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Threats in sub-Saharan Africa by 2040

A prospective analysis

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Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa has faced significant challenges, crises, and transformations in recent years. In West Africa, the region has grappled with a growing terrorist threat since the onset of the Malian crisis in 2012, as well as a wave of coups since 2020, raising concerns among observers about broader democratic backsliding. Central Africa and the Horn of Africa remain plagued by numerous armed conflicts (Sudan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia), resulting in severe humanitarian crises. These challenges are further compounded by demographic pressure and the accelerating impact of climate change, which threatens the security and stability of already fragile areas.

Africa is the fastest-growing continent in terms of population and rising temperatures, heightening fears of increased risks related to migration, food security, health, and economic instability. The impact on Africa of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine has also underscored the interaction of regional and global dynamics. While Africa is sometimes labelled the “forgotten continent”, recent international developments have demonstrated its vulnerability to global crises.

Simultaneously, in an era of heightened global strategic competition, sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as a key theatre of power rivalry, with some observers referring to a “new scramble for Africa”. Recent years have witnessed an uptick in new “global strategies” with Africa and international summits involving African countries and external powers such as China, Russia, the United States, Turkey, India, Saudi Arabia, and, since 2024, South Korea¹. Africa has emerged as a focal point of Turkey’s influence strategy, spearheaded by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s discreet yet assertive approach, marked by over 40 official visits to the continent since the early 2000s. Conversely, France’s influence in West Africa has waned, with political authorities and growing segments of local populations criticizing its military interventions and foreign policies, often perceived as neocolonial.

Amid these shifts in the international order, rising threats (security, political, and health-related), and diminishing resources (e.g., the conclusion of France’s military operations in the Sahel, the withdrawal of MINUSMA at the end of 2023, and the scheduled end of MONUSCO² and ATMIS in late 2024³), the future strategic landscape in Africa raises many questions.

- What trends will shape the challenges, issues, and threats of tomorrow?
- What will be the primary risks for African countries and Western interests?
- Can France – and Europe – renew their strategic approach as their influence is contested in historical areas of influence?
- How can France and Europe propose attractive partnership models to compete with other strategic actors on the continent?

At the beginning of 2024, FRS produced a 107-page study in the framework of the Observatory of future conflicts which offers a forward-looking analysis of the primary threats likely to shape the strategic landscape in sub-Saharan Africa by 2040. While not

¹ Joint Declaration 2024 Korea-Africa Summit, [Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), June 5, 2024.

² Paul Nantulya, “Understanding the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s push for MONUSCO’s departure”, [Africa Center for Strategic Studies](#), May 20, 2024.

³ Colin Robinson, “As ATMIS Looks to Withdraw, the Risk of Large-Scale al-Shabaab Success in Southern Somalia is High”, [IPI Global Observatory](#), December 10, 2024.

exhaustive, the study aims to propose key avenues for reflection and develop working hypotheses.

The study aimed to:

- present the main factors of evolution, risks, and trends shaping the strategic landscape (Part 1);
- highlight examples of traditional and emerging threats likely to be significant by 2040 (Part 2);
- propose recommendations for the structure and the strategic posture of the French military (Part 3). What structure would best align with French interests? In a context of reduced French military presence in the region, what tools would be necessary to maintain a minimal response capability in the event of a major crisis?

The analysis focused on sub-Saharan Africa (excluding Southern Africa) and regions of French military interest: West, Central, and East Africa (Horn of Africa, Madagascar, Mozambique). Eastern Africa, in particular, is expected to emerge as a region of concentrated strategic challenges and opportunities for cooperation by 2040.

The study takes into account both African and non-African dynamics. For example, it also builds on the conceptual framework used in previous reports, focusing on the following prospective scenarios:

- **H1**: the re-emergence of bloc competition, centered on Washington and Beijing;
- **H2**: the predominance of indirect and hybrid competition between powers, which, aware of the interdependence of their economies in a globalized world, prefer to avoid direct armed conflicts;
- **H3**: the decentralization of global power structures;
- **H4**: a shift toward global cooperation to address crises triggered by climate change, health and migration issues.

This short paper presents the main findings of our study.

AFRICA'S STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE

DEMOGRAPHY

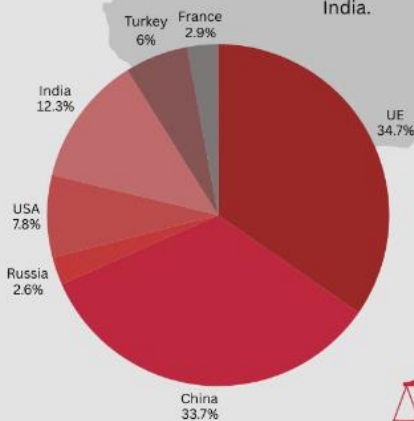


By 2050, more than **1 in 4** people will be from the **African continent**.

Countries with the highest population growth by 2040	Total population in 2023	Projected population in 2040
NIGERIA	227 882 945	320 779 660
DRC	105 789 731	170 013 816
TANZANIA	66 617 606	104 957 696
ANGOLA	36 749 906	58 104 436
MOZAMBIQUE	33 635 16	51 800 400

Estimated total trade in volume in 2023 (in bn USD), measured in billions of dollars, shows **Russia as an economic dwarf** in comparison to China or even India.

TRADE



CLIMATE AND RESOURCES



Africa is on the **frontlines of climate change**, warming at a rate faster than the global average.

+0.3°C per decade between 1991 and 2023.



By 2040, fragile African countries could face **61 days of extreme heat** (over 35°C) each year – **4x** more than other nations.



By 2060, climate change could drive **50 million** more people into **hunger** across the continent.



Africa holds **30%** of the world's **critical mineral reserves**. The continent is home to **85%** of **manganese**, **80%** of **platinum** and **chromium**, **47%** of **cobalt**, and **21%** of **graphite reserves** – vital for the global green transition.

DRC holds over **70%** of the world's **cobalt reserves**, essential for batteries, while **South Africa** leads with **80%** of **global platinum reserves** and more than of **30%** of **manganese reserves**.



DEMOCRACY

Surge of **coups d'État** in the Sahel, especially in **Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso**

CHAD	MAURITANIA	MALI	NIGER	SUDAN	BURKINA FASO
Apr 1975 June 1982 Dec 1990	Jul 1978 Jan 1980 Dec 1984 Aug 2005 Aug 2008	Nov 1968 Mar 1991 Mar 2012 Aug 2020 May 2021	Apr 1974 Jan 1996 Apr 1999 Feb 2010 July 2023	Nov 1958 May 1969 Apr 1985 Jun 1989 Apr 2019 Oct 2021	Jan 1966 Feb 1974 Nov 1980 Nov 1982 Aug 1983 Oct 1987 Oct 2014 Jan 2022 Sept 2022

But Africans remain committed to **democracy**

80%

Reject dictatorship

78%

Reject one-party rule

66%

Reject military rule

66%

Prefer democracy over any other form of government

THE RISE OF DRONE PROWER IN AFRICA

as of 2024

19



At least **19** African countries have acquired **Turkish drones**.

13



At least **13** African countries have acquired **Chinese drones**.

8



At least **8** African countries have acquired **Israeli drones**.

4



At least **4** African countries have acquired **Iranian drones**.

4



At least **4** African countries are developing their own **military drones** - **Kenya, Nigeria, Cameroon and South Africa**.

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Sources: The Military Balance/Military Africa/Afrobarometer/IMF/World Bank/AFD/United Nations/Ministries of Economy/CISIS/USGS

1. The evolving strategic landscape in sub-Saharan Africa

By 2040, the strategic landscape in sub-Saharan Africa will be shaped by at least six interlinked factors: climate change, demographic growth, governance challenges, assertion of sovereignty, strategic competition, and advancements in military and technological capacities.

1.1 Climate change: a “threat multiplier”

Sub-Saharan Africa is among the regions the most vulnerable to climate change, due mainly to the heavy reliance of its countries on agriculture and fishing, combined with weak infrastructure. Rising temperatures, desertification, and flooding will intensify food and water insecurity, heighten resource competition, and drive internal migration (32 million internal migrants by 2050 according to the World Bank’s worst-case scenario). The Sahel is already witnessing deteriorating livelihoods, fostering grievances and boosting recruitment by terrorist entities. Climate-related instability could also disrupt foreign military operations in fragile areas, especially where infrastructure is poorly developed⁴. The climate challenge will play an increasingly significant role in shaping national interests and, in particular, will influence strategies for access to Africa and its strategic resources. While African leaders may blame future conflicts on climate to avoid accountability, meaningful change requires a long-term strategy integrating development and climate issues. ECOWAS’s 2022 regional strategy could offer a path to enhance resilience if there is sufficient political will.

1.2 Demographic growth: a threat or an opportunity?

Africa’s population is projected to double by 2050, reaching over two billion people, with countries like Nigeria, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo seeing the highest growth. By 2040, Nigeria is expected to become the fourth most populous country, with 357 million people, and by 2050, it could outstrip the United States, with a population of approximately 451 million, according to UN extreme projections⁵. Urbanization is accelerating, with megacities like Lagos and Kinshasa expanding rapidly. This trend is also expected to drive the growth of so-called “smart cities”, designed to address urbanization and sustainability challenges but often disconnected from the needs of the local populations⁶.

While a youthful population offers economic potential, the lack of sufficient job creation, infrastructure, and education systems will likely exacerbate unemployment, poverty, and social unrest. Such demographic pressure is likely to overwhelm existing governance structures. By directly impacting the military and economic capacities of states, as well as the determination of their objectives and the resources allocated to them, demographic trends will significantly shape their posture on the international stage. The evolution of population growth will therefore be a decisive factor in the development of threats on the continent.

⁴ Philippe Gros, Alexandre Taithe, Aude Thomas, Vincent Touret, avec la contribution de Frédéric Coste, “La contribution des armées aux interventions de secours d’urgence en catastrophes naturelles de grande ampleur”, Note n° 18, *Observatoire des conflits futurs*, January 2021.

⁵ United Nations, *World Population Prospects 2024*, 2024.

⁶ Marie de Vergés, “Les projets de villes nouvelles en Afrique sont déconnectés des besoins réels des populations”, *Le Monde Afrique*, October 8, 2023.

1.3 Governance challenges

Political instability continues to erode state legitimacy and the social contract. Since 2020, West and Central Africa have experienced a wave of military coups, weakening democratic governance. Governance failures also create opportunities for terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates to exploit local grievances and consolidate their influence. Terrorist sanctuaries in regions like the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin may expand, increasing the likelihood of cross-border conflicts. The tendency of political authorities, and especially transitional authorities, to cling to power is likely to increase their unpopularity over time, leading to a continued rise in coups and popular uprisings, particularly in francophone countries, currently most affected by crises. Military-led transitions suggest a normalization of “pseudo-civilian regimes”, where the military retains significant control behind the scenes. This trend not only jeopardizes potential future international interventions but also exposes states to non-kinetic threats, including influence campaigns, disinformation, and election interference. A striking example is Russia’s involvement in Madagascar’s 2018 presidential election, later uncovered by the BBC in 2019⁷.

Longevity of African leaders

Country	Head of state	Year of coming to power	Age as of January 2025	Regime’s longevity in years
Equatorial Guinea	Téodoro Obiang	1979	82	46
Cameroon	Paul Biya	1982	91	43
Uganda	Yoweri Museveni	1986	80	39
Eritrea	Isaias Afwerki	1993	78	32
Congo B.	Denis Sassou-Nguesso	1997	81	28
Djibouti	Ismail Omar Guelleh	1999	77	26
Rwanda	Paul Kagamé	2000	67	24
Togo	Faure Gnassingbé	2005	58	20

1.4 The rising assertion of sovereignty

African states are increasingly asserting their sovereignty and seeking to diversify partnerships. This is reflected in their engagement with non-Western partners, such as China, Russia, and Turkey, and their reduced reliance on Western powers like France. The diminishing footprint of French military forces in longstanding spheres of influence, such as the Sahel, highlights this evolving geopolitical landscape. African states are reshaping alliances to reflect their own interests, marking a significant recalibration in global power dynamics. The growing assertion of the sovereignty principle has become a tool for military juntas in West Africa to legitimize their rule, pushing away former regional and Western partners and polarizing the region between coup-led and other states. The

⁷ “Did Russia meddle in Madagascar’s election?”, [BBC News](#), April 9, 2022.

departure of Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali from ECOWAS (effective January 29, 2025)⁸ has weakened regional cooperation and exacerbated economic challenges, despite recent signs of reconciliation. This fragmentation of the Sahelian regional space threatens the effectiveness of international and regional organizations, while ECOWAS faces a legitimacy crisis that could benefit autocratic regimes and entrench the juntas' power, underscoring the need for renewed dialogue and more balanced cooperation frameworks.

1.5 Strategic competition: the new multipolar era

Sub-Saharan Africa has become a hotspot for great-power competition, with China, Russia, Turkey, and Western nations vying for influence. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) includes significant investments in African infrastructure, such as ports in Djibouti and Kenya. Russia has been increasingly active through arms sales, Wagner Group and Africa Corps deployments, and alliances with authoritarian regimes like those in Sudan and the Central African Republic. Meanwhile, Turkey has expanded its soft power and military presence, notably with a base in Somalia. This competition also involves hybrid tactics, such as information warfare and economic coercion. Therefore, by 2040, it is unlikely that Africa's strategic landscape will be dominated by a single global competitor, as many African countries prioritize diversified, non-exclusive partnerships. Non-alignment has re-emerged as a favored strategy, allowing states to safeguard multiple alliances, avoid dependency, and leverage competition between powers for economic aid and political concessions. This multipolar context also encourages faster adoption of new technologies, enhancing the continent's strategic capacities and influence.

1.6 Advancements in military and technological capabilities

The proliferation of advanced technologies, such as drones and cyber capabilities, is transforming conflict dynamics. Private military companies like Wagner have introduced sophisticated methods of intervention. African states are also adopting new technologies, such as Nigeria's recent deployment of drones for counterinsurgency. However, these advancements carry risks: cyber vulnerabilities could be exploited by state and non-state actors, while drone warfare may escalate violence and undermine regional peace efforts.

The strategic landscape in sub-Saharan Africa over the coming decades will therefore be marked by a plurality of actors and issues, which will complicate the understanding of actions and the anticipation of threats. Together, these trends will create a complex environment marked by both traditional and emerging threats.

2. Main threats in sub-Saharan Africa by 2040

Traditional threats are expected to remain significant, particularly those stemming from internal challenges to governance systems, the expanding presence of terrorist groups, and the intensifying strategic competition on the continent – most notably between Russia and China on one side, and Europe and the United States on the other.

⁸ Marine Jeannin, "Rupture entre l'AES et la Cedeao : un départ en forme de faux-semblant", *Le Monde*, December 17, 2024.

2.1 Threats related to the internal contestation of governance systems

The internal contestation of governance systems in sub-Saharan countries, particularly in the Sahel, is likely to keep contributing to rising threats such as corruption, nepotism, and the restriction of individual freedoms. If unaddressed, these governance failures will continue to fuel radicalization, extremist recruitment, and violent popular uprisings, heightening the risk of coups, rebellions, and civil wars. Countries at particular risk include the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) region, where military regimes could face new coups, and Chad, which may face destabilization following the death of President Déby. Border disputes and sovereignty conflicts, like those between Somalia and Ethiopia, or the DRC and Rwanda, further complicate the security situation in the region. There is also growing concern over the weakening of regional organizations like ECOWAS, which could collapse by 2040, leading to fragmentation and a rise in external influences like Russia's and China's. Geopolitical tensions, including the ongoing rivalry between Morocco and Algeria, could exacerbate instability in the Sahel, spurring arms trafficking, terrorism, and migration. Overall, the trend toward internal contestation and the assertion of sovereignty could result in more internal and inter-state conflicts by 2040, with limited external interventions.

2.2 Threats related to terrorist groups

The threat posed by terrorist groups will continue to grow in the coming years across the three regions covered in this study (West, Central, and East Africa). The main factors driving this expansion will be:

- the long-term strategies of parent organizations Daesh and Al-Qaeda;
- the likely deterioration of political and socio-economic conditions in many countries, creating a fertile ground for the spread of terrorism;
- the failure of states to implement necessary socio-economic reforms (such as policies to integrate marginalized communities, negotiations with armed groups, combating youth unemployment, and other development and governance policies);
- the persistent weaknesses of local armed forces despite the likely increase in capabilities.

Despite large-scale drone acquisitions by governments combating terrorist groups, drones alone will prove inadequate in solving the broader terrorism problem. Some effects of climate change (increasing community tensions and rising internal migrations) will facilitate the recruitment processes of terrorist armed groups. Regarding scenarios, the emergence of a new caliphate in Northern Mali and the expansion of the Islamic State Sahel Province towards North-Western Nigeria would be possible. By 2040, Al-Qaeda and Daesh affiliated groups are expected to remain resilient and continue to have active groups targeting Western interests in African theatres. The emergence of new groups, with or without affiliation, cannot be ruled out given the likely persistence of a local context conducive to terrorist propaganda and recruitment.

2.3 Threats related to the growing strategic competition

By 2040, Russia and China are anticipated to expand their influence in sub-Saharan Africa, posing a growing challenge to Western interests. Both powers aim to secure access to Africa's strategic resources, yet direct confrontation between the United States, China, and Russia in the region remains unlikely due to differing priorities and objectives.

China's influence will primarily expand through economic partnerships and military agreements, which may include the construction of military bases in Tanzania and Madagascar and potentially along the Atlantic coast in Equatorial Guinea⁹, threatening Western interests. Meanwhile, Russia's strategic involvement will focus on resource exploitation, defense agreements, and military presence, with bases likely to appear in the Central African Republic, Mali, and Sudan. Both powers could also engage in proxy conflicts, potentially exacerbating local instability, as seen in Mali and Sudan with the ongoing proxy war related to Ukraine¹⁰.

France's influence in the region could face increased competition from Moscow and Beijing, not only in traditional zones of influence – such as the Gulf of Guinea, where French influence is already in decline – but also in newer areas like the Indian Ocean. This includes Chinese naval displays of power and Russia's efforts to marginalize the French presence through below-threshold aggressive tactics (for example, in the Mozambique Channel, by supporting Madagascar's claims over the Eparses Islands or the Comoros' claims over Mayotte). The expanding power of Russia and China will carry even greater weight as sub-Saharan African states are expected to grapple with increasing internal instability in the years ahead.

2.4 Emerging threats

In addition to the ongoing threats on the continent, risks related to the exploitation of climate change effects by malicious actors could further destabilize the region. These actors might target critical energy and technological infrastructures or use the climate cause as a pretext for triggering conflicts. Potential attacks on submarine cables, by state or non-state actors, could severely harm the economic stability of entire countries or regions, particularly in areas where significant numbers of cables and substantial trade traffic converge – such as off the coast of East Africa near Djibouti and the Red Sea.

Moreover, the risk of conflicts over water resources is likely to rise, especially over the Nile. The ongoing tensions between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia over the Grand Renaissance Dam could escalate into regional confrontations. Terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have already weaponized water by poisoning sources, and this tactic may intensify as resources become scarcer.

While military AI developments in Africa are currently in their early stages, by 2040, AI could significantly reshape defense strategies across the continent. Countries like Nigeria and South Africa are already integrating AI into their military strategies, with South Africa taking the lead in AI research. However, the rise of AI also attracts global powers,

⁹ Basillioh Rukanga, "Russia sends military instructors to Equatorial Guinea – reports", [BBC](#), November 13, 2024.

¹⁰ Kyiv has opened a new front against Russia in Africa by targeting Wagner troops and Africa Corps, particularly in Sudan and Mali. Ukrainian special forces have reportedly been fighting the RSF, supported by Wagner (through arms supplies and training), in Sudan for several months. Sources also indicate that Ukraine has trained Malian rebels in the use of drones, sent instructors, and provided material assistance. Additionally, Ukraine is

bolstering its diplomatic presence on the continent to counter Russian influence, exemplified by the opening of new embassies (see Thomas Eydoux, Laureline Savoye, "Quand les forces spéciales ukrainiennes combattent des mercenaires russes de Wagner au Soudan", [Le Monde](#), November 19, 2023; Hadrien Degiorgi, "En Afrique, l'Ukraine accélère sa contre-offensive diplomatique", [Le Point](#), July 22, 2024; Benjamin Roger, Emmanuel Grynszpan, "Dans le nord du Mali, les drones ukrainiens éclairent l'horizon des rebelles", [Le Monde](#), October 10, 2024).

particularly China and Israel, raising concerns about technological dependence, surveillance, and potential external influence on African defense policies. Additionally, the use of AI in military operations by terrorist groups and the growing vulnerability to cyberattacks represent significant challenges to African security.

Lastly, certain non-state actors and states, such as China, Turkey, and some regional powers in the Middle East (e.g., Gulf states), may adopt new strategies of aggression below the threshold of armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly if tensions with Western powers escalate. Should China be the main challenger to Western or French interests, the triggering factors would be actions that harm China's vital interests, such as French stances on Taiwan or Tibet (e.g., their official recognition as independent sovereign states). While Africa may not be the primary focus for China, Turkey and Gulf states, geopolitical shifts could drive them to use non-traditional methods – such as information manipulation, proxy warfare, and economic pressure – to assert influence. This complex dynamic of regional competition, strategic interests, and instrumentalization of climate issues will likely be especially strong in key areas like the Horn of Africa.

3. Implications for France and Europe

In the context of the war in Ukraine, France's 2024-2030 Military Programming Law (LPM) allocates 413.3 billion euros to its military over seven years, marking a 40 percent increase from the previous LPM¹¹. While this boost addresses key strategic concerns, it raises questions about the adaptability of France's defense strategies to future challenges, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. As mentioned above, the region is becoming increasingly complex, with a dense network of actors and issues, making it more difficult for external powers like France to assert influence or intervene directly. Its bases, once symbols of its long-standing influence in the region, are now seen less as guarantees of stability and security, and in some cases, have become points of contention, undermining France's efforts to build strong local partnerships. Moreover, Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye's recent statement on Senegal's sovereignty¹², along with Germany's¹³ and the United States'¹⁴ military withdrawal from Niger, has underscored that the acceptability of Western military bases is getting lower due to rising neo-sovereign claims.

The French strategy in Africa must evolve, particularly in light of the recent local political reconfigurations and the growing geopolitical competition. In response to mounting anti-French sentiment, decreasing acceptability of France's military footprint, and its withdrawal from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, France has conducted a review of its strategy in Africa in the last couple of years.

In the current context and looking ahead, France faces a dual challenge: how to scale back its military presence on a continent where its interventions have become the subject of widespread criticism while still offering competitive and tailored partnerships that meet the needs of local countries? How to address a growing range of risks across the full spectrum of military missions with reduced resources?

A complete withdrawal – political, economic, and security – would be a mistake, given the inseparable ties between Europe and Africa, the many opportunities for cooperation, and

¹¹ Loi de programmation militaire 2024-2030, [French Ministry of Armed Forces](#), not dated.

¹² "Le président sénégalais appelle à la fin de toutes les présences militaires étrangères dès 2025" dans le pays", [Le Monde](#), December 31, 2024.

¹³ "Niger : les derniers soldats allemands ont quitté la base de Niamey", [RFI](#), August 31, 2024.

¹⁴ "Niger : l'armée américaine annonce avoir achevé son retrait", [Le Monde](#), September 16, 2024.

the need to protect certain vital interests. The real challenge lies in implementing a pragmatic strategy that aligns with clearly defined interests, where military intervention is reserved as a last resort rather than the core of France's approach on the continent. The failure of France's strategy in the Sahel can be traced to both a misalignment of interests, strategies, and resources, as well as overreliance on military interventions – France has led the largest number of unilateral military actions on the continent.

France's ongoing redefinition of its Africa strategy, outlined in a confidential report by Jean-Marie Bockel, Emmanuel Macron's special envoy, in November 2023, aims to establish defense partnerships that better align with the needs of African partners while respecting their sovereignty. France plans to reduce its military footprint, maintaining a presence of about 100 personnel in Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire; this does not apply to its strategic base in Djibouti (with 1,500 personnel, key for France's influence in the Indo-Pacific). The focus will shift toward prioritizing soft power in Anglophone and East Africa, alongside strengthening economic ties with key partners such as Nigeria, Angola, and Senegal. However, the risk remains that France may disengage too much from West Africa, potentially repeating the same mistakes in East Africa, where similar issues like terrorism, piracy, strategic competition, and state fragility persist.

Thus, success will depend not only on reducing the visibility of France's military footprint but also on using the full spectrum of available power tools. This includes deeper cooperation with regional, European, and international partners, such as Spain, Italy, Poland, the US, the UK, Japan, and India, all of whom share common goals with France – promoting democratic values, peacebuilding, counterterrorism, and limiting Russian or Chinese influence. France can leverage its regional expertise to collaborate on governance, development, and security issues, while supporting European efforts. Moreover, France could explore other defense tools than direct military intervention: civil-military initiatives, rotating bases, etc. Soft power investments, including increasing private-sector partnerships in sectors such as education, technology, and space, would also be critical levers of influence. Additionally, France must create a communication strategy that targets African populations – not just elites – and emphasizes French and European partnership opportunities and comparative advantages, rather than focusing solely on demonizing adversaries like Russia (this serves its game). This requires a renewal of strategic thinking, engaging more deeply with African civil society organizations and local research bodies, and less on technocratic and bureaucratic visions. Additionally, a transparent and responsible approach to France's colonial history is crucial in rebuilding trust and legitimacy in the region.

Finally, France and Europe must prioritize listening to African actors themselves, particularly regional organizations, which have often been sidelined despite their importance in dialogue and stabilization efforts. These organizations must remain key interlocutors for ensuring a more inclusive, local-based approach to addressing Africa's challenges.

The relationship between France and its former African colonies needs to shift from an emotional to a pragmatic one. This new approach should focus on shared, concrete interests, avoiding double standards and paternalism. French and European strategies should be flexible, avoiding a one-size-fits-all model, and ensuring that France and Europe are not only defending their values but doing so in a way that respects African autonomy and responds to contemporary challenges.

Annex 1. Sub-Saharan Africa: mapping geostrategic trends

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 Designed and produced by Marie DE VRIES and Djenabou CISSE

