



Meeting Summary

France and Africa after the Libyan Intervention

Stéphane Gompertz

Head of Africa and Indian Ocean, French Foreign Ministry

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Stéphane Gompertz:

In recent years the situation in the African region is improving in terms of democracy, good governance and economic growth, which has measured at approximately six per cent per year. Although a debatable issue, only two dictatorships remain on the continent, Eritrea and Lebanon. The solution remains rather slow. The question arises as to whether changes in the Arab Spring will affect the African continent: will there be an African Winter? To what extent does this Arab Spring change how we as Europeans deal with African countries?

Forecasting the future is a very delicate and difficult exercise; it is hard to advise our political masters on how we should deal with these changes. There is no doubt that Africa will be influenced by changes in Arab world, and indeed changes in the Ivory Coast will change how France deals with African issues in the future. Lets us look to the key issues of consideration regarding France and Africa after the Libya intervention.

Principle of non-interference

President Sarkozy clearly stated in February 2008 in his speech in Cape Town that it is now unthinkable for French troops to be drawn into domestic conflicts in Africa, and any previous practice that has undertaken this had to stop. President Sarkozy decided to review all the defence treaties France had signed, and has signed 'defence partnership agreements' with some African countries – four of which have been ratified so far. Drafts will be issued to other African governments and the hope is that many will be agreed soon.

The crises in the Ivory Coast and Libya have affected France's approach to non-interference. France did intervene in both cases but with a strict mandate based on the 1973 UN Resolution. In the Ivory Coast we intervened only at the close of the crisis, not at the beginning. It was discussed within the French government as to whether France should show its muscles earlier. However, it was decided not to intervene until it became France's moral duty to intervene in order to protect the civilian public from heavy weapons. This principle is based on the 1973 UN Resolution that advocates intervention in order to save a significant number of lives that would have been jeopardised if no military action was taken. France (and the rest of NATO) was very careful to stick to this principle and waited to use military force until it was evident that thousands of lives were at stake if they did not intervene. France did use

military force to go in and collect French diplomats who were being fired upon in order to protect their own people.

How to deal with crises in Africa?

So what should we do to try and exert positive influence on African crises? In the future, should we try to encourage compromise solutions such as the national unity governments formed in Kenya and Zimbabwe? What should we do about contested elections? For example, there was a reason to question the results of the elections held in Cameroon in 2009. The electoral process was regarded as acceptable, but this does not mean satisfactory. France has clear evidence that there was much wrongdoing and shortcomings during this electoral process; however, it is unlikely that these would have affected the overall outcome result. Yet they should still be flagged.

France has to be very careful not to lecture African countries about good governance; this was also a point raised by President Sarkozy in his speech in Cape Town in 2008. There also is the need to tell African civil society groups not to overestimate what France can do sometimes.

More generally, what kind of preventative action can be taken when we know that a storm is coming? For example, when Mugabe passes away, what can we do to help our friends in Zimbabwe and encourage all stakeholders to act in a positive way? We need to consider these issues.

There is a big danger ahead for both Sudan and South Sudan. Corruption is rife in South Sudan and the new state has very little infrastructure. We need to explore how we can help them build a state, yet we need to tread the fine line of providing help but ensuring South Sudan gets the independence it wanted. North Sudan is currently experiencing the Darfur crisis, economic difficulties and conflict in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan region. There runs the risk that the Sudanese regime could revert into a more hard line form of its current self. Should we use the carrot or stick approach? We must make it clear that we are not trying to change the Sudanese regime. It is recognised that there is a government in place but there is the wish to try and help Sudan strike an agreement with South Sudan.

Issue of terrorism in the Sahel

Within the region there is a large quantity of light weapons, which could be very dangerous if they fall into the wrong hands. We have to work together in order to work against terrorism. A shift has occurred in the last few years, with Algeria offering a new degree of openness to the EU. There are few concrete improvements but this increased openness is a step in the right direction. Niger and Mauritania are moving in a similar way, but we can feel more hesitation in Mali – this may be due to the fact that the Presidential term ends next year and so may be wary of interfering on political grounds.

Also there is the issue of terrorism in the Horn of Africa. There is a common concern about the situation in Somalia. The impact is devastating. At present, one Somali out of three is a displaced person or refugee within their own country. The safety of people in the region is at danger. Additionally it is increasingly becoming a concern of foreign governments as non-Somalis are also being targeted; for example, a French lady was recently kidnapped in Kenya. She was ill and died soon after being kidnapped as she did not have access to her medicine. All these reasons contribute to the fact that it is important to act against al-Shabaab, and France supports Kenya's approach of taking action against al-Shabaab.

To what extent does this crisis affect our relationship with Africa?

The African Union 'missed the train' with the Libyan crisis; we felt it was not a choice to delay the intervention as extra time would have enabled Colonel Gaddafi's forces to slaughter more civilians. The African Union sent a delegation to Libya on the day that the coalition started their military role in the country. The African Union did ask the coalition if it could delay its intervention but the coalition said no. By delaying for 48 hours, thousands more people would have died in Libya.

The African Union only recognised the transitional government in Libya a few days ago. The lack of recognition previous to this appeared out of solidarity for Colonel Gaddafi. The African Union recognises that the situation has changed. France recognises that it needs the African Union, and the African Union needs the international system, and so we all should support one another.

South Africa also signed the 1973 UN Resolution concerning intervention in another sovereign state, yet has appeared negative about the actions of the

coalition in Libya. South Africa has put forward that the coalition did not give the African Union mediation efforts enough time in practice and that its military role went too far. The coalition recognises South Africa's stance on this issue, but has proposed that they both agree to disagree. Even in lieu of this South Africa and France are still friends with a firm partnership. France recognises it is important to speak frequently with the emerging powers and wishes to maintain its vibrant bilateral relationship with South Africa.