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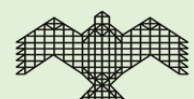


IN FOCUS

Macron's visit to Africa: Four takeaways

AFRICA IN BRIEF

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COMMENTARY

Macron's visit to Africa: Four takeaways

Through his West Africa tour, Macron has put forward plans to renew and strengthen France-Africa relations. However, Africa's skeptical responses raise the question of whether France's efforts are unfitting and insufficient.

Anu Maria Joseph



Image Source: AFP

On 28 July, France's President Emmanuel Macron concluded his three-day long, first three-country tour in Africa since his re-election in April. The visit began in Cameroon, continued in Benin, and concluded in Guinea Bissau. The visit agenda was profuse: promoting food security, renovating military partnership, educational and cultural development and human rights. The trip to the three countries with the least international attention comes as Macron seeks for new France-Africa relations that are not linked to colonial narratives. However, efforts are perceived in terms of Macron's objective to hold on to its influence in the region where new actors like Russia, China and Turkey are gaining momentum.

Macron's visit to Africa: Four Takeaways

First, Macron's three nations visit. In Cameroon, the country disrupted by jihadist militancy, ethnic violence and Anglophone separatism, Macron met President Paul Biya who has been ruling the country for almost 40 years with an iron fist. Macron pledged to help African countries increase food production as grain supplies are disturbed due to the Russia-Ukraine war. He said: "France will assist African countries to face the shocks caused by the war by encouraging local

investments in agriculture to increase food production." Macron also promised to continue its efforts in fighting Boko Haram and assured military assistance if requested. Macron's pledges were welcomed well by Biya. He said: "France has agreed to assist not only Cameroon but the entire African continent to fight against security threats and I am happy about that." Further, speaking in the capital Yaounde, Macron said that he wanted historians from both countries to investigate the past and establish "responsibilities". Before 1960, French colonial atrocities had killed tens of thousands of Cameroon nationalists.

In Benin, Macron met President Patrice Talon in Cotonou, and pledged to support the country in countering terrorism. Benin has been facing escalated threats from al-Qaeda and Islamic State-linked armed groups. Macron said: "France promises support in air, intelligence and equipment as well as training for the defense and security forces of Benin." He also announced French readiness to provide intelligence, deliver vehicles and drones, demining equipment, bulletproof vests and night vision equipment.

In Guinea Bissau, which experienced a political crisis after an attempted coup in February, Macron met the President and chair of the Economic Community of West African States, Sissoco Embalo. They discussed bilateral relations, the situation in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea which went through a series of coups. Macron said: "We spoke at length about the risk of destabilization that the situation in the Sahel poses to the entire West African region. And I reiterated France's determination, first of all, to remain

committed to the Sahel and the region.” In response, Embalo said: “I believe that cooperation is already good, but now it will strengthen even more in all areas and especially in the security field.”

Second, African stance on the Russia-Ukraine war. Macron’s three-day tour coincided with Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s trip to Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda and the Republic of Congo. Since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, most African countries maintained a position of neutrality, a major concern for France. Throughout the visit, Macron focused several remarks on Africa’s stance on Russia. He said: “Here in Africa, a continent that has suffered from colonial imperialism: Russia is one of the last colonial imperial powers”. He also accused Russia of using food and energy as “weapons of war.” However, Macron’s focus on the issue went counterproductive. Tighisti Amare, deputy director of the Africa Programme at Chatham House shared: “Macron’s comments are a reflection of this growing concern and an attempt to win Africa’s support for France’s position on the war in Ukraine.”

Third, restructuring France-Africa relations. Signaling France’s “political priority” in its relations with the African continent, a French presidential official said: “The tour will show the commitment of the President in the process of renewing the relationship with the African continent”. In 2020, the political relations with Cameroon strained after Macron’s comment that he will put “maximum pressure on Paul Biya” to end human rights violations in the country. Through the visit, Macron seeks to revive its dwindled economic and political ties with Cameroon.

In March 2019, during a visit, France developed new relations with East African countries Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia. The Montpellier summit in October 2021 was unique, representing young Africans

and civil societies without the involvement of African leaders. With the involvement of new non-francophone countries and new actors, Macron aims to change France-Africa relations. Through speeches, restitutions and apologies on colonial atrocities, restoration of artifacts, visits and summits Macron expects to overcome the colonial FrancAfrique narrative. However, a large section of the African population receives French efforts with skepticism. They accuse Macron of rebranding the traditional FrancAfrique to a new form.

Four, France’s security role in the Sahel. France’s shift in its security commitments in the Sahel is expected to act more in a supportive role for local forces than taking the lead. Though the complete pullout from Mali was perceived as abandonment by the African population, speaking at Yaounde, Macron promised France “will not relinquish the security of the African continent,” as jihadist militancy is spreading across the Sahel. He also spoke about the French revived security mission beyond the Sahel, to the second layer of West African countries. However, the new actions raise a narrative by critics saying Macron is expanding his influence in the continent under the guise of security.

AFRICA IN BRIEF

2 August – 9 August

By Apoorva Sudhakar

ETHIOPIA

US, EU envoys call for restoration of amenities

On 2 August, the US and EU envoys to Ethiopia traveled to Tigray for the first time since the conflict in Tigray broke out in November 2020. A joint statement by the Embassy of the US in Ethiopia and the Delegation of the EU to Ethiopia said political dialogue between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was necessary to achieve long-lasting peace. The envoys called for the "swift restoration of electricity, telecom, banking, other basic services and unfettered humanitarian access to Tigray and the Afar and Amhara neighboring regions affected by the conflict." ("[EU, US envoys urge Ethiopia to restore services in Tigray](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 2 August 2022)

SOUTH SUDAN

Unity government leaders extend transitional period

On 4 August, President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar signed a deal to extend the transitional period to 2024. This move was criticised by foreign observers as the deal signed by the unity government formed in February 2020 provided for general elections to be held in February 2023. The minister for cabinet affairs said the decision aimed "to address the challenges that impede the implementation of the peace agreement." The US, UK and Norway boycotted the decision expressing "profound concern that fully inclusive consultations must take place with civil society, faith-based groups, business, women's groups, youth representatives, eminent persons and international partners before the (peace deal) is amended." ("[South Sudan extends](#)

[transitional government by two years](#)," *News24*, 4 August 2022)

SOMALIA

Former al Shabaab official to be religion minister

On 2 August, the prime minister announced that Muktar Robow, a former al Shabaab spokesperson and deputy leader, had been appointed as minister of religion in the new cabinet. Robow split from the terrorist group in 2013; he was under house arrest since 2019. ("[Somalia names former al-Shabab spokesperson as religion minister](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 2 August 2022)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

MONUSCO spokesperson expelled over remarks

On 3 August, the foreign ministry released a statement expelling the spokesperson on the MONUSCO claiming that the UN official had stoked tensions leading to the week-long protests. The government accused the spokesperson of making "indelicate and inappropriate" statements and therefore maintained that the UN official's presence will not "promote a climate of mutual trust and calm between Congolese institutions and MONUSCO." ("[DR Congo expels UN peacekeeping mission spokesman after protests](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 3 August 2022)

At least 15 killed in rebel attack

On 8 August, BBC reported, 15 civilians and an army captain were killed in a series rebel attack the previous week. The Ituri province military governor, Colonel Siro Simba said that the rebels from Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) killed 10 people in Kandoyi village on 5 August. In another attack five people were killed in Bandiboli on 7 August. A UN expert group said that

Rwandan troops are fighting alongside one of the rebel groups known as M23.

However, the Rwandan government has denied the allegations. ("[At least 15 killed in fresh DR Congo rebel attacks](#)," *BBC*, 8 August 2022)

CHAD

Military government, rebel groups sign peace deal

On 8 August, the military government signed a peace deal with over 40 rebel groups during the negotiations in Doha.

The peace deal will pave the way for negotiations over the presidential elections, starting 20 August. However, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), the main rebel group, said it would not sign the deal, demanding a new committee to organize talks and release of rebel prisoners. ("[Chad military gov't, opposition groups sign peace deal in Qatar](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 8 August 2022)

GHANA

Marburg death toll rises to three

On 2 August, the WHO said a child infected with the Marburg virus had died, bringing the total number of fatalities to three in Ghana. The virus is transferred from fruit bats to people and the 2022 outbreak is the second such outbreak in West Africa, the first one being in 2021. The virus can be spread through the transfer of bodily fluids and the symptoms include diarrhea, fever, nausea and vomiting. ("[Child infected with Marburg virus dies in Ghana](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 2 August 2022)

THE GAMBIA

Two dead in heaviest rain in 30 years

On 3 August, the government said two people had died after The Gambia recorded its highest ever rainfall in 30 years. The Department of Water said 276mm of rain was recorded after torrential rains started on 30 July, leading to widespread floods. Previously, 1988 witnessed the highest rainfall at 175.4mm. ("[Floods affect thousands in Gambia after](#)

[heaviest rainfall in decades](#)," *News24*, 3 August 2022)

BURKINA FASO

Army admits to killing civilians in operation

On 3 August, the army admitted to having killed civilians in a counter-terrorism operation in the southeast few days earlier; 37 fatalities were recorded in a village near the border along Togo. An army statement said the civilians were unfortunate victims amid the operation to neutralise terrorists. (Thiam Ndaïaga, "[Burkina Faso army admits killing civilians in counter-terrorist strike](#)," *Reuters*, 3 August 2022)

MALI

21 killed in "terrorist" attack

On 7 August, at least 21 people, including 17 soldiers were killed in an attack in Tessit, a border zone between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. On 8 August, the army said 22 soldiers injured and nine missing. The statement blamed terrorists for the incident and said seven people, likely to be members of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, were also killed. ("[Suspected jihadists kill at least 21 in north Mali attack](#)," *France24*, 9 August 2022)

SENEGAL

Ruling coalition, opposition fail to secure majority

On 4 August, the provisional results revealed that President Macky Sall's ruling coalition had failed to secure the majority in the parliamentary elections by one vote. The coalition has won 82 of the 165 seats. Meanwhile, the opposition too failed to secure the majority with 80 seats. The remaining three seats, won by small parties will decide the final results. This is the first time a National Assembly will be formed in Senegal without a clear majority; this development also indicates a fall in Macky's popularity. ("[Senegal: Governing coalition loses legislative majority](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 4 August 2022)

IVORY COAST

Ouattara pardons former president Gbagbo

On 6 August, President Alassane Ouattara said he had signed a decree granting presidential pardon to former president Laurent Gbagbo, to strengthen "social cohesion." This step would nullify the 20-year jail term handed to Gbagbo in 2018 for looting the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO). The pardon comes weeks after Ouattara, Gbagbo and former president Henri Konan Bédié met on 14 July. ("[Ivorian President Ouattara pardons predecessor Gbagbo to boost 'social cohesion'](#)," *France24*, 7 August 2022)

SOUTH AFRICA

Migrants attacked by mob for alleged criminal activities

On 4 August, local residents of the Krugersdorp township attacked migrants accusing them of criminal activities in the area. The development comes after 130 people were arrested on charges of eight women near a mining dump on 28 July. The residents attacked the migrants with machetes, and hammers; they also stripped and whipped the migrants before setting the migrant camps on fire. A person present at the demonstration against the migrants said: "We want support from the police because the illegal miners are terrorising us. We cannot simply walk around the neighbourhood at night because they rape us." Krugersdorp houses several criminal gangs attempting to exploit the abandoned mines in search of any leftover gold. Several immigrants from Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe live in the area. ("[Mob attacks illegal miners after rapes shock South Africa](#)," *Reuters*, 4 August 2022)

REGIONAL

Senegal government and separatist group sign peace agreement

On 4 August, the rebel group Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance signed a peace agreement with the federal government. Signing the agreement in The

Gambia, the group agreed to lay down their arms. However, Amnesty International Senegal's director the group did not pose a huge threat to regional stability; instead, groups operating along the Gambian border were more aggressive. Therefore, the director emphasised the need to include other groups in negotiations towards a peace deal. (Annika Hammerschlag, "[Senegalese Separatists Sign Peace Deal With Government](#)," *Voice of America*, 5 August 2022)

INTERNATIONAL

US is not trying to outdo anyone, says Blinken

On 8 August, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken addressed reporters in Pretoria, in the first leg of his tour of three African countries. Blinken said the US appeals to the African population, including civilians and governments, to embrace the US "vision of democracy, openness and economic partnership." Blinken said the US was not attempting to "outdo anyone else," maintaining that it does not perceive Africa as the "latest playing field in a competition between great powers." In a direct reference to the presence of Russia's private military company, Wagner Group, Blinken said the key to addressing terrorism and violence is not Wagner. Meanwhile, South Africa's minister of international relations Naledi Pandor said that South Africa advocates for peace and said everyone should be concerned about the plight of Palestine. ("[Blinken makes case for democracy at start of sub-Saharan Africa tour](#)," *The Guardian*, 8 August 2022)

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Recent publications from Nias Africa Studies

Apoorva Sudhakar, "Tunisia's political crisis: four questions," *Africa Weekly*, 2 August 2022

Anu Maria Joseph, "Tribal conflict in Blue Nile: Causes and Implications," *Africa Weekly*, 26 July 2022

Mohamad Aseel Ummer, "Sudan-Ethiopia border tensions: Horn of Africa at the edge," *Africa Weekly*, 12 July 2022

Apoorva Sudhakar, "Africa's continuing migration problem: Three issues," *Africa Weekly*, 28 June 2022

Sankalp Gurjar, "The Visit of Belgium King to the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Wasted Opportunity," *Africa Weekly*, 21 June 2022



About NIAS Africa Studies

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focussed study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism. ,

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a weekly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and also African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.

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