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### Benedikt Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*

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In his 'Introduction: France's New Interventionism in Africa,' Benedikt Erforth offers the reader an insight into the French–African relations in the twenty-first century. In the introduction to his study, he refers to the example of the French military interventions in Mali, and the Central African Republic (CAR), which he regards as the two pivots around which his paper revolves and which serve to pinpoint the role of contemporary France in a multipolar world. Erforth highlights the global demand for African land and resources by the superpowers – primarily the United States and China – and other international organisations, like the United Nations and the European Union, which are striving to become peacekeeping guardians, and to gain larger control over African resources. Erforth looks at the motivation that lies behind the perception of African capacity, soil, natural resources, as well as the individual steps taken by these actors to solidify their position under the provisions of the military aid, humanitarian relief, counterterrorism, and many other slogans widely used across Africa. Another important factor highlighted in the paper are France's financial shortages, which seem to be the key reason why the country has withdrawn from the sponsorship of many actions, focusing only on those that are most likely to bring France a good reputation and safeguard its stable position on the international arena. With this in mind, Erforth seeks to provide a legitimate answer to the

question of whether Africa is likely to be equal to France as its partner in the global market of the twenty-first century.

The main part of the study centres around the event that took place in 2013, when the French air forces clashed with the African activists who had killed their pilot. In response to this intervention, France's president François Hollande responded to the attack by sending over troops to counter the rebellions in their hiding spot. This military operation was the most significant conflict since the Algerian War with the involvement of France. Within the next couple of few weeks, the scale and seriousness of the situation grew to that typical of a war. To justify the French, the president officially claimed to extend the intervention under the provision aimed at fostering counter-terrorism on the Malian territory. Within just one year, France got involved in the conflict with another African state, this time the Central African Republic. These military events have been referred to in the study to provide the reader with important insights into the complicated nature of the attitude of the French, and their role in keeping an eye on the country's interests in Africa. Indeed, the origins of the mutual existence of the two goes back to the colonisation era. With the creation of independent states in Africa, all these dependencies changed. Interestingly, these days the French government keeps making an effort to create the illusion of African partnership. The author seems to doubt the purity of the French intentions to acknowledge the mutual relations with Africa and addresses the question of whether the relations between France and Africa can be labelled as "just the same as before."

The first paragraph points to France's strong national identity and sense of pride, and its unique policymaking style towards Africa in the twenty-first century. The growing expenditure, combined with major financial shortages, have forced France to take unique decisions as far as sharing responsibilities with other actors interested in Africa are concerned. Erforth notes that there is still a long way ahead for Africa to become an equal partner on the international arena. This said, he also lists a few positive factors, like the rising advocacy for human rights aimed at maintaining positive relations. However, this does not explain France's efforts to be competitive with the African elites, and to argue his point, the author quotes different public and academic circles to arrive at the general conclusions that "[j]ournalists, public intellectuals, politicians, diplomats, entrepreneurs and human rights activists all make strong truth claims about what the Franco-African relationship is, and what it ought to be. Truth and myth blend in those debates."

In the next section, entitled 'Between Grandeur and Decline,' the author offers the readers an overview of the global position of France from two perspectives: one based on its cultural and economic heritage, and the other rests on the evolution from the post-colonial times with shifts into the current century. To compare these time frames, Erforth recalls De Gaulle's ambitious plans to make France's politics a dominant superpower in the post-war world despite the pressure of the stronger competitors in the global market, which at the time were the USSR, and the US. In the past, De Gaulle "was convinced that France still possessed the potential to rank among the world's great powers, despite the undeniable gap in terms of resources and material capacities, which separated it from the United States and the USSR." On the contrary, argues Erforth, today, the French financial capacity has declined, which is best epitomised in the words: "[s]ince we are not anymore a Great Power,

we need a great policy” – a statement that seems to reflect France’s key objective related to the accomplishment of the task. “If we do not have such a great policy, since we are not a Great Power anymore, we won’t be anything,” adds the author, quoting Bozo.

Erforth presents an international extension of France’s traditional style of policy-making with the cultivation of historical-cultural approach as a solution that could allow France to survive. To back up his view, he quotes other researchers specialising in French affairs, pointing to the “political, economic and cultural influence beyond the national territory” (Carillon 2002). Referring to other scholars, he finds the role of a trailblazer or forerunner in the diplomatic revolution to be France’s possible major asset that could go “hand-in-hand” with the promotion of French culture. Therefore, the reader can assume that Erforth is an advocate of the French diplomatic movement, which could be treated as a constant search of leadership. He notices the political individualism on France’s international diplomatic path in clear contrast to the notion of the so-called “global membership,” ingrained in the Western values, epitomised in the 50 years of French–American relations. Another point put forward by Erforth is the fact that in 2003 France did not support the military intervention in Iraq, which made the country “the exceptionally anti-American member in the Western camp that pretends – notwithstanding its limited resource – to have an exceptional global influence” (Frachon 2002). However, the French government led by Sarkozy changed its rhetoric towards the US, and the relations of the two countries, despite the presence of still a few unresolved issues, seem to be a lot more friendly these days.

Erforth highlights the key values of contemporary France, proposed by its Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius: 1) its permanent membership in the UN Security Council; 2) its status as a nuclear power; 3) its status as the world’s fifth-largest economy with millions French speakers around the world, and an estimated 700 million by 2050 (mainly Africans); 5) the idea of cultural *rayonnement*; 6) the positive image of France across the globe; 7) the advocacy for a specific idea of human rights; and 8) the country’s history. His conclusions leave the reader with the opinion that the exclusive reputation of French culture has had an impact on the military conflict in Mali, and the Central African Republic.

As for the evolution of the French foreign policy, Erforth admits, quoting Chafer, that along with the gaining of independence by so many of the African states, the French–African relations had to change to become “rather a restructuring other imperial relationship.” A new institution was created to work on the positive image of the bilateral political and cultural cooperation among the French and African elites. This fact has deteriorated the public spheres, as chains of connections often rely on private interests. “The tip of the iceberg consisted of the infamous Franc-Afrique networks, which brought together small groups of French and African elites, thus blurring the distinction between private and public interests. Paternalistic policies and personalised ties allowed France to exert a direct influence over a region much larger than its national territory, and to elevate its status to that of a Great Power.” Following Erforth, since the 1990s, the French–African relations have remained more “sharing-*cohabitation*” types of intercourse. The fact that epitomises this change is the transformation of the country’s domestic bodies, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs into the Ministry of Cooperation, and the abolishment of the notorious *cellule*

*Africaine*, the organisation responsible for mutual diplomacy. Thus, African leaders have been given direct access to the French president.

As the author highlights, the effort to have a socio-political and military impact on Africa is in the interest of other crucial actors of the modern world. The United Nations, as well as Europe, and just like France, took a series of measures to strengthen its position on the African continent. Various studies and reports point to organisations such as the Economic Community of the West African State, and the African Union. Erforth also compares the past achievements in Africa with the current ones, which he finds “liable to some sort of decline.” He also notices the African Renaissance, and the wise approach of African people based on their colonisation experience. Today, African leaders who in the past were subjects of economic exploitation have been given a voice again and are treated as key players in the African trade of raw materials, with a rising wave of competition coming from the Chinese growing interest in the African continent.

At a later stage of his study, Erforth highlights the fact that defence and stability were significantly changed in Africa after the 1990s. The mutual relations before 1990 were a continuation of the colonial dependency, where almost all former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa had agreed to cooperate with France under some military agreements labelled as *accords de coopération*. These forms of military bonds are likely to provide the African military force with major “technical assistance,” thus equating soldiers with their weapons. Recently, France has signed eight military agreements in Paris that allow it to set up military bases in Africa with a view to providing African leaders support during a possible hostile intervention and political instability.

Clearly, the above-mentioned French activities have given France a large control and a chance to establish hierarchical relations with Africa, just like those typical for the colonial period. This view is supported by France’s frequent involvement in a variety of battles and conflicts across Africa. This, in turn, leads to a misleading conclusion, because France seldom reduces the volume of its military intervention, trying to avoid unilateral conflicts in Africa, which allows European and United Nations Forces to take an active part too. Erforth is convinced that the motivation behind this is strongly connected to the country’s financial expenditure and the costs it generates, which are all too high for the French economy. This, in turn, encourages the French to share the costs with the European Union and the UN budget. Interestingly, Operation Serval alone cost the French an estimated €650 million in 2013.

To conclude, Erforth notes that the “multilateralists” treat their military commitments mainly to gain legitimacy, and to reduce costs and risks. This said, France is still a fundamental military help provider in Africa. Within two decades of tightening its budget, France has had to pass some financial responsibility on to other actors on the international stage, keeping control over the African region. France also wants to remain particularly active in the interventions that place it at the heart of public attention and seems to be focused on striking the right balance between multilateralism in terms of sharing costs and the responsibilities of military support on the one hand, and the need to preserve the image of dominance across the African territory on the other. The operations conducted in CAR and Mali prove that France has been quite successful at fortifying its strong position in Africa in the twenty-first century.