The Curse of Colonialism Haunts France

(Translated)

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In September 2026, teacher strikes began in France to protest the shortage of educational staff and the poor conditions of schools. Students then joined the protests, leading to the closure of some schools and the organization of demonstrations in various cities. As the government introduced strict financial measures, the scope of demands expanded to include public spending, salaries, and the standard of living. The protests soon spread to other sectors, including fishermen, energy sector workers, police, and unions, amid growing discontent over rising fuel and energy prices and the cost of living. Approximately 550,000 people participated in the recent demonstrations. While most protesters remained peaceful, militant groups and disruptive elements engaged in some actions, turning parts of the protests into looting, arson, and clashes with police.

Amid these events, President Macron attempted to focus on acts of looting and sabotage, capitalizing on the extensive media coverage of these incidents rather than addressing the root causes of the crisis! However, reducing the scene to these transgressions does not address the underlying roots of the problem, nor does it explain the expanding scope of the protests and the diversity of participating factions. The crisis, as Macron himself indicated, is linked to structural imbalances that have accumulated over years, most notably rising public debt, weak productivity, and insufficient output in certain sectors, alongside other economic and societal challenges.

Attributing France’s crisis to a single cause constitutes a reductive oversimplification of the actual situation. While US President Trump attributes some of the problems facing Western countries to immigration, others see that the structural imbalances within the capitalist system have contributed to deepening the economic and societal crises.

And while these factors are important, there is another aspect that should not be overlooked: the decline of certain economic privileges that France enjoyed as a result of the erosion of its military and political influence in Africa, particularly in the northern and western parts of the continent.

Here, it is necessary to recall French colonialism and its legacy of economic privileges; for decades, colonialism represented one of the sources of France’s economic influence and enabled it to build unequal relationships with a number of its former colonies. After World War II, and coinciding with the rise of liberation movements, France sought to reorganize its relations with its colonies to preserve its interests and influence, even after the end of direct colonial control.

In this context, the African Franc was established in December 1945, during the era of Charles de Gaulle, following France's ratification of the Bretton Woods Agreement. According to the Brookings Institution, the Franc became the currency

used in France’s African colonies at that time. It is still used today in 14 African countries, within what is known as the African Franc Zone, and its exchange rate is pegged to the Euro.

It also guaranteed the convertibility of the currency through specific monetary arrangements, while the relevant agreements stipulate depositing a percentage of foreign exchange reserves with the French Treasury. According to published reports, this percentage reached 50% under the concerned monetary arrangements.

These arrangements have sparked widespread debate regarding the monetary sovereignty of African countries, the extent of their impact on the independence of their economic decisions, and whether they achieve mutual interests or preserve a portion of French influence in new forms.

Alongside monetary arrangements, French companies have maintained a significant economic presence in Africa. Although France is not the sole investor in the region, its companies have accumulated extensive investments in a number of African countries. According to what was published by France Today newspaper, the total stock of French investments in Africa amounts to approximately 51 billion euros, distributed across more than 4,400 branches of French companies. Furthermore, its exports to North and West African countries reached around 33 billion euros in 2022, according to French customs data, as reported by the Nawaat Post website on 4 October 2023.

Within this context, the issue of natural resources stands out, particularly uranium in Niger, whose exploitation has historically been tied to the interests of French companies, foremost among them Orano, which operates in the nuclear sector. For many years, Niger has been one of the sources supplying uranium to the French nuclear industry, a fact that has elevated the relationship between the two countries beyond mere commercial cooperation to broader issues concerning sovereignty over natural resources and the distribution of revenues from their exploitation.

France's relations with a number of African countries have witnessed a noticeable deterioration in recent years, accompanied by a decline in its military presence in the Sahel region. Its forces withdrew from Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso between 2022 and 2023 amid escalating political and security disputes. Furthermore, Chad announced in November 2024 the termination of its defense cooperation agreements with France and demanded the departure of its forces from its territory. Senegal has followed suit.

Macron did not hide the challenges facing his country on the African continent. In a speech he delivered on 27 February 2023 regarding France's diplomatic strategy in Africa, he addressed the transformations the continent is witnessing and the increasing international competition there, amid the decline of French influence in a number of economic and strategic fields.

France’s economic landscape is not limited to declining external influence; it coincides with internal difficulties facing French companies. A report published by Al-Araby Al-Jadeed Newspaper on 6 December 2025, citing data from the French Central Bank, indicated that 68,564 corporate bankruptcy cases were recorded during the twelve months ending in December 2025.

In contrast, the African continent now represents only a limited percentage of France's total foreign trade. According to what was reported by the Noun Post website on 4 October 2023, this percentage reached approximately 5.3%, an indicator of the limited relative weight of trade with the continent within France's overall commercial exchanges, despite the historical importance of economic relations between the two parties. With the expansion of Chinese and American companies, and other international firms, in African markets, the relative standing of some French companies has declined, forcing some of them to reduce their activity or exit certain markets.

It is evident that France’s influence in parts of North and West Africa historically afforded it vast economic and strategic opportunities, while numerous African countries continued to suffer from poverty and underdevelopment, despite possessing immense natural resources. This paradox raises legitimate questions about the nature of the economic relations that emerged under colonialism and the extent to which some of their effects persist after independence.

From here, I direct a message to all Muslims, and to the peoples of Africa in particular:

The decline of French influence in some African countries is an important step on the path to emancipation from colonialism, but it should not be the final destination. True liberation is not completed merely by the withdrawal of foreign troops or the termination of military cooperation agreements; it requires building genuine economic and political independence, founded upon the basis of Islam.

Replacing French influence with that of America, Russia, or China does not guarantee the realization of the interests of the peoples of Africa, but will instead lead to reproducing dependency in new forms.

What is required is not replacing one foreign power with another, but rather building a state capable of managing its resources, directing its wealth toward development, and establishing international relations based on the Islamic ideology. And the peoples of North and West Africa, with their natural resources, strategic location, and Islamic civilizational heritage, are capable of building a prosperous future, provided that the demand for liberation from foreign influence is transformed into a practical project for development, economic integration, the establishment of strong institutions, and the achievement of unity in interests and stances.

Let the transformations witnessed in Africa be the beginning of a new stage of true independence, built upon the great ideology of Islam.