

From a reinvented partnership to the "Solution Country"

DRC – France in Nairobi: the meeting of two
African strategic visions



Long version

Introduction — Two speeches for a new Africa

Africa Forward and Congolese centrality — The Africa Forward Summit, held on May 11 and 12, 2026, in Nairobi, Kenya, placed peace and security issues, the strengthening and financing of health systems, and environmental challenges at the heart of its priorities. Within this framework, the Democratic Republic of Congo advocated for a fundamental reform of global governance through Security Council reform, the promotion of health sovereignty based on innovative mechanisms, and its status as a "solution country" for Africa and the world.

A political dialogue more suggested than documented — We obviously do not know the exact content or depth of the discussions that took place between Emmanuel Macron and Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo in Nairobi, even though a brief meeting between the two presidents occurred on camera on the sidelines of the summit. This exercise therefore makes no claim to represent an actual diplomatic conversation. More modestly, it consists of comparing two sets of statements: on the one hand, the speech given by the Congolese Head of State on May 6, 2026, to the Congolese and international press; on the other hand, the interview given by the French President to Jeune Afrique and The Africa Report. This comparison reveals a kind of intellectual dialogue, albeit at a distance, between two strategic visions of contemporary Africa, from which it becomes possible to identify certain convergences, tensions, and geopolitical implications.

Nairobi and Kinshasa as new political centers — Between the Africa Forward summit held in Nairobi and the strategic speeches delivered in Kinshasa by President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, a single reality emerges: Africa is no longer conceived as a periphery of the international system but as a central space for the geopolitical transformations of the 21st century. French and Congolese leaders now speak of industrialization, sovereignty, critical resources, infrastructure, and power in a language that far transcends the old categories of development aid.

Two doctrines in dialogue — Emmanuel Macron speaks of a “reinvented partnership” while Félix Tshisekedi refers to Congo as a “Solution Country.” The two expressions belong to different political universes, but they implicitly engage in a dialogue. One attempts to redefine the place of a former colonial power in a multipolar Africa. The other seeks to transform a long-fragile African state into a strategic actor capable of influencing contemporary global balances.

The end of the old postcolonial tête-à-tête — The implicit dialogue between Paris and Kinshasa no longer resembles the Franco-African relations of past decades. Emmanuel Macron himself acknowledges the limitations of the “sphere of influence,” while Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo demands greater economic, security, and industrial sovereignty. The Africa-France relationship is gradually ceasing to be structured by classic postcolonial dependence. It is becoming an ongoing negotiation between sovereign states, each seeking to preserve its interests in an increasingly competitive international environment.

A strategic Africa — Both leaders emphasize the central role of critical minerals, the energy transition, and new industrial value chains. Congolese cobalt, African rare earth elements, and energy infrastructure are now global issues. Africa is no longer simply described as a continent to be stabilized. It is emerging as one of the essential spaces for the industrial, digital, and climate transitions of the 21st century.

The return of the strategic State — Emmanuel Macron asserts that “strong states are necessary,” while Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo advocates for a state capable of organizing infrastructure, peace, and the economic transformation of the Congo. Both visions converge on one major point: markets alone will not suffice to structure the new African sovereignties. The return of the strategic state is becoming a prerequisite for security, industrialization, and resource control in the emerging new world order.

1. Emmanuel Macron : break free from Françafrique

Deconstructing the old French system

The recognition of the old sphere of influence — Emmanuel Macron admits that “the economic relationship followed a logic of the pre-colonial sphere of influence.” This statement likely constitutes one of the most significant doctrinal shifts ever made by a French president regarding the African policy of the Fifth Republic. It implicitly acknowledges the existence of a historical system of influence combining political networks, military presence, economic dependencies, and the stabilization of strategic allies in several former French colonies.

Condemning without completely breaking the tide — When Emmanuel Macron recalls having “strongly condemned colonization,” he is attempting to open a new chapter of shared memory between France and Africa. But this acknowledgment remains politically delicate. France seeks to move beyond its colonial legacy while maintaining economic, diplomatic, and strategic influence on the continent. The entire difficulty of Macronism in Africa lies precisely in this tension between symbolic rupture and the continuity of French geopolitical interests.

The CFA Franc reform as a political signal — Emmanuel Macron also acknowledges that the CFA franc had become a major symbol of criticism leveled at France. The monetary reform undertaken with several West African states aimed to reduce the perception of economic dependence inherited from the post-colonial period. This development, in a broader sense, resonates with certain African demands for monetary and economic sovereignty voiced in other capitals across the continent, including Kinshasa.

The reinvented partnership — Emmanuel Macron affirms his “deep belief in the need for a reinvented partnership.” This concept has become the cornerstone of his African doctrine. France no longer claims to single-handedly orchestrate the continent’s political balance. It now seeks to present itself as a partner in investment, industrialization, and the energy transition. But this new stance also implies accepting a redistribution of power and influence in favor of the African states themselves.

The Sahel and the crisis of French power

The end of the Barkhane model — The withdrawal from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has profoundly transformed the French presence in Africa. When Emmanuel Macron states that “when our presence was no longer wanted, we left,” he implicitly acknowledges that the old French security infrastructure no longer possesses the necessary political legitimacy to maintain a lasting presence in several African regions. The Sahel thus becomes the symbol of the exhaustion of the French postcolonial model.

Sovereignty as a new principle — Emmanuel Macron asserts that the Sahelian states must be allowed to “chart their own path.” This statement indirectly resonates with contemporary African discourses on national sovereignty and the rejection of external control. Even if Paris continues to defend its strategic interests, France is gradually recognizing that it can no longer claim to unilaterally steer the political or security trajectories of its former African partners.

Popular rejection of France — The Sahel crisis also reveals a deeper rift between the French perception of its security role and how this role is received by a segment of African societies. French military bases have become, according to Emmanuel Macron himself, symbols “that are no longer understood.” Behind Russian influence campaigns and local political crises, a persistent crisis of postcolonial credibility for French power is at play.

A power that has become relative — Emmanuel Macron is now seeking to reposition France in an environment where China, Russia, Turkey, and the Gulf States are challenging Europeans for their historical influence. Paris no longer holds a diplomatic or security monopoly on the African continent. France is becoming one actor among many in a multipolar Africa where African states can now choose between several competing strategic partners.

2. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo: building the "Solution Country"

Congolese sovereignty as a historical project

Congo as a potential power — Since 2019, Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo has regularly presented the DRC as a “Solution Country,” capable of playing a central role in global energy and industrial transitions thanks to its strategic natural resources. This formula goes far beyond traditional political rhetoric. It reflects an attempt to reposition Congo geopolitically as an essential player in the new global value chains linked to batteries, digital technologies, and the overall energy transition.

Resources serving sovereignty — Where Emmanuel Macron speaks of “critical minerals,” Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo insists on the need to transform Congolese resources into instruments of economic and industrial sovereignty. Cobalt, copper, and lithium should no longer be exported simply as raw materials. They must enable the construction of infrastructure, local industries, and processing capacities capable of sustainably strengthening Congolese economic power.

Peace as a strategic infrastructure — President Tshisekedi Tshilombo consistently links security to development. The conflicts in eastern Congo appear not only as human tragedies but also as mechanisms hindering the consolidation of Congolese sovereignty. This perspective partially aligns with Emmanuel Macron's analysis of the Sahel: without lasting security stability, African states remain trapped in a perpetual balancing act between war, infrastructure, and economic development.

The State as a power builder — Emmanuel Macron asserts that “we need strong states.” Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, for his part, advocates for a state capable of securing resources, organizing investments, and planning national infrastructure. Both visions converge on the return of the strategic state to contemporary development policies. 21st-century Africa will not be able to transform its resources into sustainable power without institutions capable of organizing industrial chains and national public policies.

The rejection of the extractive model

Transforming resources locally — Emmanuel Macron acknowledges that Africa now wants to “be able to extract and process its strategic resources at home.” This statement directly aligns with Congo's ambitions for the local processing of critical minerals. The debate is no longer solely about access to African resources, but also about the distribution of industrial added value. Behind this issue lies the fundamental challenge of African economic sovereignty within the new global production chains.

Congo at the heart of global transitions — Thanks to its exceptional mineral reserves, the DRC now occupies a central position in the industrial strategies of major powers. Electric batteries, digital infrastructure, the energy transition, and defense industries all depend on resources largely found within Congolese territory. This situation gives Congo unprecedented geopolitical leverage, but it also exposes the country to growing international rivalries over control of strategic value chains.

The end of peripheral Africa — The speeches of Emmanuel Macron and Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo converge on a fundamental idea: Africa can no longer be

considered a marginal economic periphery. The continent is becoming essential to global energy, climate, and technological transitions. This new centrality is gradually altering the international balance of power. African states are now seeking to convert this strategic importance into more autonomous industrial, financial, and diplomatic capabilities.

Sovereignty and industrialization — The real challenge for the “Solution Country” ultimately lies in the Congo’s ability to transform its geological advantage into genuine industrial power. Resources alone are not enough. They must be accompanied by infrastructure, energy, governance, education, and political stability. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo indirectly echoes Emmanuel Macron here: contemporary economic sovereignty depends less on the raw possession of resources than on the control of processing chains and national industrial capacities.

3. Two African visions in a multipolar world

An unexpected strategic convergence

The return of sovereignty — Emmanuel Macron and Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo use different language but converge on the same idea: the return of sovereignty to contemporary international relations. President Macron seeks to adapt France to a post-Françafrique world. President Tshisekedi seeks to integrate Congo into a globalization where African states can negotiate greater control over their resources, infrastructure, and national economic trajectories.

Strong States for an unstable world — Both leaders believe that contemporary crises necessitate the return of the strategic state. Terrorism, proxy wars, global competition for resources, energy crises, and financial instability make public institutions capable of protecting national interests essential. This doctrinal convergence is significant. It marks a gradual shift away from the purely liberal logic that had long structured international economic policies toward Africa.

Africa at the heart of the 21st century — Both Emmanuel Macron and Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo now consider Africa one of the key strategic spaces of the 21st century. Demographics, critical minerals, urbanization, climate, and energy infrastructure make the continent a key player in global restructuring. This new centrality is profoundly altering the international balance of power. Africa is no longer simply an object of external intervention; it is gradually becoming a geopolitical actor capable of negotiating its own strategic priorities.

The limitations of the new partnership

Can France still be central? — Despite his desire to break with Françafrique, Emmanuel Macron still faces a major challenge: France remains associated with its imperial past. Even when Paris speaks of sovereignty or a balanced partnership, a segment of African public opinion still perceives French policy through the military, economic, and cultural legacies of the post-colonial period. The credibility of the “reinvented partnership” thus remains structurally fragile.

The African challenge of real transformation — African states also face their own contradictions. Mineral or industrial sovereignty requires considerable administrative, energy, educational, and security capacities. Between the possession of resources and the building of sustainable economic power lies an immense challenge of governance and infrastructure. The “Solution Country” can only become a reality if natural resources are transformed into institutions, industries, and long-term stability.

Competing sovereignties — The implicit dialogue between Emmanuel Macron and Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo ultimately reveals a profound transformation of Africa-Europe relations. The former vertical relationship is gradually giving way to negotiation between sovereignties, each seeking to preserve its strategic interests in a highly competitive globalized environment. Resources, investments, security, and infrastructure are becoming the new battlegrounds of this redefined postcolonial relationship.

Conclusion — Africa after the sphere of influence

The end of a postcolonial world — Between Emmanuel Macron’s “reinvented partnership” and Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo’s “Solution Country,” one of the major contemporary geopolitical transformations is perhaps taking shape: Africa’s gradual exit from the old postcolonial system inherited from independence. France can no longer single-handedly organize the African balance of power; African states are now seeking to transform their resources and sovereignty into sustainable strategic power.

A new African architecture — This transition, however, remains incomplete. France is still searching for its place in a multipolar Africa, while several African states are attempting to translate their strategic importance into real development. But a historic break now seems to be underway. Between Nairobi and Kinshasa, a more sovereign, more contested, and more aware Africa is gradually emerging, recognizing its central role in the energy, industrial, and geopolitical balances of the 21st century.