

France Should Be a Third-world Country

Although the people of Africa don't necessarily admire France, they may need the country because of its living conditions, and robust educational systems, among other incentives and migration, pull factors. Yet, colonial France would not have such opportunities and immigration factors without its opportunistic coercive mindset through the centuries-long of excessive exploitations of its colonies, mainly African states. There has been a controversy in the use of the term 'third world' in addressing the least developed countries. In this commentary, however, this term is used to describe France's exploitative behaviors across Africa. It is also used to depict France's class, thanks to its plundering of African resources.

Limitless are the bounties of Africa, yet the effective use of those bounties has been limited for decades due to the inefficient human resources there. One of the major causes of this is the exploitative maneuvers of the French colony. However, young minds across Africa have been striving to develop their capabilities. Many of them attained higher education abroad, while others completed their school across African universities and institutions. Nowadays, a large number of Africans including political leaders and activists have come to a common conclusion, clearly asserting that French domination over many aspects would aggravate the situations in African states and hinder their development. They also agree upon the necessity of France's withdrawal from the continent.

France forced the African continent to keep large portions of it under its full or partial control in an attempt to exploit its natural and human resources and capabilities. Although most French colonies got their independence, former French president François Hollande asserted in 2013 that France besides Europe would be more active in shaping Africa's destiny. He is not the first official to elaborate on this. In 1957, François Mitterrand warned that France would not have any position in 21st-century history unless it maintained its control over Africa. In the same vein, Jacques Chirac acknowledged that "without Africa, France will slide down into the rank of a third [world] power".

France has been using its 'Francophonie' tools to maintain control over many African countries. Some of these are culturally-based, such as promoting the French language and culture, student exchange programs and so forth. However, some tools decisively threaten the sovereignty of African countries in terms of economy and finance, social norms, military and defense industry. For decades, France involves its military activities in countries including Mali, Tchad and Burkina Faso. We have seen military troops deployed to those countries and their terrible maneuvers, not as it is marketed as military cooperation. For instance, more than 20 African leaders were assassinated by French power, on top of the various coup d'état orchestrated by Paris. Economically, several African countries are coerced to link their currency with the reserves of the France Central Bank. Moreover, 14 countries use CFA franc as their only official currency. Banks and financial institutions are mainly managed and franchised through France-based headquarters.

Concurrently, what disturbs France is the widespread involvement of old and new players in the African continent like Morocco, which has long rooted ties with many countries in the West and Central Africa. Morocco now operates West and Central Africa's sectors including banking and finance. The emerging involvement of Türkiye, China, and Russia also caused a lot of disappointment in the Élysée Palace. Unlike France, these countries compete to influence their power over Africa with win-win solutions.

Exploitation is the core of France's existing ideology in Africa. For instance, although France does not possess any gold mine in Europe, it stands in the top five countries in terms of gold reserves with 2,436 tons in the fourth quarter of 2022. Meanwhile, world economic indicators do not display Mali in the list, when it has many gold mines across the Malian territory. Such exploitations have been referred by a Senegalese economist as the continuing "slavery spirit" and "expropriation" which both depict the core of France's foreign policies in Africa. This is one of the main reasons that hinder France to further develop its colonies' infrastructures, health systems, education and other vital sectors. Despite Hollande's weak attempts to mitigate the secretive use of economic and political influence over Africa, the 'hidden clauses' between elites in France and their colonial counterparts continued to facilitate and maintain the status quo since the 1960s. Nevertheless, recent developments and the awakening of pan-African elites, scholars, youth, and activists - especially in the last decade - have triggered France to the realization of its gradual power loss in Africa; many ex-colonies lost their confidence in France which eventually weakened its hegemonic ties.

It has been a centuries-long story, and still is ongoing in different forms be it cultural, military, or economic. However, the origin and foundation of Franco-African relations is based on France's view of Africa as a usable fruitful garden. Otherwise, France would drastically slide to a third-world country. France should eventually understand that Africa's near future is being crafted by Africans who no longer welcome French presence, and prefer to be independent.