French policymakers are committed to maintaining some type of special relationship with their francophone African counterparts. However, French freedom of action is increasingly constrained by a variety of factors and developments: France's responsibilities and interests outside Africa, the evolving structure of the international system, declining military capabilities during a period of growing domestic constraints, and most important, the emergence of new elites in francophone Africa less willing to accept the same ties enjoyed and permitted by their predecessors.

France and the Great Game in Africa

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France is the only former colonial power that has sought to maintain and expand its presence throughout Africa. Whether France has been led by the socialists of François Mitterrand or the more conservative partisans of Charles de Gaulle and Jacques Chirac, French policymakers consistently have claimed that historical links and geographical proximity justify placing francophone Africa within France's sphere of influence. The implicit assumption of what has been described as the French version of the Monroe Doctrine is that francophone Africa constitutes France's domaine réservé (natural preserve), and is therefore "off limits" to other great powers.1

But in the post-cold war era the concept of the domaine réservé is increasingly under attack by the very countries that French policies were designed to "protect." Criticism has emerged not only from a new generation of democratically elected African elites less enamored of their French counterparts but from traditional, often authoritarian allies who fear that a diminished France will be either unwilling or unable to maintain previous commitments.

Equally important, French support for the domaine réservé appears to be waning. The policymaking elite is preoccupied with the implications of European integration and NATO's enlargement. Meanwhile, the French public is beginning to question French financial commitments to Africa at a time of economic stagnation at home. The uglier side of this public shift is growing intolerance for African immigrants (whether legal or not). As President Jacques Chirac prepares to lead France into the twenty-first century, French foreign policy must adjust to an increasingly turbulent francophone Africa.

Making Africa Safe for France

A desire to reassert France's historical position as a great power drove French policy toward francophone Africa during the cold war. French policymakers sought to consolidate and promote the rayonnement (spread) of the most notable aspects of French culture, including the French language and intellectual traditions. Also referred to as the promotion of la francophonie (a greater French-speaking community), this policy is best represented by the biannual Franco-African summit attended by the leaders of France and francophone Africa. The summit has been described as the "centerpiece" of Franco-African cultural relations, primarily because it is seen as a "family" reunion designed to strengthen already close personal relationships between the French president and his African counterparts.

The promotion of French economic supremacy in francophone Africa served as the second most important objective of French foreign policy during

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the cold war. The best example of this pursuit was the organization of 13 former French colonies and Equatorial Guinea into the franc zone. Created in 1947, the franc zone constitutes a supranational financial system in which France serves as a central bank and in which a common currency—the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) franc—is tied to the French franc and guaranteed by the French treasury. By wedding its fiscal policy to the franc zone, France has sought to preserve monetary stability throughout the region. French policymakers provided emergency credits, subsidized private investments to franc zone members, and offered tax breaks to French companies conducting business in the region.

The pursuit of regional security was an integral aspect of French cultural and economic policies during the cold war. A series of French administrations signed defense accords with their African counterparts, generously provided arms and military advisers for training purposes, and authorized interventions by French military forces to ensure stability and maintain the status quo. In this regard, one can argue that French policymakers sought to spread French culture with the same ideological fervor with which United States policymakers sought to prevent the spread of communism. Consequently, when francophone countries tried to renounce their special relationship with France, as Guinea did in 1958 when it voted against the creation of a revised French community of states, French retribution was swift: all aid to Guinea was abruptly cut off by an angry de Gaulle. But as long as these countries maintained close ties with France, even authoritarian leaders were unlikely to find themselves under heavy pressure from Paris to reform their governments.

The United States and the other major Western powers promoted the idea of France’s special role in francophone Africa, commonly referred to as France’s chasse gardée (exclusive hunting ground). A shared set of interests had developed around France’s perceived role as a bulwark against communism in francophone Africa. However, as forcefully noted in the recently published memoirs of Jacques Foccart, the primary architect of the francophone structure under de Gaulle, the French placed the potential United States threat to francophone Africa on a par with that posed by the former Soviet Union, and in the extreme depicted the United States as the primary long-term threat to French interests.2 Foccart even went so far as to decry Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko’s close ties to Washington as breeding “Anglo-Saxon influence” in the largest country of francophone Africa, and therefore hastening a clear “victory” for the United States at the expense of France. Despite Foccart’s characterization, Washington’s explicit acceptance of the chasse gardée ensured that Zaire would remain the exception to the rule of United States-French cooperation in francophone Africa during the cold war.

**Security, development, and (perhaps) democracy**

A series of events immediately after the cold war highlighted pressures for change in France’s carefully crafted francophone network. The emergence of democratic reform movements seeking an end to single-party rule heralded the beginning of a process that threatened the essence of the francophone structure: the potential replacement of staunchly pro-French, undemocratic elites with opposition candidates less enamored of France and more sympathetic to seeking closer ties with other great powers. To the surprise of many, President François Mitterrand publicly embraced these democratization movements in a much-quoted speech at the 1990 Franco-African summit held in La Baule, France, and warned his counterparts in francophone Africa that future French foreign aid would be contingent on their willingness to promote true democratic change. What became known as the La Baule Doctrine suggested that the promotion of democracy would become the new hallmark of French policy in francophone Africa.

The bold rhetoric of democratization was not matched by the reality of ongoing foreign aid programs designed to keep pro-French elites in power. In the case of Cameroon, French aid to the authoritarian regime of President Paul Biya expanded from $159 million in 1990 to $436 million in 1992—the year of the country’s first multiparty presidential elections. The primary reason for the dramatic increases in French aid was to ensure Biya’s victory, especially since the most popular opposition candidate was John Fru Ndi—an anglophone politician perceived as a threat to French interests in Cameroon.

Any misunderstandings generated by earlier French rhetoric were resolved at the 1992 Franco-African summit held in Libreville, Gabon. At this meeting, French Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy

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privately stated that when confronted with the potentially conflicting goals of promoting democracy, ensuring development, and maintaining security, the leaders of francophone Africa were expected to adhere to the following order of priorities: above all, security, followed by development and, finally, democratization.

The intensification of a continentwide economic crisis also created pressure for change in France's economic relationship with francophone Africa. With many of their clients on the verge of financial bankruptcy, French policymakers initially decided to undertake an economic bailout that entailed massive increases in foreign aid. From 1990 to 1992, French aid exceeded $8.2 billion—a $2.1 billion increase over the previous three-year period. Once it became clear that the short-term bailouts were insufficient and that projected required aid levels were beyond France's fiscal capabilities, French policymakers took the extraordinary step in January 1994 of devaluing the previously sacred CFA franc by 50 percent. The decision sent shock waves throughout the CFA franc zone, which had never before suffered a devaluation. Most important, the move clearly signaled that France's commitment to la francophonie no longer took precedence over the pursuit of economic self-interest.

The emergence of new security challenges, such as the growing numbers of "collapsed states" beset by ethnic, religious, and political rivalries, has contributed to rising pressures for change in France's security relationship with francophone Africa. In the case of Rwanda, France took the lead in undertaking a series of military interventions between 1990 and 1994. The Mitterrand administration's decision to intervene was the latest manifestation of the long-term French goal of integrating the former Belgian colonies of the Great Lakes region into the French sphere of influence. These interventions also fostered one of the rare examples of popular outrage in France about policy toward francophone Africa when it was learned that the Mitterrand administration had provided the authoritarian Rwandan regime of Major General Juvenal Habyarimana with over $160 million in economic aid and an untold amount of military aid from 1990 to 1994—in essence contributing to the genocide that unfolded in 1994.

France's attempt to rationalize military intervention in Rwanda as a humanitarian response to local suffering was dubious at best. In reality, the Mitterrand government sought to stem the invasion and steady advance beginning in October 1990 of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a guerrilla army supported by Uganda and perceived by French policymakers as hostile to France and "under Anglo-Saxon influence." From the perspective of most French policymakers, the RPF's military victory in 1994 marked the first time that a francophone country had "fallen" to Anglo-Saxon influence. Some French policymakers considered Rwanda the first in a series of regional "dominoes" that could eventually lead to Anglo-Saxon domination of portions of Central Africa.

**BUFFETED BY TURBULENCE**

Jacques Chirac's election as president of France in May 1995 coincided with an increasingly turbulent period in French foreign policy toward francophone Africa. The growing contradictions in French support for democratization were shown by the Chirac administration's response to a February 1996 military coup in Niger—the first against a democratically elected government in France's former colonies since the beginning of the democratization process in 1990. Despite a 1995 commitment by Minister of Cooperation Jacques Godfrain that France would intervene to reinstate a democratically elected government if a defense treaty had been signed with that country, France refused to intervene in Niger and ultimately decided to work with the military regime headed by Colonel Ibrahim Mainassara Baré. Not surprisingly, the democratically elected francophone neighbors of Niger were worried by French inaction. In a throwback to an earlier era of authoritarian rule and highly questionable democratic practices, Colonel Baré announced that there would be multiparty elections in 1996, presented himself as the candidate of the ruling party, and subsequently won the elections to the congratulatory toasts of local French diplomats.

The events in Niger signaled the reemergence of African militaries as critical forces to be reckoned with in francophone Africa, as well as the growing stagnation of the democratization process that had begun in 1990. When military uprisings subsequently broke out against the democratically elected government of Ange-Félix Patassé in the Central African Republic in April and May 1996, Chirac twice ordered French troops stationed in the country to intervene to maintain stability and order. These interventions ironically occurred against the backdrop of a statement by Minister of Cooperation Godfrain that French troops would only intervene in countries threatened by external aggression.
The troubling aspect of French intervention in the Central African Republic is that the Patassé regime, although democratically elected in 1993, had become increasingly authoritarian and corrupt. Critics therefore questioned the true motives behind the Chirac administration's actions. Intervention presumably was not driven by a desire to promote democracy (at least based on earlier French inaction in Niger), nor was it the result of popular appeals from the Central African Republic. Popular public opinion instead was overwhelmingly opposed to Patassé's regime, and produced a virulently anti-French backlash in the aftermath of French military intervention.

The most plausible explanation for the shift in policy is that the Chirac administration had received "panicked calls" from other francophone client states who feared that French inaction would embolden opposition movements in their countries. The emergence of overwhelming anti-French sentiment after the second intervention in May 1996 did lead Chirac to decide against military action in December 1996 when a third mutiny broke out (although a small retaliatory strike was authorized in January 1997 when mutinous troops killed two French soldiers). Chirac instead supported the diplomatic efforts of a delegation of francophone African presidents led by Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso.

The dilemmas associated with French military intervention are demonstrated by the Chirac administration's response to an expanding crisis in the Great Lakes region, particularly the emergence and spread of a guerrilla insurgency in eastern Zaire. French policymakers perceive the Great Lakes crisis in francophone-anglophone terms: the guerrilla insurgency in eastern Zaire is led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who in turn is strongly supported by and allied with the Rwandan government of Paul Kagame and the Ugandan government of Yoweri Museveni. As a result, the French consider Kabila's guerrilla movement to be under Anglo-Saxon influence, and therefore hostile to France. One can assume that for France the worst-case scenario would be Kabila's overthrow of the Mobutu regime and the installation of a new government strongly allied with Rwanda, Uganda, and the United States. Such a government could then act as a springboard for the further spread of Anglo-Saxon influence throughout Africa.

The Chirac administration's attempts at playing a more proactive role in the Great Lakes region have been restrained by a variety of factors. First, the lack of interest among the other major Western powers, especially the United States, has stymied French proposals to create a UN-sponsored, multilateral military force that would be dispatched to eastern Zaire, ostensibly to protect refugees from Burundi and Rwanda. Second, the option of unilateral French intervention is out of the question because of the publicly stated promise of the Rwandan government and Kabila's guerrilla forces to militarily engage French forces. Unlike earlier French military interventions in Rwanda, French forces would be confronted by battle-hardened troops capable of inflicting heavy casualties. Finally, even if the Chirac administration were willing to accept the public uproar that surely would accompany French casualties in any unilateral intervention, the French military is simply incapable of independently moving and sustaining the large numbers of troops and equipment necessary for a long-term engagement in such a vast military theater. In short, French military action in the largest country of francophone Africa essentially has been vetoed by a combination of local and international forces.

In the case of Algeria, the dilemma confronting Chirac is not so much constrained policy choices as the spillover of those policies into French society. Having fought a bloody war from 1954 to 1962 to gain independence from France, Algeria is currently locked in a brutal civil war between the military-backed regime of President Liamine Zeroual and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), a fanatical Islamist guerrilla movement. Chirac maintains the inherited policy of providing strong financial and diplomatic support to the Algerian government, which totaled $578 million from 1992 to 1994.

The GIA has made good on a promise to target French citizens. As a result, French nationals have been killed not only in Algeria—as in the May 1996 murder of seven French monks kidnapped from a monastery outside Algiers—but in a series of terrorist bombings in Paris, including a December 1996 explosion that killed four people and wounded over ninety others on a commuter train. "We do what we say," explained a letter from the GIA demanding the termination of all French aid to
the Zeroul regime. "If you refuse us, we are prepared to fight you and destroy your country—whatever it takes."

The GIA bombings in Paris have contributed to a significant backlash in France against African immigrants, especially those from North Africa. The implications of this backlash were most vividly demonstrated in 1996 by the Chirac administration's heavy-handed removal and arrest of African immigrants who had barricaded themselves in the Saint-Bernard Church in Paris to protest changes in French immigration practices. The transmission of this television image across francophone Africa not only provoked feelings of "humiliation," "indignation," and "solidarity," but reminded francophone Africans of the significant gap between the rhetoric of la francophonie and the reality of French consideration of their African counterparts as second-class citizens.

PARIS VERSUS WASHINGTON

The international debate that unfolded during the fall of 1996 over who should serve as the next UN secretary general offered some interesting insights into France's ability to lead the francophone African voting bloc in international organizations. The Chirac administration led a losing battle to reelect Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali for a second term. The Clinton administration had vowed early on to use its veto rights to block Boutros-Ghali's candidacy, and did so at a November 19 meeting of the Security Council. France responded by threatening to veto any candidate from a nonfrancophone country, and strongly promoted the candidacy of Amara Essy, Ivory Coast's foreign minister. In the end, Kofi Annan, a native English speaker from Ghana who was perceived among French policymakers as the "American candidate," was chosen by the Security Council on December 13, 1996. The most plausible explanation as to why the Chirac administration ultimately backed away from its earlier commitment was the loss of support among francophone African countries (which inevitably rallied around Annan's candidacy). When confronted with the possibility that an extended stalemate between the United States and France might lead to the selection of a non-African secretary general, the francophone African leaders placed their common heritage as Africans before their more select common attachment to la francophonie.

The conflict over the selection of the secretary general is indicative of a rising war of words between the United States State Department and the French Ministry of Cooperation over francophone Africa that peaked just before the United States presidential elections of November 1996. A turning point occurred when Minister of Cooperation Godfrain chided Secretary of State Warren Christopher for his decision to make his first (and last) official visit to Africa approximately four years after assuming office and literally weeks before the presidential elections—obviously for political gain. Christopher responded to the perceived diplomatic slight by demanding an official apology. When none was forthcoming, he publicly criticized French policy: "All nations must cooperate, not compete, if we are going to make a positive difference in Africa's future," explained Christopher. "The time has passed when Africa could be carved into spheres of influence, or when outside powers could view whole groups of states as their private domain." Not to be outdone, Godfrain responded in kind: "If I were a political or electoral counselor to President Bill Clinton, I would advise him to worry more about helping African development after the elections."

An important dimension of the rising war of words is the parallel development of local United States-French competition for the favor of emerging elites throughout francophone Africa. Local United States diplomats are more vocal than their French counterparts concerning the democratization process in francophone Africa. This outspokenness, however, is not due to a greater United States commitment to democratization. Indeed, there is abundant evidence of the contradictions between Washington's pro-democracy rhetoric and its foreign policy actions throughout Africa both during and after the cold war.

The logic of diplomatic competition at the local level is seemingly based on a perception of the democratization process as a zero-sum game (that is, one person's gain is another's loss). From the perspective of local United States ambassadors, promoting multiparty democracy is a low-cost strategy with potentially high returns—namely, the replacement of pro-French elites with new protagonists potentially more sensitive to United States interests. From the perspective of local French ambassadors, the reverse holds true, which explains why French policymakers tend to emerge as protectors of the status quo. In the case of Benin, for example, Nicephore Soglo's victory in the 1991 presidential elections led to the formation of a regime more interested in promoting closer United States ties. It is precisely for this reason, argue crit-
ics of French policies, that local French diplomats provided significant support to Soglo's predecessor, Mathieu Kerekou, who emerged victorious in the 1996 presidential elections and subsequently installed a regime that represented a return to the status quo.

France's efforts to strengthen and expand its influence beyond la francophonie were nicely captured by the 1996 Franco-African summit held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The summit was attended by a record 45 countries, including 26 heads of state. Although little of substance actually emerged from the discussions, conference organizers took pride in the fact that the meeting functioned as a surrogate Organization of African Unity (OAU). Attendees represented all the colonial heritages of the African continent, signaling a broadening of the Franco-African summit beyond its original francophone organizers whose first official meeting was held in 1973 in Paris. The Chirac administration was especially pleased with the first-time attendance of Nigeria, which was represented by General Sani Abacha. The only significant point of dissension occurred when Chirac sought to allay the fears of his franc zone counterparts by proclaiming that France would never again devalue the CFA franc—even though the further implementation of the Maastricht treaty calls for the creation of a common European currency. The response of the assembled franc zone leaders was both guarded and lighthearted, with Pascal Lissouba of the Congo taking the lead in demanding that Chirac place this promise "in writing"—a clear reference to earlier promises obviously not kept when France devalued the CFA franc in 1994.

The broadening scope of the Franco-African summit is part of the Chirac administration's aggressive "triple strategy" of enhancing links with the three major anglophone powers of Africa: Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya. In each case, French foreign policy is primarily driven by the pursuit of economic interests (that is, trade and investment). French policymakers also downplay the importance of human rights issues, as demonstrated by France's close relationship with the extremely authoritarian Kenyan regime of President Daniel arap Moi. It is precisely because of its neomercantilist conception of bilateral relations within the anglophone world that France has finally established close ties with the authoritarian military government of Nigeria, a development that only became possible after the death in December 1993 of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the former president of Ivory Coast, who viewed Nigeria as a regional threat. In this regard, France opposes international efforts to impose economic sanctions against Kenya and Nigeria.

**How "Special" a Relationship?**

Some observers take the extremely pessimistic view that francophone Africa is on the verge of "Somalization"—state disintegration and a descent into chaos. France in this scenario is not willing to remain involved, and therefore is preparing to abandon its former clients to disintegrate on their own. Others err in the opposite direction by offering the image of a highly engaged French policymaking establishment that is committed to aiding francophone Africa in the pursuit of the triple goals of promoting la francophonie, economic development, and democratization. France in this scenario becomes the savior of francophone Africa, a modern-day example of enlightened policies that harkens back to colonial rationales for the imposition of direct colonial rule.

The reality of the evolution of French foreign policy from the cold war to the increasingly turbulent era of the 1990s requires a more nuanced understanding somewhere between these two extremes. French policymakers are committed to maintaining some type of special relationship with their francophone African counterparts. The word "special," however, means something completely different in the evolving context of the 1990s than it did in the 1970s or the 1950s. Most important, regardless of what special ties French policymakers ideally would like to pursue, French freedom of action is increasingly constrained by a variety of factors and developments: France's responsibilities and interests outside Africa; the evolving structure of the international system; declining military capabilities during a period of growing domestic constraints; and, most important, the emergence of new elites in francophone Africa less willing to accept the same types of ties enjoyed and permitted by their predecessors.