The President of the French Republic and Africa (2026)

The end of the old sphere of influence and the search for a new strategic partnership

Long version

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Introduction — The end of a French African cycle

France and Kenya as co-organizers — The very title of the "Africa Forward" summit, co-organized by France and Kenya in Nairobi on May 11 and 12, 2026, reflects France's desire to showcase a new relationship with the African continent. Before the forum opened, Emmanuel Macron gave an interview to Jeune Afrique, published on the first day of the summit. For those who closely follow French policies in Africa, this co-organization already constitutes a political message: France is now seeking to establish its African presence within a less paternalistic and more partnership-based framework.

Nairobi as a demonstration of the "reinvented partnership" — The innovative nature of a France-Africa summit organized on African soil, in an Anglophone capital and outside the former Francophone sphere of influence, clearly underpins the confirmation of the change attempted by Emmanuel Macron during his two terms. The French president himself emphasizes that the event is co-organized with Kenya in order to concretely embody the "reinvented partnership" he has been advocating since 2017. The choice of Nairobi thus aims to symbolize a less hierarchical relationship, one more focused on economic, technological, and continental cooperation.

Nairobi as a political symbol — The Africa Forward summit marks, first and foremost, a major symbolic shift in French policy toward Africa. For the first time, a Franco-African summit is being held in a non-Francophone country. This choice is not merely geographical. It signifies Emmanuel Macron's desire to move Franco-African cooperation beyond its former "sphere of influence" and situate it within a broader continental, Anglophone, economic, and multipolar space.

The end of the Francophone reflex — By choosing Nairobi, Emmanuel Macron seeks to demonstrate that France no longer wants to think of Africa solely through the lens of its former colonies, its historical networks, and its postcolonial legacies. Kenya is thus becoming the symbol of a new Africa, focused on technology, youth, investment, and global markets. This shift in the center of gravity also reflects the implicit recognition of a weakening French presence in several Francophone regions, particularly in the Sahel.

From Ouagadougou to Nairobi — Since his speech in Ouagadougou in November 2017, Emmanuel Macron has been attempting to redefine the relationship between France and the African continent around a central idea: that of a "reinvented partnership." The interview given to Jeune Afrique and The Africa Report is a continuation of this political ambition. Nairobi then appears as the culmination of a process that began nearly a decade earlier, marked by the French president's desire to break with the traditional codes of Françafrique and the postcolonial vestiges from which he has consistently sought to distance himself.

A reinvented partnership — The vocabulary used by Emmanuel Macron is not neutral. When he states that he believes "deeply in the need for a balanced partnership," and then evokes a "reinvented partnership," he seeks to replace the old relationship of influence with a relationship of cooperation between sovereign states. This doctrine rests on a promise: to move beyond political paternalism, security

dependency, and rent-seeking in order to build a relationship based on investment, youth, and productive transformation.

The crisis of the Sahelian model — This attempt at restructuring, however, comes in the context of a profound crisis in the French presence in Africa. The withdrawal from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States, and the rise of anti-French sentiment have significantly weakened Paris's legitimacy. When Macron states that "when our presence was no longer wanted, we left," he acknowledges the end of a military model that is now politically untenable.

The end of permanent bases — French security doctrine is also changing in nature. Emmanuel Macron explains that France is no longer operating with a logic of permanently established "large bases," but rather with a logic of training, equipping, and supporting African armies. This evolution reflects a major strategic shift. The French military presence can no longer be conceived as a permanent infrastructure of influence. It must now be justified, accepted, and adapted to the sovereignty of partner states.

A doctrine under constraint — The interview is therefore not merely a matter of political communication. It represents an attempt to rebuild a French doctrine for Africa at the very moment when France's historical instruments of power are weakening. Emmanuel Macron is no longer seeking to preserve the old system of spheres of influence. He is attempting to define a post-imperial relationship compatible with a more sovereign, more demanding continent, one increasingly sought after by the new global powers.

The end of traditional aid — One of the hallmarks of this new doctrine lies in the rejection of the traditional vocabulary of aid. Emmanuel Macron states that "we are no longer operating within a logic of aid" and prefers to speak of "solidarity-based and sustainable investment." This formulation reflects a significant shift. Africa is no longer conceived solely as a recipient of public funding from the Global North, but as a space for investment, growth, innovation, and economic development.

Critical minerals as a central issue — France's African policy is also being reformulated around strategic resources. Emmanuel Macron emphasizes critical minerals, rare earth elements, and Europe's need for materials essential to the energy, industrial, and military transitions. But he also affirms that Africa wants "to be able to extract and process these resources at home." This recognition is essential. It makes local transformation and African economic sovereignty central issues of the new partnership.

A multipolar Africa — The Africa described by Emmanuel Macron is no longer the Africa of independence movements or of French interventions in past decades. It is an Africa courted by China, Russia, Turkey, the United States, and the Gulf powers. In this environment, France is no longer alone, nor even always at the center. It must now persuade, propose, and work with African states capable of diversifying their alliances and leveraging strategic competition.

France among others — The phrase that Sahelian states must be allowed to “chart their own course” perhaps sums up the historic shift in this African policy. It acknowledges that France can no longer claim to single-handedly orchestrate the continent’s political, security, or economic trajectories. It is becoming one partner among others in a world

of competing sovereignties. This article will analyze precisely this transition: France after Françafrique.

1. Breaking free from Françafrique: doctrinal rupture and crisis of power

Deconstructing the postcolonial legacy

The condemnation of colonization — In his interview, Emmanuel Macron recalls having "strongly condemned colonization" as early as February 2017, even before his election to the French presidency. This stance constitutes one of the founding acts of his African doctrine. By describing colonization as a "crime against humanity," he broke with several decades of French ambiguity on the issue of historical memory. This break was intended to allow for the reconstruction of a new political relationship with postcolonial African societies.

The rejection of colonial determinism — Emmanuel Macron, however, refuses to make colonization the sole explanation for contemporary African difficulties. "I will not blame it for everything," he states, noting that some non-colonized countries also experience governance problems. This position seeks to introduce a more complex understanding of African trajectories. The French President thus attempts to articulate historical recognition and the accountability of post-independence elites, sometimes at the risk of fueling contradictory criticisms from both sides.

Criticism of the French sphere of influence — The interview likely contains one of the most explicit criticisms ever leveled by a French president against the old African system of the Fifth Republic. Emmanuel Macron acknowledges that "the economic relationship followed a logic of the French sphere of influence" designed to preserve certain strategic French interests after independence. This acknowledgment is crucial because it implicitly admits the existence of a system combining political influence, security dependence, economic networks, and the stabilization of allied regimes in the name of French interests.

The end of unspoken African issues — Emmanuel Macron also explains that there was "an unacknowledged bias and many unspoken issues" between France and Africa that prevented any balanced relationship. This statement summarizes one of the central objectives of his African policy: to move beyond the historical ambiguities that made a genuine relationship between Paris and African societies impossible. Colonial history, military interventions, networks of influence, and economic dependencies had to be explicitly acknowledged in order to allow for a gradual normalization of the Franco-African relationship.

The Ouagadougou speech as a doctrinal break — The speech delivered in Ouagadougou in November 2017 remains the foundational text of this attempt at refounding. In it, Emmanuel Macron already affirmed his desire to build a relationship with new generations of Africans free from postcolonial logic. In an interview with Jeune Afrique and The Africa Report, he explicitly presents the Nairobi summit as the direct continuation of this political sequence. The "reinvented partnership" has thus become the doctrinal backbone of his African strategy since he came to power.

The reinvented partnership — When Emmanuel Macron speaks of "the need for a balanced partnership," he seeks to replace the historical logic of influence with a logic of cooperation between sovereign states. This evolution theoretically implies the end of the paternalistic relationships inherited from Françafrique. The proposed partnership is now based on investment, youth, infrastructure, innovation, and

economic transformation rather than on the former privileged political and military relations between Paris and certain African regimes.

The reform of the CFA franc — The issue of the CFA franc also appears as an important marker of this desire for a break with the past. Emmanuel Macron recalls that this currency "crystallized the criticisms" leveled at France in West Africa. By supporting its reform and then its gradual transformation, Paris sought to address one of the most contested symbols of the post-colonial French presence. The French President now asserts that the construction of monetary integration belongs primarily to the West African organizations themselves.

The CFA franc as a political symbol — Beyond the monetary issue, the debate surrounding the CFA franc primarily revealed a deeper crisis of French legitimacy on the continent. For a growing segment of African public opinion, this currency represented the survival of a system of economic dependence inherited from colonization. By agreeing to undertake its reform, Emmanuel Macron implicitly acknowledged that certain historical instruments of French influence had become politically untenable in an Africa increasingly sensitive to issues of economic and monetary sovereignty.

Cultural restitutions — Emmanuel Macron also presents the restitution of African artifacts as a "true revolution." He points out that the first restitutions concerned Benin, Senegal, and Ivory Coast, before the final adoption of a French law facilitating this process. This policy of historical memory pursues several objectives: to acknowledge colonial spoliation, to symbolically rebalance the cultural relationship with Africa, and to change the French perspective on African heritage long appropriated by Western institutions.

Changing perspectives on Africa — The creation of the House of African Worlds in Paris is also part of this cultural strategy. Emmanuel Macron explains that he wants to "bring about a complete change of perspective" on contemporary African societies. Culture thus becomes an instrument for the political refounding of the Africa-France relationship. It is no longer simply a matter of diplomatic or economic cooperation, but a broader attempt to transform the historical representations inherited from the colonial and post-colonial periods.

An incomplete break — Despite these doctrinal developments, the break with Françafrique remains incomplete and contested. French military interventions, tensions in the Sahel, debates on immigration, and persistent perceptions of economic dependence continue to fuel distrust among some Africans. Emmanuel Macron is attempting to build a post-imperial relationship, but this transition is hampered both by the weight of historical legacies and by the new geopolitical rivalries that now traverse the African continent.

The security crisis and the end of the Barkhane model

The Sahel as a strategic fracture — Emmanuel Macron's African policy has gradually run up against a major crisis in the Sahel, which has become the primary arena for the weakening of French influence in Africa. Inheriting the legacy of Operations Serval and Barkhane launched under François Hollande, the French military presence was initially intended to prevent the security collapse of Mali and contain the expansion of

jihadist groups in the region. However, this long-term intervention has progressively lost its political legitimacy in the eyes of a growing segment of Sahelian public opinion.

France as a security power — For nearly a decade, France was the main external military power engaged in the fight against armed groups in the Sahel. Emmanuel Macron himself acknowledges that "France has lost dozens of its sons for the sovereignty of Mali, for the security of Burkina Faso and Niger." This statement aims to underscore the human cost of the French commitment and Paris's conviction that it acted in the name of regional stability and the security of the Sahelian states.

The exhaustion of the Barkhane model — Despite tactical successes on the ground, the Barkhane model has gradually lost its political edge. The French military presence, conceived as a security response to the jihadist threat, has come to be perceived by some Sahelian societies as a permanent apparatus of foreign interference. Emmanuel Macron himself acknowledges that the large French bases were no longer understood and had become, particularly under the influence of the Russian narrative, supposed symbols of French neocolonialism.

Popular rejection of the French presence — The rise in anti-French demonstrations in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has profoundly transformed the regional political landscape. The Russian flags waved at rallies hostile to Paris illustrated the crisis of French credibility in the Sahel. This distrust was not solely the result of external influence campaigns. It also reflected the wear and tear of a sustained foreign military presence, incapable of providing sufficiently visible security stabilization to sustainably convince local populations.

The departure from Mali — The French withdrawal from Mali is probably the most symbolic turning point in this historical sequence. After successive coups and a break with the Malian authorities, Paris was forced to end Operation Barkhane on Malian territory. Emmanuel Macron insists, however, that "when our presence was no longer wanted, we left." This statement seeks to present the French withdrawal not as a strategic humiliation, but as a logical consequence of the principle of sovereignty of partner states.

The alliance of Sahel States — The creation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger marks a new stage in the regional political realignment. This alliance between military regimes reflects both a desire to break with the old security architectures supported by Paris and the search for new geopolitical balances. Emmanuel Macron adopts a relatively cautious stance on this subject, stating that "these states and their leaders, even those who staged coups, must be allowed to forge their own path."

The era of Sahelian juntas — The French President nevertheless continues to hope for a future return to democratically elected governments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. He notably refers to Mohamed Bazoum as a "highly esteemed" president whose detention, according to him, constitutes "one of the great scandals of this region." This position reveals the current ambiguity of French doctrine: recognizing the new political realities of the Sahel while refusing to permanently legitimize regimes that have emerged from military coups.

The transformation of military doctrine — Faced with this crisis, Emmanuel Macron is seeking to redefine the French military role in Africa. He asserts that France is no longer pursuing a permanent presence, but rather a lighter form of security

cooperation: training, equipping, structuring local armies, and providing ad hoc support. This evolution reflects a significant strategic shift. The French military presence should no longer be seen as a permanent power infrastructure, but as limited support for the security sovereignty of partner African states.

The African Union as an alternative — Emmanuel Macron also emphasizes the need to strengthen African security capabilities themselves. He believes the African Union must have permanent resources, special envoys, and funding to conduct its own peacekeeping operations. This approach reflects a significant doctrinal shift: the continent's stability can no longer rely sustainably on Western military interventions but must gradually be driven by African mechanisms for collective security.

The Sahel as a postcolonial crisis — The Sahel crisis ultimately transcends purely military issues. It reveals the exhaustion of a historical model of French presence built around security, political networks, and the management of regional crises. Popular rejection of France, the rise of African sovereignty movements, and competition from new external powers have profoundly altered the relationship between Paris and its former Sahelian partners. The end of Operation Barkhane thus marks the end of a certain postcolonial architecture of French power in Africa.

The global competition for Africa

Africa at the heart of global rivalries — Emmanuel Macron presents Africa as one of the main areas of geopolitical realignment in the 21st century. The continent is no longer perceived solely through humanitarian or security issues, but as a strategic space coveted for its resources, its demographics, its markets, and its position in global energy transitions. This evolution is profoundly transforming Africa's place in international relations and intensifying competition between established and emerging powers for access to strategic resources and infrastructure.

Critical minerals as a global issue — African mineral resources now occupy a central place in this new global competition. Emmanuel Macron particularly emphasizes "critical minerals" and "rare earth elements," which have become essential to contemporary energy, digital, and military industries. Cobalt, lithium, copper, and coltan are now shaping the industrial transitions of major powers. Africa is thus becoming a major strategic space in the new global value chains linked to batteries, electric vehicles, and advanced technologies.

China as a dominant power — Emmanuel Macron explicitly identifies China as one of the main players in this contemporary African competition. Beijing has progressively built its presence on the continent through infrastructure, loans, mining investments, and major industrial projects linked to the Belt and Road Initiative. This strategy has allowed China to acquire considerable economic influence in several African regions while securing its access to resources that have become essential for its industrial and technological power.

Criticism of the Chinese model — The French President asserts that “China is operating according to a predatory logic.” This statement constitutes one of the most direct geopolitical criticisms made in the interview. Emmanuel Macron accuses Beijing of transforming African resources on its own territory in order to concentrate industrial added value there, while creating economic dependencies through its

licensing and financing mechanisms. This criticism aims to contrast the European partnership model with a Chinese strategy presented as asymmetrical and extractive.

Russia and the wars of influence — Russia also appears as a central player in the new African rivalries. Emmanuel Macron explicitly mentions the "Russian narrative" that has contributed to delegitimizing the French military presence in the Sahel. Moscow now uses Africa as a space for diplomatic, security, and informational influence, notably through private military companies, media campaigns, and security agreements concluded with several African regimes. This Russian presence is part of a broader strategy to challenge Western influence on the continent.

African proxy wars — Emmanuel Macron also denounces the risk of Africa becoming "the theater of military influence and proxy wars." This geopolitical analysis extends beyond the Sahel. The French President also mentions Libya and Sudan as areas where rivalries between foreign powers fuel internal conflicts. Africa thus appears as an arena for indirect confrontation between states seeking to expand their political, military, or economic spheres of influence.

Turkey as an intermediary power — Emmanuel Macron also cites Turkey among the powers that have adopted competing power strategies on the African continent. Ankara has significantly strengthened its economic, diplomatic, and military presence in Africa in recent years. Military bases, trade agreements, the defense industry, and religious diplomacy now allow Turkey to establish itself as a major player in several African regions, particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel.

Europe as a strategic alternative — Faced with these competing powers, Emmanuel Macron is attempting to present Europe as a different kind of partner. He asserts that "Europeans are not the predators of this century" and defends a model based on multilateralism, the rule of law, and open trade. This argument aims to reposition the European Union as a cooperative power capable of offering partnerships less unbalanced than those attributed to China or Russia.

A win-win partnership — Emmanuel Macron notably advocates for a "win-win" partnership between Europe and Africa around strategic resources. Europe would need critical African minerals for its defense industries and energy transitions, while Africa would like to develop its local extraction and processing capacities. This approach seeks to combine African sovereignty, local industrialization, and Euro-African economic cooperation in a framework presented as more balanced than the purely extractive models of the past.

Strategic autonomy as a doctrine — Emmanuel Macron ultimately affirms his commitment to "a strategy of autonomy for both Europe and Africa." This idea constitutes one of the doctrinal cornerstones of his interview. In a world marked by the resurgence of power rivalries, Africa and Europe should, according to him, avoid becoming dependent on new economic or technological empires. Sovereignty thus becomes a shared issue: European industrial sovereignty and African economic sovereignty appear as two complementary dimensions of the same global geopolitical rebalancing.

2. Rethinking the Africa-France partnership

From development aid to strategic investment

The end of the aid paradigm — Emmanuel Macron explicitly states that "we are no longer operating within an aid framework." This statement constitutes one of the major doctrinal pivots of his interview with Jeune Afrique and The Africa Report. The French President believes that the classic notion of official development assistance is "no longer truly understood" by African partners. This shift reflects a desire to break with a relationship historically marked by aid, financial dependence, and asymmetries inherited from the post-colonial era.

Solidarity and sustainable investment — Emmanuel Macron now contrasts the traditional logic of aid with that of "solidarity and sustainable investment." The change in vocabulary is significant. Africa is no longer conceived solely as a region requiring public transfers from the Global North, but as a continent of investment, growth, and economic transformation. This approach seeks to reposition the Africa-France relationship around infrastructure, value chains, innovation, and productive financing, rather than solely around budgetary or humanitarian assistance.

The summit for financing African economies — Emmanuel Macron presents the Summit for Financing African Economies, held in Paris in 2021, as one of the first structuring moments of this new financial doctrine. This summit aimed to rethink the continent's financing mechanisms after the economic shock caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The stated objective was to build instruments capable of mobilizing more private capital while reducing the structural financial vulnerabilities of many African states.

The Paris pact as continuity — The French President also includes the "Paris Pact for People and Planet" in this attempt to transform global financial governance. The central idea is to better integrate development, climate, infrastructure, and economic stability in the Global South. Emmanuel Macron thus seeks to position France as a reformer of international financial institutions in order to better meet the needs of African economies facing debt, underinvestment, and the high costs of international financing.

Transforming the international financial architecture — Emmanuel Macron states that he is "convinced that we must transform the international financial architecture." This formulation reveals the broader ambition of his African doctrine. The African problem is not only one of available resources, but also one of global rules governing financing, ratings, and access to capital. The French President implicitly criticizes an international system incapable of effectively financing the infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economic transitions necessary for the development of the African continent.

Public funds as leverage — Emmanuel Macron believes that public funding must now act as leverage rather than solely ensuring African development. According to him, public resources should be primarily directed toward "non-market" sectors such as education, healthcare, essential infrastructure, and certain agricultural sectors. The objective is then to attract private capital through financial safeguards capable of reducing the risk perceived by international investors in African markets.

The role of private capital — The interview strongly emphasizes the need to increase the share of private capital in financing African economies. Emmanuel Macron believes that "there is still too little private money" on the continent. According to him, this weakness limits Africa's capacity for economic transformation, industrialization, and infrastructure development. French policy therefore seeks to reposition private investment as essential drivers of African growth, supported by public guarantee and risk reduction instruments.

The problem of African credit ratings — Emmanuel Macron also points out that several African countries "have no rating, or have poor ratings." This technical issue becomes a major geopolitical concern in his speech. Low credit ratings significantly increase the cost of capital for African states and limit their access to large international financing. The French President believes that this situation structurally hinders the continent's development and prevents sufficient volumes of long-term private investment.

Economies excluded from large-scale financing — Emmanuel Macron even states that several African countries "are not eligible for major World Bank funds." According to him, this situation reveals a profound contradiction in the international financial system: the countries most in need of structural investments are often those that have the most difficulty accessing international financing on sustainable terms. This exclusion contributes to widening the development gap between the African continent and the major industrialized economies.

Financial guarantees as a solution — Faced with these difficulties, Emmanuel Macron advocates for the implementation of "financial guarantees" capable of reassuring international private investors. These mechanisms would reduce the risks associated with African investments and attract more capital to infrastructure, energy, industry, and agriculture. The French President even considers this ability to secure investments to be "the key" to the continent's economic transformation in the coming decades.

Finance in common and international coordination — Emmanuel Macron also emphasizes the need to improve cooperation among major international financial institutions: the IMF, the World Bank, public development banks, and national agencies. He presents the "Finance in Common" initiative launched by the French Development Agency as an attempt at international coordination aimed at making public financing more coherent and efficient. This approach reflects a French desire to influence the reform of global financial governance around African issues.

A new African economic doctrine — Behind these financial proposals ultimately lies an attempt at a broader reconstruction of French economic doctrine in Africa. France is no longer simply seeking to maintain political or military spheres of influence; it is now attempting to position itself as a partner in the economic, industrial, and financial transformation of the continent. Investment, infrastructure, private financing, industrialization, and economic sovereignty are gradually becoming the new pillars of the Africa-France partnership championed by Emmanuel Macron.

Strategic resources and African sovereignty

Africa in the global energy transition — Emmanuel Macron explicitly places Africa at the heart of the major energy and industrial transitions of the 21st century. African critical minerals are now essential for batteries, electric vehicles, digital infrastructure,

and defense industries. This development is profoundly transforming the continent's geopolitical position. Africa is no longer perceived merely as a peripheral extraction zone, but as a central player in the new global value chains linked to decarbonization and strategic technologies.

Rare earths as a strategic issue — The French President particularly emphasizes the "critical minerals" and "rare earths" that Europe needs to support its industrial and technological sovereignty. This dependence on strategic resources is becoming a major issue in contemporary international relations. African mineral resources are thus acquiring a new geopolitical dimension. Their control, processing, and security now determine a portion of the global economic competition between industrial powers.

Africa rejects the old extractive model — Emmanuel Macron also acknowledges that African states no longer want to limit themselves to exporting raw materials. He states that Africa now wants "to be able to extract and process them at home." This statement marks a significant shift in French discourse. It implicitly recognizes the legitimacy of African demands for local processing, industrialization, and greater national control over strategic mining value chains.

Local processing as a matter of sovereignty — The issue of local processing goes far beyond the purely industrial dimension. It becomes a matter of economic sovereignty. As long as African resources are extracted and then processed elsewhere, the majority of industrial added value escapes African economies. Emmanuel Macron thus admits that producing countries now want to capture more wealth, develop their national industries, and build technological capabilities linked to their own strategic resources.

Industrialize rather than export — Behind the mining issue lies the question of the future African development model. Critical resources can either prolong economies dependent on raw exports or become the foundations of a new industrialization. Macron's discourse attempts to position itself on this second option. The challenge is no longer simply to extract minerals for global markets, but to build local processing, production, and industrial integration capacities around these strategic resources.

Europe in search of a new partnership — Emmanuel Macron also seeks to present Europe as a different kind of partner from the major competing powers. According to him, Europeans can offer a "win-win" partnership based on transparency, respect for rules, and the creation of shared value. Europe would contribute its technological and industrial capabilities, while Africa would strengthen its role in global strategic value chains. This vision aims to distinguish the European model from Chinese or purely extractive approaches.

The implicit critique of the Chinese model — Emmanuel Macron explicitly contrasts this European approach with that of China, which he accuses of being "operating according to a predatory logic." He notably criticizes Beijing for concentrating the industrial processing of African resources within its territory in order to capture the lion's share of the added value. This criticism reveals the intensification of global competition for critical African resources. Minerals are now becoming major instruments of industrial, technological, and geopolitical power.

Resources as a lever for African power — Emmanuel Macron's speech implicitly acknowledges that strategic resources can become a lever for Africa's historic repositioning within the global balance of power. African states now possess assets essential to contemporary energy transitions. This newfound centrality potentially

offers them increased negotiating power vis-à-vis major industrial powers. African sovereignty thus hinges on the ability to transform this geological wealth into sustainable economic power.

Economic sovereignty as an objective — Beyond mining issues, a broader challenge ultimately emerges: that of African economic sovereignty. Emmanuel Macron argues that Africa and Europe must avoid becoming dependent on new economic or technological empires. This reflection extends beyond the realm of raw materials alone. It also concerns control of infrastructure, industrial chains, financing, and the technological capabilities necessary for the development of contemporary economies.

A new geopolitics of resources — African strategic resources now occupy a central place in the geopolitical realignments of the 21st century. Energy transition, reindustrialization, technological sovereignty, and global competition are restoring Africa's major economic importance. Emmanuel Macron is thus attempting to reposition the Africa-France relationship around this new strategic centrality of the continent. But this ambition also requires accepting a new reality: African states now want more control, local transformation, and sovereignty over their own resources.

Youth, State and Development

Youth as a demographic shift — Emmanuel Macron points out that nearly 70% of the African population is under thirty. He believes this demographic reality constitutes one of the continent's major strategic challenges in the 21st century. Africa is entering a historical phase where its population growth is both a formidable reserve of human energy and a major challenge for states. This youth represents considerable economic potential, but also increasing pressure on infrastructure, education systems, and labor markets.

An opportunity as much as a challenge — The French President states that this demographic is "both an opportunity and a challenge that must be overcome." This statement encapsulates the ambivalence of the contemporary African moment. Youth can become an engine of growth, innovation, and economic transformation. But it can also exacerbate social and political vulnerabilities if African economies remain unable to create sufficient jobs, infrastructure, and opportunities for economic integration for the new urban and educated generations.

Employment as a continental challenge — Emmanuel Macron particularly emphasizes the need to "make room for this generation in the labor market." The issue of employment thus appears as one of the cornerstones of future African stability. Without industrialization, productive investment, and the upgrading of African economies, population growth risks fueling mass unemployment, informality, and social tensions. Economic development then becomes inseparable from the ability of states to absorb their own demographic dynamics.

Education as a strategic infrastructure — The French President also considers education to be an essential infrastructure for African development. Training millions of young people is becoming a prerequisite for any sustainable economic transformation. Emmanuel Macron thus insists on the need to invest in the continent's education systems, vocational training, and university capacity. In contemporary economies, wealth no longer rests solely on natural resources but also on human capital, technical skills, and mastery of new technologies.

The return of the developmental state — Emmanuel Macron explicitly states that "strong states are necessary." This statement marks a significant shift in Western discourse on African development. For a long time, international economic doctrines favored liberalization and state withdrawal. The French President now emphasizes the need for robust public capacities capable of organizing education, healthcare, infrastructure, and the redistribution mechanisms essential to the stability of contemporary African societies.

Taxation and redistribution — Emmanuel Macron also stresses that states must accept "taking a minimum from resources and redistributing." This remark reintroduces the issue of taxation to the heart of African development. Mineral, energy, or agricultural resources cannot generate lasting stability without public redistribution mechanisms capable of financing essential services. Economic sovereignty therefore also presupposes fiscal and administrative capacity enabling African states to transform their resources into sustainable public policies.

Security vs. hospitals and schools — Emmanuel Macron acknowledges, however, that several African states remain trapped in a constant trade-off between security and development. He explains that "security has become a budgetary priority at the expense of hospitals and schools." This situation encapsulates the vicious cycle facing several countries on the continent. Security crises are absorbing a growing share of public resources and limiting investment in social infrastructure essential for long-term stability.

Trafficking and the weakening of states — The French President also mentions the “explosion of illicit trafficking,” terrorist violence, and intercommunal tensions that have weakened several African countries, despite their positive development trajectories. This interpretation directly links security and economic governance. Conflicts not only destroy human lives; they also disrupt the administrations, investments, infrastructure, and economic transformation capacities of the states concerned.

Development as stabilization — Behind this analysis lies a central idea of Macron's doctrine: security stability cannot be sustainable without economic and social development. The fight against terrorism or trafficking cannot rely solely on military responses. It also requires jobs, public services, infrastructure, and economic prospects for the most vulnerable populations. Security and development thus appear as two inseparable dimensions of contemporary state sovereignty.

An Africa of human transformation — Emmanuel Macron finally cites Morocco, South Africa, and Kenya among the countries that have already made “enormous progress” in certain educational, economic, and institutional areas. This reference aims to show that African development is not a matter of historical inevitability but rather the result of distinct political, economic, and institutional trajectories. The continent’s future will largely depend on its ability to transform its immense demographic growth into sustainable human, economic, and technological power.

3. The contradictions of Macron's doctrine

Algeria, immigration, and French divisions

Algeria as an essential relationship — Emmanuel Macron considers the Franco-Algerian relationship to remain one of the major strategic pillars of French African and Mediterranean policy. Despite recent diplomatic tensions, he affirms that “it is in France’s interest to maintain good relations with Algeria,” just as it is in Algiers’ interest to preserve this relationship. This position reflects geopolitical realism: security, energy, immigration, and regional cooperation make the two countries structurally interdependent.

Colonial memory as a persistent fracture — Emmanuel Macron recalls having multiplied commemorative gestures since 2017 concerning the Algerian War, the Harkis, the Pied-Noirs, and colonial violence. He insists that “the words have been spoken” and that several forms of official recognition have been initiated. This policy of remembrance was intended to soothe a relationship historically marked by colonial wounds. But it also reveals the limitations of this approach: memory remains a subject of political confrontation on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Western Sahara as a breaking point — Emmanuel Macron explicitly acknowledges that relations with Algiers have deteriorated significantly following French support for Morocco's plan regarding Western Sahara. This diplomatic choice is presented as "a sovereign choice" made with Morocco, not against Algeria. However, this decision has reignited a major crisis with Algiers and demonstrated how delicate the Maghreb balance remains for French diplomacy. The Sahara issue thus remains one of the main sources of regional tension.

A confrontation maintained by both sides — Emmanuel Macron also states that "a segment of the French political class," as well as "a segment of the Algerian political class," do not genuinely desire appeasement between Paris and Algiers. This remark underscores the deeply political and domestic nature of the Franco-Algerian relationship. Tensions surrounding historical memory, identity, and migration regularly fuel national debates in both countries and make any diplomatic stabilization particularly fragile.

Immigration and French domestic politics — The interview also reveals how African issues are now intertwined with the internal divisions within French society. Emmanuel Macron acknowledges that immigration is a subject heavily exploited by the French far right. Debates on Africa, Islam, and migration now extend beyond the purely diplomatic sphere. They have become central elements of the identity, social, and political tensions running through contemporary France.

A historical perspective on migration — Emmanuel Macron attempts to place migratory tensions within a longer historical perspective. He recalls the hostilities that accompanied the arrival of Polish, Italian, and then North African immigrants during the 20th century. This comparison aims to show that current tensions are not a unique historical phenomenon. The French President thus seeks to defend the idea that French societies have always experienced periods of tension linked to demographic and migratory transformations.

Republican universalism as a doctrine — Emmanuel Macron presents himself as a "fervent supporter of republican universalism." This reference constitutes a central element of his vision of French politics. He explains that he is not asking individuals "to be 100% like him," but to share the values that allow them to "build a society." This universalist approach seeks to promote integration based on education, work, and adherence to republican principles, rather than on community or identity-based logics.

Islam and the Republic — The French President also acknowledges the existence of tensions surrounding the issue of Islam in France. He explains that he is working to "structure Islam" in order to demonstrate that the Republic is compatible with all religions as long as they respect its rules. In his discourse, this issue becomes a security, cultural, and political concern. It directly links French debates on secularism to the demographic and social transformations stemming from colonial and migratory history.

The social divides behind identity tensions — Emmanuel Macron believes, however, that current tensions primarily originate in "deindustrialization, the economic crisis, and unemployment." This analysis seeks to place identity conflicts within a broader context of social and territorial fragility. Debates on immigration or Islam are thus amplified by economic inequalities, downward social mobility, and the territorial divides that permeate a segment of contemporary French society.

The contradictions of Macronism in Africa — This interplay between Africa, immigration, colonial memory, and identity tensions ultimately reveals one of the main contradictions in Emmanuel Macron's African doctrine. France seeks to build a more balanced postcolonial relationship with Africa while remaining internally shaped by the political, cultural, and migratory legacies of its imperial history. French African policy cannot therefore be separated from debates on national identity, the Republic, and the place of Islam in contemporary French society.

A coherent doctrine confronted with African reality

A genuine strategic vision for Africa — The interview given by Emmanuel Macron to Jeune Afrique and The Africa Report reveals a more structured African doctrine than is often presented in French public debate. The French President articulates colonial memory, African sovereignty, international financial reform, security, industrialization, and energy transition within a single geopolitical framework. From his 2017 Ouagadougou speech to the Africa Forward summit in Nairobi, a coherent doctrine is emerging around the idea of a “reinvented partnership” between Europe and Africa.

The acknowledged end of the sphere of influence — Emmanuel Macron also appears as the first French president to so explicitly recognize the exhaustion of the historical model of Françafrique. When he criticizes the logic of the “sphere of influence,” acknowledges the ambiguities of postcolonial relations, or accepts the transformation of the CFA franc, he implicitly admits that the traditional instruments of French influence are no longer suited to contemporary Africa. This doctrinal break constitutes one of the most original elements of his African policy since 2017.

An Africa that has become sovereign in its choices — Macron's discourse also acknowledges a fundamental transformation of the African continent: African states now possess an increased capacity for diplomatic, economic, and military

diversification. China, Russia, Turkey, and the Gulf powers offer new strategic alternatives to African governments. France can no longer claim to exert a structuring influence over its former partners on its own. Africa is gradually entering a multipolar logic where national sovereignties seek to maximize their international room for maneuver.

The loss of French influence — Yet, this doctrinal clarity is accompanied by a visible weakening of French power on the continent. The military withdrawal from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the rise of anti-French rhetoric, and the erosion of Paris's political influence reflect a profound crisis of credibility. Even when France attempts to transform its presence, it often remains associated with the historical legacies of Françafrique, military interventions, and postcolonial ambiguities that continue to fuel mistrust among a segment of African public opinion.

The postcolonial credibility challenge — The major difficulty of Macronism in Africa likely lies in this contradiction: wanting to build a post-imperial relationship while representing the former colonial power. Emmanuel Macron may acknowledge past mistakes, promote cultural restitution, or reform certain historical mechanisms, but for many, France continues to embody the old system of political, military, and economic influence built after independence. The credibility of the new French discourse thus remains constantly undermined by the weight of historical perceptions.

The Sahel as a crisis of legitimacy — The Sahelian sequence has particularly revealed this crisis of French legitimacy. Despite the military sacrifices made by Paris, the French presence has gradually come to be perceived as ineffective, intrusive, or neocolonial by a growing segment of the local population. Emmanuel Macron himself acknowledges that French military bases “were no longer understood.” The problem, therefore, was not merely military. It concerned, more fundamentally, France’s ability to politically justify its presence in an African environment transformed by contemporary sovereignist movements.

The rise of African sovereignist movements — The Africa described in the 2026 interview is a much more politically assertive Africa than in previous decades. African states are now demanding greater control over their resources, military partnerships, monetary policies, and diplomatic trajectories. Emmanuel Macron himself recognizes that Sahelian countries must be allowed to “chart their own course.” This statement encapsulates the ongoing historical shift: France can no longer single-handedly organize or steer the regional political balance in Africa.

The Paradox of a reinvented partnership — The “reinvented partnership” championed by Emmanuel Macron faces a structural challenge. The more France recognizes African sovereignty, the less it can maintain the traditional instruments of its continental influence. Macron’s doctrine attempts to resolve this contradiction by substituting investment, innovation, culture, and infrastructure for the old political and military mechanisms of Françafrique. But this transition remains incomplete, and its results are still limited in concrete geopolitical terms.

An Africa of strategic competition — Emmanuel Macron must also contend with a profoundly transformed international environment. Africa is no longer a space of almost exclusive influence for the former European powers. It is becoming an arena of global competition where China, Russia, Turkey, the United States, India, and the Gulf monarchies are all simultaneously active. In this context, France becomes one partner

among others, obliged to persuade rather than impose its historical priorities on African states.

The limits of Macronism in Africa — Emmanuel Macron's African doctrine thus appears both intellectually ambitious and politically limited. It lucidly identifies the end of the sphere of influence, the importance of African sovereignty, and the continent's new multipolar realities. But it still struggles to produce a truly stable relationship between Paris and several strategic African regions. Macronism in Africa will likely have attempted to close the historical cycle of Françafrique without fully succeeding in defining the new and lasting place that France can occupy in 21st-century Africa.

Conclusion — France after Françafrique

The attempt to close the postcolonial cycle — Since coming to power in 2017, Emmanuel Macron has likely been the French president who has most explicitly attempted to close the historical cycle of Françafrique. Condemnation of colonization, reform of the CFA franc, cultural restitutions, criticism of the "sphere of influence" (or "pré carré"), and transformation of the French military presence: all these initiatives reflected a desire to rebuild the relationship between France and Africa on new foundations. The Africa Forward summit held in Nairobi appears as the symbolic culmination of this attempt at doctrinal refounding.

A coherent African doctrine — The interview given to Jeune Afrique and The Africa Report reveals a genuine intellectual coherence in Emmanuel Macron's vision for Africa. The French President articulates African sovereignty, reform of the international financial architecture, industrialization, investment, security, and energy transition within a single strategic interpretation of the continent. Africa is no longer conceived as a dependent periphery but as a central player in the major demographic, energy, and geopolitical transformations of the 21st century.

The end of the French historical model — Yet, this attempt at transformation has been accompanied by a visible weakening of French influence in several major African regions. The military withdrawal from the Sahel, the rise of anti-French rhetoric, the erosion of historical networks of influence, and the growing competition from new powers have profoundly weakened the African model built by France since independence. Emmanuel Macron himself acknowledges that certain forms of French presence “were no longer understood” and had become politically untenable.

The Sahel as a historical rupture — The Sahelian sequence will likely remain the turning point in this transformation. Operation Barkhane was conceived as a sustainable security infrastructure for regional stabilization; it has gradually become the symbol of the exhaustion of the French postcolonial model. The withdrawal from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger revealed that no external power can now maintain a significant military presence indefinitely without local political and social legitimacy. This crisis goes far beyond mere security concerns; it marks the end of a certain French power architecture in Africa.

A multipolar Africa — The Africa described by Emmanuel Macron in 2026 is a profoundly transformed continent. China, Russia, Turkey, the Gulf States, India, and the United States are now engaged in global competition for African resources, infrastructure, markets, and strategic partnerships. African states now have far greater diplomatic leeway than in previous decades. They can diversify their alliances, leverage international competition, and assert greater sovereignty over their resources and political trajectories.

France as a partner among others — In this new environment, France can no longer claim to occupy a privileged or structuring position on the African continent. It is becoming one actor among others, obliged to persuade rather than impose. Emmanuel Macron himself seems to recognize this evolution when he states that African states must be allowed to “chart their own path.” This phrase probably summarizes the main geopolitical shift in the contemporary Africa-France relationship: the gradual end of a tutelary logic inherited from postcolonial history.

The challenge of post-imperial credibility — The central problem now facing France is that of the credibility of its postcolonial relationship with Africa. How can a balanced partnership be built when colonial memories, suspicions of economic dependence, and traces of former power structures persist? How can a discourse of African sovereignty be defended while seeking to preserve French strategic interests on a continent that has become highly competitive? The entire difficulty of Macronism in Africa lies precisely in this tension between doctrinal rupture and historical legacy.

A relationship to be reinvented in a world of competing sovereignties — Emmanuel Macron's interview ultimately reveals that the French question in Africa has entered a new historical phase. Françafrique, as a power system organized around its sphere of influence, permanent military bases, and privileged political networks, appears to be gradually becoming obsolete. But the alternative model is still under construction. In a multipolar, sovereign Africa, highly coveted for its strategic resources, the central question now becomes: how to build a credible post-imperial relationship between France and Africa in a world of competing sovereignties?