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France-Africa

A scathing disavowal of Macron's African policy in Burkina Faso

- IV Online magazine - 2021 - IV563 - December 2021 -

Publication date: Monday 13 December 2021

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The comms were perfect. An audience of representatives of African civil societies, an intellectual critic of *Françafrique* as organizer, and a panel of slightly rebellious young people playing the foils to an egotistic and condescending Macron. In this respect, the France-Africa summit held in Montpellier at the beginning of October was a success. But facts are stubborn things, as the recent blockade of a French military convoy in Burkina Faso has reminded those who refused to see it.

Certainly this staging was inspired by the report of the Centre d'analyse de prévision et de stratégie (Centre for Analysis of Forecasting and Strategy - CAPS) which in its note of April 2020 indicated: "We must anticipate the discrediting of the political authorities" and "urgently support the emergence of other forms of credible African authorities to address the people" - the new interlocutors would be "religious authorities, diasporas, popular artists" and "neo-liberal businessmen".

Crisis and neo-colonial reality

However, the Montpellier summit did not manage to hide the reality of a France that supports African governments as long as they serve its own agenda. Thus, Paris will criticize the coup d'état in Mali, but covers for the seizure of power by the son of the dictator Déby and ignores the third term of the Ivorian Ouattara.

At the military level, Operation Barkhane turned out to be a real fiasco. Those who applauded this intervention did not see that the Sahel crisis is above all political. Moreover, we should speak of "crises" in the plural. Some are recurrent like the antagonism between livestock raisers and farmers, others are disagreements within a community, and can be religious, or social. What they have in common is that they offer jihadists an opportunity to establish themselves. While these crises are not new, frameworks once existed to enable their peaceful resolution. The weakening of states due to structural adjustment policies, the scarcity of resources and the increase in social inequalities, accompanied by corruption, have shattered these mediations.

Rumours and confrontation

The episode of the recent blockade across Burkina Faso of the French military convoy illustrates the crisis between French and African elites on the one hand and the people on the other. Starting from the French military base of Port-Bouët in the suburbs of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, a large logistical convoy of the army was supposed to reach Gao in Mali. On arrival in Burkina Faso the convoy was blocked, first in Bobo Dioulasso and then in Kaya. Protesters were injured by French and/or Burkinabe warning shots. In an attempt to defuse the mobilization, the government shut down the internet as dictatorships traditionally do. Protesters suspected that this convoy would provide aid to the jihadists. Some commentators scoff at these accusations. without saying anything about Le Drian's statement that the Russians' hand is behind the blockade.

Such rumours are fostered by the repeated lies of the French army in Africa. Whether it is denials of responsibility for the bombing of a wedding in Bounti in Mali that left 22 dead or complicity with the Egyptian dictatorship in the context of Operation Sirli. In this recent case, the information provided by the French General Staff was used to neutralize traffickers on the border between Egypt and Libya.

A wounded country

Burkina Faso has been hard hit by jihadist violence, nearly 1.3 million people have been displaced, fleeing conflicts. The attack on the Inata barracks where more than 50 gendarmes were killed was a shock to the country. A barracks that was no longer being provisioned. A situation that exacerbates the reproaches of the inefficiency of Barkhane and his collaboration with Burkinabe generals who pay more attention to managing their personal business affairs. The people perceive the French army as above all a support to African leaders who, in their eyes, have lost all dignity before Macron. Indeed, he can afford to summon them to Pau to renew their allegiance to France. But also, to make derogatory jokes about President Kaboré during his invitation to Ouagadougou. Macron would never behave thus to a leader of a Western country.

The convoy is now passing through Niger but here also it is meeting violently repressed demonstrations. This reveals the growing rejection of France's African policy.

2 December 2021

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