

France's sphere of influence on Africa waning



Thousands of protesters gather in support of the putschist soldiers in the capital Niamey, Niger, on August 3, 2023. The sign reads "Goodbye France."
● REUTERS

By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

France's presence in Africa is "dwindling." This is what Iran's former ambassador to France believes. The former Iranian envoy to Libya has argued that France is unable to resort to military action to quell recent coups within its sphere of influence on Africa.

On August 30, just over a month following a military coup in Niger, Gabon's top military brass orchestrated a putsch, bringing down the sitting government. Al Jazeera reports that eight coups have taken place in

West and Central Africa since 2020, affecting nations such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Gabon.

Gabon's coup was staged just a day after the presidential election results were released, confirming the victory of Ali Bongo who secured his third consecutive term. But opposition factions rejected the outcome as rigged, claiming widespread irregularities. Bongo has been in power since 2009, succeeding his father, Omar Bongo, who presided over the nation's vast oil and mineral resources for 42 years.

The majority of the Central

and West African countries experiencing coups were formerly French colonies, and following their independence, they continued to be tethered to Paris's influence in security, politics, and economy. Despite their resource-rich status, many of these nations, including Gabon, grapple with glaring wealth disparities and inadequate resource allocation, resulting in a significant yawning gap between the ruling elite and a substantial portion of the public. In the case of Gabon, it is estimated that one-third of its 1.7 million strong population lives under the poverty line. Abolqassem Delfi, former

Iranian ambassador to France, has told Iran Daily that while coups have become a recurring theme in Africa, the majority of them in French-influenced nations before 2000 had been engineered in line with France's interests. "These coups were either directly fomented by Paris or launched by militias backed by the French government. However, the recent coups largely diverge from France's interests in these nations."

Ja'afar Qannadbashi, an expert on African affairs and former Iranian ambassador to Libya, echoed a similar stance to Iran Daily, highlighting the

prevalence of coups as a "rampant means of regime change and power transfer" due to the "fragility of political structures" in most African countries.

According to Qannadbashi, apparently legitimate governments elected through democratic processes often struggle to address ongoing issues, despite abundant resources at their disposal. Furthermore, the geopolitical competition among major powers in Africa exerts little influence on these coups.

Drawing upon his visit to Libreville, the capital of Gabon, Qannadbashi explained the gross disparities in wealth and resource monopolies among the ruling elite and their associates. "Within the city, there is a dichotomy, with one part exhibiting a modernity akin to European nations, while another segment languishes in poverty, bereft of basic needs for a humble life.

While pointing to the people's economic discontentment with the inefficiencies of the Gabonese government, Qannadbashi said that the primary source of anger stems from the government's heavy reliance on France and the latter's control over the country's decision-making and ex-

ecutive bodies. Therefore, the military intervened in response to the people's protests, topping the government and assuming power. Qannadbashi asserted that the era of French post-colonial influence over African nations is now dwindling, after the end of the old colonial epoch.

Delfi highlighted the persistence of coups in African nations, despite international condemnation, citing a series of factors that fuel these recurring incidents. He pointed to the coup in Gabon and its anti-French undertones, saying: "France had been in the process of disengaging from Africa in recent years but sought a face-saving withdrawal that could protect some of its traditional interests."

He noted that France had realized that maintaining control over Africa as it did in the past was no longer feasible, primarily due to the financial burdens imposed and the emergence of new influential players on the continent, including China, the United States, and Russia.

In examining the rivalry among major powers in Africa, Delfi referred to the outright confrontation between Europe, including France, and Russia, the Ukraine war. He hinted that this rivalry might have extended to Africa, noting instances where Russian flags appeared in the hands of opposition forces in Niger and Burkina Faso before coups and

the noticeable presence of the Moscow-linked Wagner militia group in Africa. The fact that the Gabonese coup came hot on the heels of the putsch in Niger, raises the question of whether France or other African nations would resort to military intervention to crush the coup plotters.

Qannadbashi suggested that even if France harbored such intentions, it did not have the ability to do so. "Because there are concerns that military intervention could embroil the French in protracted conflicts akin to the quagmire of Afghanistan where the Americans bogged down. Furthermore, French authorities worry that instead of receiving a warm reception, their intervention might trigger resistance from the affected people.

Delfi also noted that prevailing international conditions and domestic circumstances in France were not conducive to the utilization of old methods of flexing muscles and military intervention. He underscored that within an unspoken and unwritten reality, France had come to terms with the notion that, in the medium and long term, it could not guarantee a sustained presence in the nations within its sphere of influence on Africa. "While Paris strives to safeguard its interests in the short term, it is aware that the era of its dominance is drawing to a close."

On the significance of Vietnam's Independence Day

Vietnam's remarkable transformation in 77 years

By Luong Quoc Huy
Ambassador of Vietnam in Tehran

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

78 years ago, in the autumn of 1945, under the leadership of President Ho Chi Minh, the people all over the country of Vietnam simultaneously rose up and conducted a general uprising to seize power. By making good use of situational factors and revolutionary opportunities with careful preparation, the general uprising took place very quickly, with almost no bloodshed but a huge victory. Within just 15 days at the end of August 1945, the general uprising won completely, and the government belonged to the people of Vietnam.

On September 2, 1945, at Ba Dinh Square, President Ho Chi Minh read the historic "Declaration of Inde-

pendence" and solemnly declared to the whole world the birth of a new state: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam).

More than two-thirds of the century has passed. Many details of the contents of the "Declaration of Independence" have been studied and clarified in many fields. It is a legal document laying the basis for affirming the establishment of a state based on the rule of law, with the goals of Independence, Freedom, and Happiness. Moreover, the Declaration of Independence also contributed to the path of human liberation and opened the era of independence and freedom for oppressed peoples all over the world.

The thoughts of President Ho Chi Minh in the Declaration of Independence have become motivations for the entire Vietnamese nation to overcome all difficulties and challenges to build up the country. Vietnam has never

had the opportunity, potential, position, and international prestige like today.

Economically, Vietnam has been a development success story and now is one of the most dynamic emerging countries in the East Asia region. In recent years, its average growth has been about 7% per year. Vietnam has left the group of low-income countries since 2008. After basically controlling the COVID-19 pandemic, from the fourth quarter of 2021, Vietnam's economy has reopened and has taken steps to recover and grow strongly. In 2022, its GDP was about \$409 billion, its GDP growth reached 8.02%, and its GDP per capita was about \$4,110. Its export turnover reached \$371.85 billion, an increase of 10.6% compared to the previous year, and its import turnover reached \$360.65 billion, an increase of 8.4% over the previous year. The trade balance surplus was \$11.2 billion. Foreign direct investment in

Vietnam reached \$22.4 billion, an increase of 13.5% over the previous year. Vietnam now has trade relations with more than 230 markets and has engaged in more than 500 bilateral and multilateral agreements in various fields, including 17 FTAs.

In the international arena, Vietnam is a good friend, a reliable partner, and a responsible member of the international community. From the status of being isolated and embargoed, Vietnam has created and enhanced the foreign policy of openness, multilateralization, diversification, and creating favourable conditions for the country's renovation and development. Vietnam has expanded and elevated its diplomatic relations with all neighboring countries, major powers, important partners, and traditional friends. On the multilateral scale, Vietnam is an active and responsible member of over 70 important interna-

tional organizations and forums such as the United Nations, ASEAN, APEC, ASEM, and WTO.

The high-level foreign activities of the Party and State leaders remain active. Vietnam Communist Party has established ties with 247 political parties in 111 countries. Vietnam National Assembly has relations with the national assemblies and parliaments of over 140 countries. Its private organizations and agencies have

ties with thousands of private and non-governmental organizations from foreign countries.

Vietnam's international status and prestige in the region and the world remain enhanced as it actively and responsibly contributes to the maintaining of peace, cooperation, development, and progress in the world. During the past years, Vietnam has successfully organized major international conferences and completed many international tasks as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (two terms: 2008-2009 and 2020-2021), the ASEAN Rotating Chair-

man, and the Host of ASEM high-level meeting, APEC Summit, World Economic Forum on ASEAN, etc. It has dispatched hundreds of officers and soldiers to join the Peacekeeping Organization of the UN in Africa. Recently, the new development of the situation, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, has impacted all aspects including politics and socio-economy. Vietnam has timely sent medical and financial support to over 50 countries and international organizations, clearly displaying the motto "a responsible member" in the international community.

