France’s largest military installation in Tropical Africa at the time.

French troops in Djibouti. If the base in Gabon has been based on the vital interest of the military and political “elite” of this state, things look somewhat different in Djibouti: the French military base is regarded here more as a commercial enterprise. Currently, the largest French air and naval bases are located in this country. According to the French Ministry of Defense, about 1,500 servicemen are currently stationed there.

Deployed on the east coast of Africa, the units represent a strategic, operational, and logistical platform. The base is designed to serve as an intermediate point for the transfer of rapid reaction forces to crisis points in East Africa. In addition, the French Army’s land, air, and naval units located here allow for the reception as well as rapid redeployment of forces towards the Indian Ocean or the Middle East. The Ministry of Defense of the Fifth Republic sees this base as an opportunity to control dozens of states in the Middle East, East Africa, and the Indian Ocean. At the same time, the Djibouti base could serve as a rear base for Paris, if necessary, to support sustained combat operations in Africa¹¹.

⁹ Boisbouvier C. 50 years later, *Françafrique* is alive and well. *RFI France*. 04.03.2022. <http://en.rfi.fr/africa/20100216-50-years-later-francafrique-alive-and-well> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

¹⁰ Gabon central to France’s Africa military presence. *Economist intelligence*. 20.05.2014. https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1791827163&Country=Gabon&topic=Politics&subtopic=Fo_6 (accessed: 30.05.2024)

¹¹ Chronologie des interventions de l’armée française en Afrique depuis 1981. *Vie publique*. 18.12.2023. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/20138-chronologie-interventions-de-larmee-francaise-en-afrique-depuis-1981> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

French Armed Forces in Côte d'Ivoire. The operational base of the French Armed Forces in the West of the Black Continent is the grouping of troops of the Armed Forces of the French Republic in Côte d'Ivoire. It is considered by French strategists as a center for ensuring France's security and interests in the Gulf of Guinea. It coordinates, among other things, the fight against piracy and the interception of smuggling. This region has been identified as one of France's strategic priorities.

This military base is considered by the Élysée Palace to be France's most reliable outpost on the African continent. The fact is that the current president of Côte d'Ivoire, Alassane Ouattara, was brought to power by French special forces after the country's Constitutional Council announced that his rival, L. Gbagbo, had won the 2010 presidential elections (the latter had the indiscretion to actually start a war with the military contingent of the Fifth Republic in 2011 [Filippov 2011]). The current president of Côte d'Ivoire is well aware that his political longevity depends entirely on the support of France and its armed forces.

French military base in Senegal. Only 330 soldiers are currently stationed here (in 2010, there were 1,200). From the point of view of France's strategic interests, the military base in Senegal serves as a center of logistical support for troops involved in operations on the African continent, collects intelligence, and monitors the situation in West Africa. According to French commanders, the base allows them to maintain communications and, if necessary, to conduct joint operations with the Senegalese army. The base is a "support point materialized by the presence of an important nucleus of a joint command post, as well as naval and air sites."¹². As a regional center in West Africa, the Senegalese grouping of French troops conducts training and exercise missions for local armies at the request of partner countries.

In addition to these permanent military bases, Operation Barkhane established military basing facilities in the cities of Gao (Mali), Atar (Mauritania), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Niamey (Niger), and N'Djamena (Chad). "Forward" or "control" bases were made use of in Tessalit (Mali), Madama (Niger), Faya-Largeau, and Zouar (Chad)¹³. French fighter jets were stationed in Chad, reconnaissance drones in Niger, special operations troops in Burkina Faso, and the logistics hub in Côte d'Ivoire¹⁴. However, the military coup in Mali forced E. Macron to curtail this costly operation. On June 10, 2021, the president of the Fifth Republic announced the end of Operation Barkhane and the withdrawal of French troops from Mali. This decision came a week after Paris announced the end of its cooperation with Bamako. The ignominious end of Operation Barkhane was, in fact, a recognition of France's diplomatic and military defeat in the Sahel.

NEW MILITARY STRATEGY OF PARIS IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

The crisis of the political systems of the Sahel and Central African countries led to a rapid deterioration of the military component of "Françafrique". The collapse of the political elites loyal to Paris in the countries of the Sahel and Central Africa, the obvious

¹² Eléments français au Sénégal. *Ministère des Armées*. 01.08.2011. <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/forces-prepositionnees/forces-presence/elements-francais-au-senegal> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

¹³ Keenan J. France's Operation Barkhan and Saharan ghosts. *Middle East Eye*. 12.02.2015. <http://middleeasteye.net/columns/france-s-operation-barkhan-and-sahara-s-ghosts-225752252> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

¹⁴ Leading Role for France as Africa Battles Back. *The New York Times*. 16.03.2015. <https://ny-times.com/2015/03/16/world/africa/leading-role-for-france-as-africa-battles-back.html> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

anti-French character of the coups, and the unconditional support of civil society for the rebel military forced the Élysée Palace to hastily develop a new strategy of military presence on the African continent. This strategy would have to address the nomenclature of military bases, their deployment and combat potential, as well as the functioning of the expeditionary corps.

It became necessary to redeploy troops in the Sahel and the Sahara. Instead of Mali, France first wanted to deploy its troops in Niger. Mohamed Bazoum, while still president of the country, agreed to receive on his territory part of the military contingent withdrawn from Mali.¹⁵ However, the coup d'état in Niger buried these intentions. The new authorities of this country not only refused to receive the French contingent withdrawn from Mali but also expelled all French soldiers from its territory at the end of 2023. I would like to remind that the French were previously forced to leave the Central African Republic and Burkina Faso. In the current situation, the Élysée Palace expects to extend its influence in the Gulf of Guinea region under the pretext of fighting terrorism and maritime piracy. Perhaps part of the “homeless” French military will be transferred to Cameroon. This was discussed during the talks between Macron and the president of this country, Paul Biya, in March 2023¹⁶.

Foreseeing the further degradation of the policy and practice of “Françafrique”, E. Macron decided once again to declare the abandonment of the previous ambitions of Paris and the modernization of relations with the countries that, until recently, had been obedient to Paris in all respects. Recognizing that the presence of French soldiers on the territory of sovereign African countries has become the most acute conflict-generating factor, he announced his intention to fundamentally restructure the relationship between the French military contingent stationed on African soil and the armed forces of sovereign subjects of international law.

In early March 2023, the French president made a week-long tour of Central Africa, visiting Gabon, Angola, the Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the context of the crisis in Franco-African relations, E. Macron considered it necessary to discuss with the leaders of the region the changing nature of the French military bases on the continent. Before the trip, he made an important announcement that he intended to significantly reduce the number of military personnel in Africa and change the format of the military bases. From now on, he said, they would be “managed jointly with national governments, and the French military will be needed to train local forces rather than participate in combat operations”¹⁷.

At a meeting with representatives of the French community in Libreville, he announced the development of a new strategy for the joint management of French military bases on the continent with the African military. It was said that “it is not a question of withdrawing or separating forces, but of adapting them to the needs of the countries”¹⁸.

¹⁵ Niger becomes France's partner of last resort after Mali withdrawal. *France 24*. 18.02.2022. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220218-niger-becomes-france-s-partner-of-last-resort-after-mali-withdrawal> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

¹⁶ Airault P. Macron face aux poupées russes en Afrique. *Opinion*. 07.08.2023. <https://www.lopinion.fr/international/emmanuel-macron-deplacement-afrique-contrer-influence-russe> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

¹⁷ Parkhomenko G. Macron to tour African countries, discuss military bases. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. 01.03.2023. (In Russ.). <https://rg.ru/2023/03/01/makron-provedet-turne-po-stranam-afriki-obsudit-francuzskie-voennye-bazy.html> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

¹⁸ Macron dévoile sa nouvelle stratégie africaine: moins de soldats, plus d'“humilité”. *Courrier International*. 28.02.2023. <https://courrierinternational.com/article/influence-emmanuel-macron-devoile-sa-nouvelle-strategie-africaine-moins-de-soldats-francais-plus-d-humilite> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

But who will decide what is in the interest of the countries? Obviously, these decisions will be made by strategists in the Élysée Palace and will be transmitted to the power elites of the countries still loyal to the former metropolis.

In January 2024, E. Macron announced his decision to “significantly reduce France’s military contingents in a number of countries”¹⁹. First, the number of military contingents will be reduced at the base in Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire), then in Dakar (Senegal), and Libreville (Gabon). At the beginning of the year, there were 950 French soldiers in Côte d’Ivoire and about 350 in Senegal and Gabon, respectively. At the same time, the number of French troops in Djibouti remains unchanged at 1,500. The military department of the Fifth Republic stated that the process of reducing the number of French troops has already begun in most of the French bases in African countries.

Crisis of the G5 Sahel Group

Another consequence of the change in the ruling elites in the Sahel countries and the sharp weakening of the Fifth Republic’s political, economic, and military positions in these African states was the de facto collapse of the *G5 Sahel*. This bloc was formed on the initiative of the Élysée Palace and was under the constant control of the French military department. This institutional structure was formally designed to ensure regional cooperation in the development of national armed forces and security issues in West Africa. The goal of the *G5 Sahel* was to strengthen the link between economic development and security.

The need to create this military alliance was allegedly dictated by the need to coordinate efforts to combat the terrorist activities of jihadist organizations (Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram²⁰, etc.) operating in the Sahara and the Sahel. As early as December 20, 2014, the Sahel G5, supported by the African Union, called on the UN Security Council to establish an international force to “neutralize armed groups, promote national reconciliation and establish stable democratic institutions in Libya”.²¹ Of course, the aim was not to protect France’s energy security but to fight terrorism.

The bloc was institutionalized in February 2014 in the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, at a summit of five Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.²² Military cooperation was formally coordinated at the level of the chiefs of staff of the founding states, but in practice, the bloc’s activities were regulated by the command of the French expeditionary corps in the framework of Operation Barkhane. It should be noted that the poorly armed and trained national units of the armed forces of the “Group of Five” did not prove themselves in any way during the military operations and did not justify the hopes of the French. Soldiers from the Muslim countries of the Sahel were not at all eager to fight alongside their co-religionists in defense of the French military, which was alien to them.

After the events in Mali described above, the *G5 Sahel* began a rapid disintegration. In May 2022, the Republic of Mali announced its withdrawal from the alliance. Niger and Bur-

¹⁹ Vincent E. La France amorce une baisse drastique de ses effectifs militaires dans ses bases d’Afrique de l’Ouest. *Le Monde*. 30.01.2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/01/30/la-france-amorce-une-baisse-drastrique-de-ses-effectifs-militaires-dans-ses-bases-d-afrique-de-l-ouest_6213852_3210.html (accessed: 30.05.2024)

²⁰ Both organizations are recognized as terrorist and banned in the Russian Federation.

²¹ Bamako: prise d’otages à Bamako. *Express*. 20.11.2015. https://www.lexpress.fr/monde/afrique/bamako-prise-d-otages-a-l-hotel-radisson-blue_1737877.html (accessed: 30.05.2024)

²² African nations form G5 to work on Sahel security, development. *Reuters*. 16.02.2014. <https://reuters.com/article/us-africa-sahel-g-idUSBREA1F0P520140216/> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

kina Faso followed suit in December 2023. On December 6, 2023, Chad and Mauritania, who formally remained in the bloc, announced the imminent dissolution of the alliance²³.

CONCLUSION

In the context of our topic, it is important to note that it was during these years that the apparent crisis of “Françafrique” policy and practice occurred and the French neocolonial system began to disintegrate. As a result, the Fifth Republic’s military presence in Africa declined sharply. The fact is that the years of E. Macron’s rule witnessed tectonic shifts in the geopolitical situation of the world in general and the African continent in particular. Among the many factors that caused these global transformations, we should first mention the powerful economic expansion of China and the return of Russia to Africa. Other actors in the geopolitical process are showing increasing interest in the continent.

The new political elites of African countries since the turn of the century have had ample opportunity to diversify their economic activities and political and military cooperation. On the other hand, the civil societies of these countries are increasingly demanding that those in power give up their separate corrupt deals with the Élysée Palace and make foreign economic cooperation more transparent. The loss of former preferences in the acquisition of mineral resources of African countries undermines the economy of the Fifth Republic, already weakened by the current socio-economic crisis. This makes the former metropolis less and less competitive in general and in Africa in particular. “Françafrique” is crumbling before our eyes like a house of cards. The crisis of this politico-military system has become systemic: the destruction of one of its structural elements leads to the deterioration of all its other components, making the process irreversible.

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²³ Chad, Mauritania pave way for dissolution of G5 Sahel alliance. *Al-Jazeera*. 06.12.2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/6/chad-mauritania-pave-way-to-dissolve-g5-anti-rebel-alliance> (accessed: 30.05.2024)

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Аннотация. Глобальные геополитические трансформации новейшего времени деформировали сложившееся в послевоенное время мироустройство. Эти тектонические сдвиги обусловили начало конца доминирования Французской Республики в Западной и Центральной Африке и привели к серьезным изменениям в международных отношениях в регионе, который всегда считался зоной французских интересов. Происходит быстрая деградация и распад военно-политической системы «Франсафрик», суть которой состоит в латентных связях коррумпированных элит Пятой республики и ряда африканских стран, находящихся в экономической и политической зависимости от бывшей метрополии. Цель этой статьи – рассмотреть распад этой системы в ее целостности, приблизиться к пониманию того, каким образом разрушение отдельных ее фрагментов обуславливает кризис взаимосвязанных структурных элементов всей системы. Разумеется, в рамках небольшой статьи возможно лишь обозначить общий подход к рассмотрению проблемной ситуации, исходя из теоретико-методологического подхода, который подразумевает системный анализ объекта, то есть феномена «Франсафрик». За последнее время появился целый ряд работ, посвященных различным аспектами этой проблемы (смене элит в африканских государствах, разочарованию в эффективности африканской политики в бывшей метрополии, сокращению военного присутствия Франции в Сахеле и Центральной Африке, провалу военной операции «Бархан», распаду инспирированных Пятой республикой военно-политических блоков африканских стран). Новизна этой работы и ее актуальность состоят в демонстрации необходимости изучения обозначенных тенденций в их целостности и взаимосвязи. Такой подход потребует комплексного рассмотрения причин, хода, результатов и последствий распада военно-политической системы «Франсафрик» в рамках будущего масштабного исследования этого феномена.

Ключевые слова: Африка, Франция, «Франсафрик», африканская политика Франции, военные базы Франции, военный переворот, путч, Сахель, Центральная Африка, операция «Бархан», геополитические сдвиги

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