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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

A New Look in French-African Relations

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A NEW LOOK IN FRENCH-AFRICAN RELATIONS

Summary
Paris is loosening the ties that bind it to its former colonies in Black Africa; in so doing, Paris is reacting to pressures from some of the states involved. Since independence in 1960, fourteen of France's former colonies—Mauritania, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Togo, Dahomey, Niger, Central African Republic, Chad, Gabon, Cameroon, Congo, Mali, and the Malagasy Republic—have been dealing with France under a series of 14 separate, paternalistic accords. Paris is holding bilateral talks with each country that has requested revision of these accords. The Africans have not tried to coordinate their demands; nor is it assured that they will all be treated alike, since their economic and sentimental value to France varies widely.

Over the past decade, Paris has used the accords to ensure French dominance of commerce, trade, and finance and to give France the decisive voice in cultural and educational matters. French private and public investment has flourished because the climate has been favorable and no restrictions placed on the repatriation of profits. Paris has channeled over $4 billion in aid to the area over the past decade.

None of the African states has challenged the idea of continued cooperation with France, but virtually all of them would like to make the special relationship more

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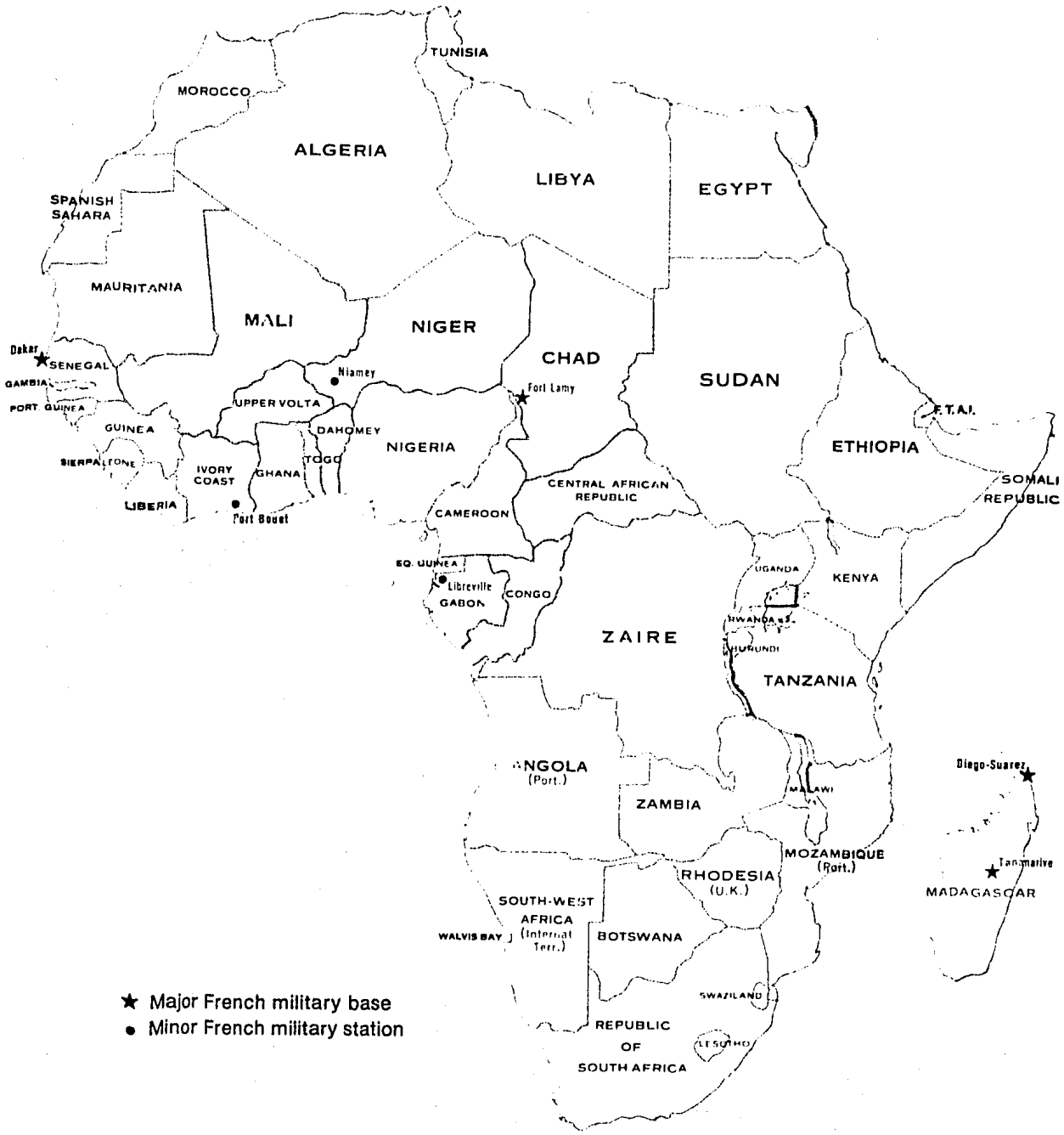
African Countries Maintaining Close Ties with France



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flexible and less one-sided. Specifically, they are looking for a better economic deal. Paris appears willing to go along in revising technical, aid, and cultural accords, but will be less forthcoming where monetary and defense policies are concerned. So far, Mauritania has pulled out of the franc zone because the French would not meet its demands concerning Nouakchott's new national currency, and neither Mauritania nor the Malagasy Republic has been able to reach an agreement with France on the revision of defense accords. Paris seems to be in a position to regulate the pace and extent of change, but if the Africans become more assertive the French may be impelled to make considerably more changes than they have so far been willing to accept.

The French Position

After granting its African colonies independence in 1960, France has managed to keep close ties with all of them. (Guinea, which became independent in 1958, is an exception.) Operating under a series of paternalistic accords, France today still sees political and military advantages in a continuing relationship with its former colonies in Africa. Commercial profits, along with what might be called the French cultural imperative, will also push Paris to keep its hand in; at least, they will slow the French retreat in the face of African pressure for change.

France, pre-eminently among the old imperial powers, has been keen on spreading its language and culture. In the 19th century, it went so far as to develop an extraordinary policy under which France would "assimilate" the colonial peoples into the French way of life. Based on the doctrine that French civilization was in every way superior, the assimilation policy invited Africans to adopt French standards in nearly every sphere of human activity. Considering that the French were very much outnumbered (there are today some 50 million Africans and less than a quarter of a million whites in French-speaking Africa), the policy never had much of a chance and was abandoned. Still, echoes of the philosophy underlying it still reverberate through the African colonies, and France continues to transplant its cultural, linguistic, and educational experience to Africa.

French businessmen in Africa, frequently abetted by African associates, have, since independence, enjoyed a preferential position. Their preferential position is little disturbed today, and they continue to reap and expatriate huge profits.

In the past year or so, the French leadership has begun to take a less possessive attitude toward its former colonies. The gradual shift reflects not only the change in leaders in France but an increased restiveness on the part of the leaders of the French-speaking African states. General De Gaulle is gone, and President Pompidou has replaced him. The General pursued a quite personal

> "The day will come when the men for whom France is a second fatherland will no longer be in power. Should not France show that she takes the word independence seriously?"
>
> *Le Monde*, January 1973

African policy, molded by his concern with France's "civilizing mission" and his World War II connections with the former African colonies and some of their leaders; Pompidou carries less baggage of this type. Also gone is Yvon Bourges, who headed the French cooperation program; in his place is Pierre Billecocq, a progressive and pragmatic man, committed to a policy of open dialogue with any state that wishes to revise the accords. He has pledged that France "will stop meddling in everything." Billecocq appears to have the full backing of Pompidou and at least the acquiescence of the shadowy Jacques Foccart

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Foccart (l.) and Billecocq

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[redacted] The influence of Foccart, who still heads the Secretariat of African and Malagasy Affairs at the Elysee, has apparently diminished over the past year.

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The African Position

Personalities on the African side have also changed. In the 12 years since independence, eight of the fourteen states have undergone one or more changes of leadership, and in each instance (except for Gabon) a military strong man is in power. The leaders today feel less grateful to France, either because newer and usually younger figures have emerged with no special affection for France, or because sentimental ties binding the old guard to France are wearing thin. The breakdown of loyalties was accelerated by the resignation in 1969 of De Gaulle, but even the General could pull only Ivory Coast and Gabon along to join France in supporting the breakaway Biafran regime in English-speaking Nigeria. Before he departed, De Gaulle also saw the French-backed Afro-Malagasy and Mauritian Common Organization begin to change from a force for political moderation to a lobby for the African states' economic interest.

Other poles of attraction have emerged. With the French-speaking African states' association with the EC, their economic allegiances are slowly being reoriented from France toward a kind of partnership with Europe generally. Thus far, the impact has been as much psychological as material, and France's former colonies would like to diversify their aid and trade relationships. The English-speaking countries nearby attract them, as does the possibility of closer regional ties or aid from Moscow, Peking, and Western donors. As President Diori of Niger has asked, "Can we be blamed for playing all our cards?"

Over the past year or so, Diori has gradually become the most outspoken and articulate critic of France's role in Africa, voicing complaints that most other leaders lack the courage to put into words. He is convinced that Niger's long-range development is linked to that of Nigeria, already Niger's main African trading partner. Diori wishes to be free to promote even closer economic ties with Lagos. He has also had a close assistance and advisory relationship with Canada. Ould Daddah of predominantly Muslim Mauritania has been drawing closer to Libya and Algeria, and his foreign policy moves in that direction complement his desire for "Arabization" at home to the detriment of French cultural influence in his country.

> "We want to recover our sovereignty and we are ready to pay the price."
>
> President Moktar Ould Daddah of Mauritania

There have been anti-French pressures in virtually all states. No African government can safely ignore activist elements among students, labor, and civil servants. In many countries of

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French-speaking Africa, these elements have been sharpening their criticism of close cooperation with France and demanding accelerated Africanization, better jobs, and greater economic sovereignty. The extension of schools and consumer economies has created rising popular expectations, but not enough jobs for the younger and more politicized generation that now comprises at least half the population of French-speaking Africa. This generation resents French dominance of commerce, which stifles native opportunities in every country except Mali, and the continued presence of expatriates in the government.

The questioning of France's role has been encouraged in recent years by the large number of predominantly young, anti-establishment French technicians, particularly teachers, who have been sent to Africa as volunteers in lieu of military service. There is also a body of sophisticated writing by French-speaking Africans aimed at their contemporaries in government and academic circles. Their writing portrays the African policy of France as inherently selfish and anachronistic. A Canadian economist produced an influential study for the Niger Government that took a hard and critical look at the advantages and disadvantages for Niger of membership in the franc zone.

African Demands

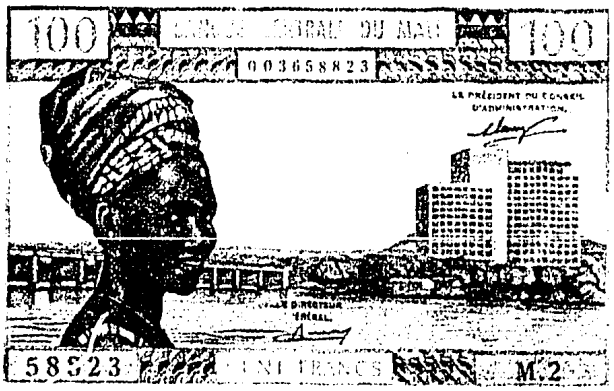
It is no wonder then that over the past year a number of French African leaders have sought changes in the basic accords designed to satisfy their wish for greater national control. So far, eight of the 14 are known to have expressed dissatisfaction to France via diplomatic channels or in public pronouncements. Pressures for change have come most strongly from Mauritania and the Malagasy Republic; Niger, Congo, Dahomey, and Cameroon are not far behind, with Togo and Gabon bringing up the rear. (Mali, having largely broken out of the French sphere a decade ago, is a sympathetic bystander.) Chad, the Central African Republic, and Upper Volta will probably follow in seeking modest modifications in their ties with France. Only Ivory Coast President Houphouet-Boigny, France's staunchest African ally and the grand old man of West African politics, has privately expressed his

"For Paris, the franc zone is the true backbone of French policy in Africa."

Jeune Afrique, December 1972

The Franc Zone

All ex-French territories, except Guinea and now Mauritania, retain full membership in the franc zone. Twelve states participate through the multilateral African Financial Community, which embraces three subgroupings, each with its own currency and issuing bank. Africans receive monetary stability and accept conservative French monetary and banking policies in place of national control. Zone arrangements protect France's privileged trade by setting effective ceilings on imports by Africans from outside the zone and the EC, and minimum levels for certain imports from France. Most African issuing banks must hold their members' pooled currency reserves and foreign exchange earnings in French francs in a French treasury account into which receipts are credited and payments debited. African states ordinarily cannot impose exchange controls or revalue their currencies without the consent of all parties, and they are obliged to follow the lead of France in these areas. Congo, Malagasy Republic, and Mauritania have, however, initiated exchange controls without asking French permission.



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satisfaction with the accords as they are. Senghor of Senegal is not really dissatisfied, although he has stronger domestic pressure to deal with.

Those who want change are looking for a better economic deal: they want broader regional cooperation, particularly with English-speaking states nearby; greater control over their own monetary matters; and an end to strings on French aid. The Africans are just beginning what is certain to be a long dialogue with Paris on monetary matters, and they are far from a consensus on the modifications they want.

President Ould Daddah of Mauritania believes that the sizable foreign exchange earnings of his country's mining operations are adequate to back a national currency (with a little help from President Qadhafi, who has offered a substantial drawing account on the Bank of Libya). Ould Daddah can, therefore, be more aggressive in his financial demands than the others who lack his combination of political determination and a well-heeled backer. Togo, which has been successful in attracting aid from Bonn and Peking, has more maneuverability than a country like Gabon, where the French investment is heavy and President Bongo needs French troops to stay in office.

Cooperation Agreements Between France and Its African Client States

	Aid		Commerce		Communications			Culture			Diplomacy		Justice		Military		Monetary
	Financial and technical assistance agreements	Institutional agreement	Trade agreement	Civil aviation agreement	Merchant marine agreement	Posts and telecommunications agreements	Cultural agreement	Higher education agreement	Consular agreement	Diplomatic convention agreement	French Community membership agreement	Legal agreement	Mutual defense agreement	Military assistance agreement	Strategic raw materials and products agreement	Franc zone agreement	
Cameroon	●			●				◒	◒	◒	◒	◒				◒	◒	◒
Central African Republic	●		●	●				●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●
Chad	●			●				●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
Congo	●		●	●				◒	●		◒	◒		●	●	●	●
Dahomey	●			●	●	●	●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●
Ivory Coast	●			●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●	●	●	●
Gabon	●		●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●
Malagasy Republic	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mali	●			●													●
Mauritania	●			●	●	●	●	●			●		●	●	●	●	
Niger	●			●	●	●	●	●			●		●	●	●	●	●
Senegal	●		●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Togo	●		●	●				●			●		●	●	●	●	●
Upper Volta	●			●	●	●	●	●			●		●		●	◒	●

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In general, however, the African attitude is characterized by ambivalence: they want more control over their own affairs, but they want France to stand behind them. This attitude finds expression in the demands of some states for financial autonomy while insisting that Paris continue to back their currencies.

The French Response

French officials are themselves divided on how far Paris should go in meeting African demands. Even those favoring a continuation of the Gaullist policy of aid to Africa, however, have apparently realized that African development has become too costly for France and that other donors must be encouraged to share the burden. The concept of French Africa as a "special preserve," in which no poachers are allowed, seems to have been abandoned. Emphasis now is on "coordination," although Paris clearly expects to go on playing the key role.

Paris' position is not without its own ambivalence. France is willing to open its former colonies to more outside economic influence, but is extremely sensitive about retaining its cultural, commercial, and military dominance. Paris wants to continue its privileged relationship, but is willing to begin a gentle disengagement in which it controls all stages of the retreat. Pompidou, during his trip to Africa last November (his third since 1971), outlined a "new look" in French aid policy. From now on, he said, French aid would be given on a flexible, over-all, multi-year framework tied to the development plans of the African countries. France would remain the major donor (in fact, French aid this year—$345 million—is 15 percent more than last), but would cooperate with other donors and try to help the Africans diversify their sources of aid.

The French plan to reduce their visibility in Africa by cutting back the number of French technical assistants and by training Africans to replace them. The majority of the more than 10,000 *cooperants* are teachers, and it was a student, after all, who threw a tomato at Pompidou during his trip to Niamey in 1972, and students are at the center of discontent and political unrest

French African Cooperation Accords

The accords, signed at independence in 1960, have never been published, but their general provisions are known. They spell out a broad range of relationships in diplomacy, economics, culture, and defense, and provide the legal basis for continued French hegemony in French-speaking Africa. Guinea did not sign the accords and has not had diplomatic relations with France since 1965. Mali signed the accords but established its own national currency and bank in 1962; after five years of floundering, it signed a financial accord with France in 1967 by which Paris underwrote its currency.

The accords gave Paris a virtual monopoly in trade and greatly facilitated commercial relations by guaranteeing the convertibility of African francs into French francs at a fixed rate; Paris also gained control of African regional banks. French public and private investment flourished because there were practically no restrictions on the repatriation of capital and profits to France. The accords were by no means a one-way street; France has poured in over $4 billion in aid to the area since 1960.

Paris forged strong cultural ties through the use of French as the official language and through domination of African educational systems and the media. Although most of the military agreements specified that France would defend the fledgling African states against internal or external threats, Paris has moved in openly only when its economic interests were seriously threatened (e.g., Gabon in 1964). It has overflight rights in most countries and permanent military bases in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Chad, and the Malagasy Republic (the latter now being disputed).

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in many countries. Finally, Paris has proposed that its educational assistance be re-oriented toward technical and vocational training, particularly modern training for young farmers. Specifically, more attention will be placed on literacy programs in vernacular languages. Pompidou has said that he favors cooperation between the French- and English-speaking countries, but Paris would not look kindly on the integration of its former colonies into a larger unit in which the interests of the English speakers might prevail.

In the cultural, military assistance, and diplomatic fields the Africans are pressing for change and are likely to get it. Now that Africans have taken control of their national universities and other institutions of higher learning, they want the educational accords modified to drop the requirement that rectors, professors, and curricula be chosen by agreement between the African government concerned and France. In the military assistance field the Africans reject the stipulations that make them give first priority to France in seeking arms and training and consult Paris before approaching alternative sources. At least one ex-colony, Congo, would put an end to the anachronistic formality which institutionalized the role of the French ambassador as the dean of the diplomatic corps. The Malagasy Republic and Mauritania have already done so.

Obstacles

Between the formulation of a new aid strategy and its successful execution lies a number of formidable obstacles. Many African countries do not have the development planning capacity required for a closely coordinated long-term development effort. With the exception of Peking, which has offered Dahomey and Togo $45 million and $46 million in aid respectively, there are no new donors in sight with both the resources and the interest to play a significantly larger role in French-speaking Africa. There is a real possibility for coordination between the French and other donors (including the US) in such matters as houseing, transportation, and industry.

A cutback in the number of French technicians and educators may be a step in the right direction, but the course will be far from smooth. Increased teaching in the vernacular languages, for example, creates controversy. Which vernacular? Last month saw rioting in the Malagasy Republic, caused in part because the coastal tribes fear increased use in the educational system of the Malagasy language (essentially Merina, the language of the plateau people). French cooperation chief Billecocq is right in noting that Paris has imposed Sorbonnes on countries that need quite a different sort of training; however, the African elite has learned that a French education leads to a coveted job in the bureaucracy; this is a lesson that will be hard to forget. Above all, it is difficult to legislate decolonialization. As a Togolese official remarked, "The French talk easily about a new look, but it is not so easy to kill the old man who sleeps inside many Frenchmen."

French Monetary Policies

One of the most important, and from Paris' view, durable, ties that bind France and the Africans it once ruled is the monetary one. There is so far no new look in France's conservative monetary policies in respect to the franc zone, nor is one planned. African francs are fully convertible to French francs at a fixed rate guaranteed by France, and the four African regional banks of issue are French controlled. Monetary questions are still handled by French officials in the various African financial ministries and in the countries' national banks. Pompidou has expressed sympathy for the African wish for a greater monetary say; he is prepared to make more of the franc zone's foreign exchange reserves available for African economic development, but has indicated that Paris will retain ultimate control. The changes that have taken place in the five-member bank of the equatorial African states have been largely cosmetic; the staff has been Africanized, the bank has taken on a modest economic development role, and credit policies have been relaxed. West African members of the franc zone already enjoy an Africanized staff, and their central bank will be given similar development and credit prerogatives. In both cases, however, the banks are run by a French managing director and a two-thirds vote of the board of directors is

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required on "important" questions, with the French deciding what is important.

Fundamental revision of the franc zone—central to the influence Paris wields in Africa—does not seem in the cards unless the Africans begin to pull together. Aid chief Billecocq in a *Le Monde* interview last month put forward proposals for a two-tier zone that go far beyond those of his more conservative colleagues. During Pompidou's African trip last winter, he reacted sharply to a request by Togolese President Eyadema for a revision of links between French and African francs. "The African franc," Pompidou pointed out, "would collapse in a day without French backing." Despite France's hard line, President Ould Daddah's example in leaving the franc zone will probably embolden some others to look for alternative backers and then press for more flexible franc zone arrangements. President Eyadema reportedly received a flurry of congratulatory telephone calls from fellow African leaders following his request to Pompidou.

Two Bellwethers

Mauritania has asked for the termination of both its mutual defense pact and its communications agreements with France. Nouakchott objects to the provision that gives France the right to station and move troops through the country. In rancorous negotiations last month the two sides failed to reach agreement on military cooperation. Mauritania refused to give France military overflight rights and, when France tried to make the continuation of the advisory mission contingent on concessions to the French position on overflights, asked Paris to withdraw its military advisers. Military cooperation negotiations are also deadlocked in the Malagasy Republic; the French are unwilling to surrender their naval base at Diego Suarez, the headquarters of their Indian Ocean military forces. The Malagasy insist on asserting their sovereignty over the base. The two sides have yet to find a formula that would satisfy their sensitivities without requiring expulsion of the French. The two countries, however, have made progress in working out new monetary arrangements. The Malagasy Republic is to remain in the franc zone, but will enjoy more economic independence.

Certain geographic, cultural, and political factors set Mauritania and the Malagasy Republic apart from the other nations of French-speaking Africa, and the difficult pattern of negotiations between these two countries and Paris will probably not be followed elsewhere. Mauritania and the Malagasy Republic, after all, were the countries which resisted most strongly the French 19th century policy of assimilation.

Still, change is in the wind throughout French-speaking Africa, and Paris may not be able to control the pace as closely as it would like. Close cultural ties are likely to persist, but once the generation of Senegalese President Senghor and Ivory Coast President Houphouet-Boigny—heavily wedded to French language and culture—passes from the scene, Paris may find that considerably more than cosmetic change will be required.

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