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Uranium Factor in France's Foreign Policy Towards Africa

Review. Use of the comparative political analysis allowed the author to identify certain trends within France's foreign policy towards Africa of the beginning of this millennium. Analysis of the geographic localization of the expeditions of the French armed forces into Africa confirms the fact that the Élysée Palace initiated the peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions within the territories of the sovereign nations of the Dark Continent whenever France faced a serious threat to their energy security. The threat to the interests of the French state corporation AREVA, which specializes in recovery and refinement of uranium ore, was always followed by operations of the special services and military interventions in Niger, Mali and the Central African Republic. The methodological basis for this research consisted of the systemic, structural-functional, comparative-historical approaches, methods of analysis, synthesis, observation, and modeling. The author substantiates the opinion according to which the rapid escalation of the competitiveness and the African uranium markets, emergence of new players in these markets, first and foremost China, prompts France to resort to various forms of political and military pressure (from political assassinations and incitement of confessional and tribal conflicts to direct military intrusion) upon the political elites of their former colonies. A conclusion is made on the fact that it is the direct dependency of the French nuclear power plants, and therefore the whole French economy, upon the African uranium defines the main vector of the Africa policy of the Fifth Republic.

Keywords: intervention, uranium, Françafrique, France, Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, Africa, neocolonialism, values.

Over the last few years France has demonstrated a noticeable military and political activity in West Africa. Within Paris' political rhetoric there are assurances that the French military campaigns in Africa carry purely humanitarian character and are aimed at fighting the Islamic extremism.

But upon a closer examination of the events in Niger, Mali, and Central African Republic we can see a certain trend: the French special forces and military divisions appear in these countries at the time of threat to the interests of the French state corporations that deal in recovery of uranium within the territories of African nations.

The peaceful atom of the Fifth Republic

The development program of the nuclear energy has been implemented in France from the moment when in 1973 the rapid growth of the oil prices on the global market considerably increased the cost of producing energy from oil. The nuclear program allowed a fairly low cost solution to the dependency upon the oil producing countries. The construction of the nuclear power plants in France is handled by AREVA, which then transfers them over the *Électricité de France* (EDF) power company. Being the leader in this sector, AREVA installs power plants in Europe, Africa, North America, China, and South Korea. It has over 100 branches located in 40 different countries.

The nuclear energy plays a strategic role in France: it provides approximately 75% of the energy balance of the country ^[1]. The overall amount of the produced nuclear energy consists of approximately 480 TW, and in some years the portion of nuclear energy reaches 80% (for comparison: the nuclear power plants currently provide approximately 16% of all produced power worldwide). The world's biggest producer of electricity EDF (*Électricité de France*) manages 59 block-units at 18 nuclear power plants, and supplies power to 25 million homes. The corporation has roughly 156,000 employees, and approximately 50,000 more work at the subsidiary companies of the French giant in other countries.

The reactors of multiple French nuclear power plants need to be constantly supplied with uranium fuel. In addition to that, France's largest energy corporations (EDF and AREVA) signed long-term contracts to supply nuclear fuel to their European partners. According to the World Nuclear Association AREVA controls 17% of the global uranium production, and ranks third in the world in extraction of uranium. Besides the African mines, it develops uranium depos-

its in Kazakhstan and Canada. COMUF, the subsidiary company of AREVA, was developing uranium deposits in Gabon from 1960 to 1999, when the deposit was closed due to lack of profitability and depletion of the deposit. In June 2014 AREVA has purchased a Canadian company Uramin for 2.5 billion USD. The French Court of Audit noticed serious legal violations in striking of that deal. After Anne Lauvergeon was removed from the post as the head of the corporation, its representatives admitted that the actual value of the Canadian company was five times lower. This was due to the drop in the uranium prices and the delay of Uranium in the launch of uranium mine in Namibia ^[2].

Development of the uranium ore in France began in 1957. For several decades France was the largest uranium producer in Western Europe. The combined capacities of 20 deposits amounted to approximately 4,000 tons per year. During the 1980's the company COGEMA supplied approximately 75% of uranium production at 3 enrichment complexes — Bessines, Saint Martin du Bosc, and Ecarpiere. Annual consumption of uranium in France was upwards of 6,500 tons, and the deficit even then was covered by importing uranium (3,461 tons in 1985) from Niger, Gabon, Canada, and US, where uranium was produced with participation of French companies. Enrichment of uranium, production of the nuclear fuel and its refinement was taking place in France. But by the end of last century and the beginning of this century the French uranium resources were depleted: if in 2001 France was mining 195 tons, by 2002 it dropped to just 20 tons, and in 2003 it dropped to a complete zero ^[3]. From that point on the supply of French companies with uranium comes from Sub-Saharan and Central Africa. This is where the current mines and still undeveloped uranium deposits are located and are predominately by control of French companies.

So that the readers can understand the level of escalation of the competitiveness on the uranium market, it is worth providing the following facts. Australia controls quarter of all global discovered deposits — 989,000 tons. Kazakhstan holds 622,000 tons of uranium, while Russia has 615,000 tons; in other words, Russia and Kazakhstan possess approximately 15% each of the global discovered deposits. Canada's deposits amount to 441,000 tons or 11% of the global deposits; South African Republic — 398,000 tons or 10%; Ukraine — 250,000 tons or approximately 6%; Niger — 227,000 tons or approximately 6%; Namibia — 212,000 tons or 5%; Brazil — 143,000 tons or 3%; United States — 102,000 tons or 2%; Uzbekistan — 93,000 tons or approximately 2%^[4]. It is evident that France with its sizeable deficit of energy resources ended up in a rather complicated position — it needs African uranium like oxygen.

Uranium is currently one of the most demanded non-renewable resources. Since the beginning of this century there has been a spike in the prices on the global market: if in 2000 a pound of uranium cost \$7 USD, in 2007 a pound of uranium concentrate reached \$100 USD, in 2008 — \$140 USD. However, the Fukushima tragedy in 2011 and aggressive acts of the “green” all over the world (especially in Germany) lead to a temporary drop in interest towards nuclear power and a noticeable drop in uranium prices: in 2013 the average price of uranium consisted of only \$38 USD per pound. There is still no real alternative to the nuclear power, and experts forecast the growth in uranium prices. In 2014, the head of Rosatom Sergey Kirienko stated that “overall the forecast for construction of nuclear power plants across the world till 2030 is back to the pre-Fukushima level”. According to the World Nuclear Association, by 2012 the global demand for uranium can grow by more than 22.5%, and by 2030

by 1.5–2 times^[5]. The late member of the Executive Committee of AREVA Luc Oursel expected the capacity of nuclear power plants throughout the world to reach 635 GW by 2030, while at the same time believing that his estimate was a conservative one; estimates of other experts reach upwards of 800 GW^[6].

At the same time, of key importance is the issue of cost of uranium acquired from the ores in various countries across multiple continents. There are many minerals that contain uranium — over 200, but not all of them are of industrial grade. It depends on the percentage of uranium content: the ore that contains 0.1% uranium attracts interest, although the growth in prices of this strategic material influences extraction from poor ores; for example, in the South African Republic ore is mined that contains only 0.01% of uranium. Sahel's uranium deposits are significantly richer than South Africa's: according to experts the uranium resources in Mali for example, are estimated to be 100,000 tons of U3O8 with average uranium content in the ores at 0.085%^[7]. In addition to the quality of uranium ores the profitability of their development is affected by a number of other important factors such as depth of the deposit, natural and environmental conditions for recovery, labor costs, etc. But there is another significant component that affects the actual cost of uranium mined by the French corporation AREVA in Niger, Mali, Algeria, and Central African Republic: it is the cost of political and military domination in the region.

It is no secret that France sees their former colonies in Africa as their domain and protectively defends the mineral riches of as if sovereign states from encroachment of other countries, first and foremost China and the United States. This requires substantial investments into the ore mining industry, creation on necessary infrastructure, and most importantly support of the

puppet leaders brought to power by the efforts of the French special services and soldiers of expeditionary force. The Élysée Palace is forced to spend great sums of money on the large-scale military operations intended to protect its favored political regimes from “domestic enemies” striving to participate in redistribution of profits from natural resource royalties. In addition to that, French tax payers must pay for the arming and training of the military of these quasi-states. Over the recent years there were 6,500 French soldiers stationed in the countries of the Sub-Saharan and Central Africa (Niger, Mali, Central African Republic, and Chad Republic), and their locations perfectly match the locations of uranium mines of the AREVA corporation and the discovered uranium deposits in Niger, Mali and Central African Republic ^[8]. All of this makes the African uranium too costly for France, and the prospects of retaining the Sahel zone under control of the Élysée Palace seems more improbable.

Niger uranium — a factor in survivability of French economy

Niger is one of the main suppliers of uranium to the global market. It ranks 9th in the world by reserves of uranium (276,000 tons), and 6th in uranium recovery (approximately 6% of the global recovery) ^[9]. Nevertheless, the data on uranium reserves and its recovery differs: Evgeny Korendyassov writes that the country holds 5th place globally by confirmed reserves — 445,000 tons of uranium and 4th place in its production — 4,350 tons (as of 2013). Until very recently the buy price for Niger’s uranium set by the French were 3–4 times lower than the prices on the global market. As a result, the African nation over the 50 years of its independence received about 14 to 20 billion dollars less than was supposed to ^[10]. The profits from uranium sales comprise approximately 1/3 of the overall revenue

of the country, while revenue of AREVA in 2012 exceeded the entire national budget of Niger by 4 times ^[11]. At the same time, roughly 1/3 of the needed uranium in France is mined in Niger.

The uranium ore in Niger was discovered in 1957. First uranium mine opened in Niger around the town of Arlit in 1970 by SOMAIR mining company. Eight years later, the COMINAK mining company has begun to develop a uranium deposit near Akokan. France has presented Nigeriens with crippling terms for the sale of uranium ore, while the president and government of Niger did not know how much of uranium is being taken out of the country or what was its total value. In 1974 President Hamani Diori let the French know that he was unsatisfied with neither the price offered by France, nor the terms of supplying uranium. As a result, on April 15, 1974 the French security service has organized a coup in the capital of Niger, and Hamani Diori was removed from power. Later, President Seyni Kountché proposed to declassify the information on how much of uranium ore is being shipped out of his country. The Mines Minister representing the Nigerien side was killed after the first round of talks with Paris. In 1999 President of Niger Mamadou Tandja called on Paris to reevaluate the terms of uranium trade, but at first the French simply ignored this proposition.

At the beginning of this century the aggressive policy of China on African uranium markets allowed Nigeriens to get better terms from the French corporations. For a long time the French operated in Niger on short-term agreements of 3–4 years that would fix the uranium price at 21,000 CFA francs per kilo, which is approximately 30 euros per kilo (or approximately \$14 USD per pound). When in 2007 the cost of uranium reached upwards of 150 euros per kilo, Mamadou Tandja demanded that the price for uranium would be raised to almost

double the amount — 40,000 CFA francs per kilo.

When the tensions in the relations between President Mamadou Tandja and the AREVA Corporation reached apogee, there was an uprising of the nomadic Tuareg tribes in the north of Niger. The main demand of the leaders of the uprising was redistribution of profits from uranium trade. The French security services provoked this separatist uprising in order to exert pressure upon the government of Niger. The logic was simple: if we cannot reach an agreement with the Nigerien leadership, then we will reach it with the separatists. The former adviser to the Nigerien president Ibrahim Lutu on October 30, 2007 in response to the question of who supports the uprising of Tuaregs in the north has stated: “No one in Niger has the ability to form a real army in the desert with modern weapons and 4x4 SUV’s. But an interesting fact is that AREVA has ordered a dozen of SUV’s and had them delivered to Arlit... but every single one of them ended up being “stolen” by the rebels! AREVA has paid few million francs to their security forces, but that money has also somehow wound up in the hands of the Tuaregs” [12]. President Mamadou Tandja in turn accused the French company of purchasing their safety by financing the rebel movements of the nomadic tribes. On August 1, 2007 he ordered to annul all contracts with AREVA. Only after involvement of the French diplomats the conflict could subside. The temporary compromise resulted in a noticeable increase of the French financial aid to Niger.

Throughout the years of the Mamadou Tandja presidency the China National Uranium Corporation (Sino-U) has actively worked in the north of the country near Azelic. In 2007 the corporation along with the Nigerien government formed a mining company Société des mines d’Azelic-Somina with 62% belonging to the Chinese compa-

nies, 33% to Niger, and 5% to a South Korean investor. In 2010 this company has exported 600 tons of uranium to China, and this year (2015) the uranium production should reach 2,500 tons. Until now, the annual yield of uranium from the mines controlled by Chinese did not exceed 700 tons [13]. As a reminder, this is almost 5 times less than productivity of the mines controlled by the French.

Wanting to go bigger, On March 1, 2010 China has reached a new deal with the government of Niger, which brings an investment of 300 million USD into development of the mineral base of Sahel. Soon after, the French companies have signed agreements on investing into the Niger’s industry worth 1.7 billion USD. But the China National Petroleum Corporation is attempting to negotiate a deal on investing 5 billion USD into the mining industry of Niger. Such competition has posed a direct threat to the interests of France, which continues to view the Western Sub-Saharan Africa as its domain.

In 2009 the Élysée Palace saw an opportunity to gain influence of the Nigerien president: at the time of elections Mamadou Tandja has refused to leave his post, thus violating the constitution. The usurper has made a deal with AREVA — uranium in exchange for political protection on international level [14]. Upon the agreement in 2009 the French received a contract for developing the Imouraren deposit (the second largest uranium deposit in the world totaling 80,000 tons). At the same time, the French had to invest 1.2 billion euros and create 1,400 jobs. Currently, the mine yields approximately 5,500 tons of uranium ore annually, which is 1/3 of all uranium imported into France.

The French political scientist A. Gleser has said this about the events: “China has been interested in the Imouraren deposit for quite some time... At first, AREVA has contemplated the possibility of partnership

with the Chinese, but in the end preferred the South Korean KEPCO. So the Chinese companies were unable to get access to Imouraren and for now have to be satisfied with the Azelic deposit. Another aggravating factor for the Chinese is the fact that they cannot conduct geological survey of the area near the deposits controlled by AREVA, as all geological maps are held not by the Nigerien government, but by a French government geological survey called The Bureau de recherches géologiques et minières (Geological and mining research bureau). Thus, the disagreements between the Chinese companies and AREVA have emerged quite some time ago, and it is doubtful that they will go away any time soon" [15].

After Mamadou Tandja has practically declared himself president-for-life he began talks on developing uranium deposits with such countries as Libya, Venezuela, and according to some data with Iraq (back in 2002 the US government has accused Bagdad in attempt to acquire uranium from Niger for the purposes of building a nuclear bomb). These talks were taken by the Élysée Palace as not only infringement upon the economic interests of France, but also as a direct threat to the security of the NATO member countries. On February 18, 2010 there was another military coup. Mamadou Tandja was removed from power and imprisoned.

The elections of the new president of Niger took place in January of 2011 and the country was headed by Mahamadou Issoufou — a former high-ranking member of the AREVA Corporation. On June 25, 2011 while answering the question on a possible joint effort of the Chinese with the French corporation in development of the uranium deposit Imouraren Mahamadou Issoufou replied: "AREVA is our strategic partner and has worked in Niger for over 50 years... I do not think that Chinese can join Imouraren" [16]. This statement best answers the question of whom and why did somebody

need to change the Nigerien president. On June 21, 2012 François Hollande declared that France and Niger will renew the talks on mutual efforts in the area of uranium recovery. Later, at the time of intervention of French army in Mali, Paris has directed divisions of Special Forces into Niger to protect the uranium mines controlled by AREVA.

It is worth mentioning that the new president's loyalty to the Parisian guardians did not last too long: by February 2014 the Nigerien government has again demanded that AREVA would change the buy price for uranium ores. But after a 2-year interruption in service the SOMAIR and COMINAK have begun to mine uranium once again. The talks on prolongation of exploitation of the two uranium mines in Niger by the French AREVA lasted 18 months, resulting in an agreement on prolongation of the use of these mines for another 10 years. "We received a legitimate request from the Nigerien government for higher compensation for the use of uranium mines", said the chairman of the board of AREVA Luc Oursel, who came to Niamey for contract signing. In the end the French were able to "squeeze" the most out of Nigeriens: in the mutual statement they declared that both uranium mines will be exempt from taxes for the next 5 years.

Mali: who will develop the uranium deposits?

According to experts, the uranium resources in Mali are estimated at 100,000 tons of U308 at the average uranium content in the ores at 0.085%. In the Gao region the discovered Samit deposit contains 200 tons of uranium. By preliminary data the uranium potential of the Falea region (150 sq. km.) is estimated to contain 5,000 tons. At the northeastern side of the country, near the L'Adrar Des Iforas massif, just to the west of the neighboring Niger uranium territory of Tim Mersoï that is surveyed by Kidal Project; the area of the geological survey

spans 19,930 sq. km. The predicted uranium yield for each of these objects is estimated at 8,500 tons. Southwest of Adrar des Ifoghas in the Tilemsi region across the area of 19,000 sq. km. there have been several radiometric anomalies and indications of uranium ore. Samit has also been discovered in the same area. In the southwest of Mali 20 km. north from the Guinea border a survey is being conducted on the copper-uranium deposit of Falea, with the ores containing 0.1% uranium ^[17]. There is no official data on uranium recovery in Mali. Nevertheless, according to press the northeastern region of Mali and the adjacent Nigerien territory, which are both controlled by the Tuaregs, can be the areas of illegal uranium mining.

The uprising of the Tuaregs in Niger has started back in 2007. Initially it was led by the Niger Movement for Justice, who demanded that Nigerian authorities would provide socio-economic equality for Tuaregs with the rest of the country's citizens. This was first and foremost related to equal distribution of profits from the sales of natural resources of Niger, especially uranium ^[18].

These mottos turned out to hit home with the Mali Tuaregs, who in turn resumed military actions against the government forces. On May 17, 2007 they attacked the government military base at the border of Mali and Niger, and captured 30 hostages. In the summer the conflicts did not cease, the Tuaregs have shifted to mine warfare, resulting in dozens of deaths. By September 12, the Tuaregs have fired at an American airplane that was supposed to bring munitions for the government forces of Mali, so that they could resist the Tuareg advance into the country's territory. Two days later, under the leadership of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga the Tuaregs have captured a town of Tinzaoutin at the border of Mali and Algeria.

Having captured hostages, the Tuaregs demanded that Mali forces would leave the Tinzaoutin region. But they have set mines on

the road to Bamako, practically locking the Mali forces inside the region. On September 16 the Tuaregs attacked the military convoy on the border with Algeria, resulting in the deaths of 7 rebels and 1 soldier. Ibrahim Ag Bahanga has reportedly made demands for additional government subsidies for Tuaregs and a portion of the profits from the uranium mines located on "their territory". This was another attempt on the nomads to take control over the traditional caravan trails between Maghreb and Sahel. Soon after these events the rebel leaders have announced the creation of the Mali-Niger Tuareg Alliance, officially headed by Ham Ag Sid Ahmed. Within the territorial demands of the alliance the "uranium subject" was evermore present, giving some experts the reason to dub the rebellion of the Tuaregs of 2007–2008 the "uranium rebellion" ^[19].

The smoldering military activity in the north of Mali continued for 5 years. But the NATO aggression against Libya has escalated the situation in the north of Mali. On January 17, 2012 the veterans of the Tuareg battalions from the army of the assassinated General Kaddafi attacked the city of Ménaka in northern Mali ^[20]. The Tuaregs marched under the flag of The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad and demanded establishment of an independent Tuareg state in the northern parts of Mali and Niger, and the southern Algeria (this is precisely the area in which the uranium mines are located). Even back then these events were interpreted by the experts as a shifting of the civil war from Libya onto the Mali territory.

On February 19, an all-out war has begun in the north of Mali. The rebels have sieged the camp of the government forces near Tessalit. The president of Mali has responded by sending in armored vehicles and helicopters flown by the pilots from Eastern Europe and republics of the former USSR. Despite all this, by February 21 the rebels have attacked 7 and captured 5 cities in the

northern and central parts of the country^[21]. The number of casualties on both sides was in the hundreds.

After capturing the town of Aguelhok, the separatist executed dozens of captured soldiers. In response, demonstrations were held in the capital Bamako. The demonstrators demanded that President Amadou Toumani Touré punished the murderers. Soon after, the capital and other Mali cities have become overwhelmed with riots: the angry crowds were burning homes and stores that were owned by the Tuaregs, as well as regular people of light skin.

At the beginning stages of the armed conflict the Mali forces were losing ground, but by the end of February they started to advance^[22]. The aviation attacked the rebel positions from the helicopters^[23] in order to halt their advancement towards Kidal — the largest city in the region. The Tuareg leaders in turn stated that the government is bombing civilians^[24].

The situation in Mali was worsened by the fact that in April the country was supposed to hold the presidential elections. The authorities assured people that the elections will be held. But on March 22, 2012 on the background of Tuareg military activity in the north of the country, the French security forces have organized a coup, which led to the removal from power of the legally elected president Amadou Toumani Touré. Destabilization of the political situation in Mali and the Al-Qaeda activity in Sahel, as well as the separatism of the Berber-speaking Tuareg tribes were used by France as justification for organizing a large-scale military operation “Serval” in this sovereign nation.

On January 13, 2013 the French military aircraft began to bomb cities in the east of the country, while the expeditionary force of 4,000 men have quickly advanced inside the territory controlled by the separatists. By February 3, 2013 François Hollande arrived

in Bamako and declared that the military operation of the French army in Mali was finished. On August 11, 2013 Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta became the president of Mali, elevated to that position by the French soldiers and French diplomats.

Within the political rhetoric of the official Paris the military intervention was justified first and foremost by the necessity to “fight the Islamic fundamentalism”, as well as by the humanitarian motives of “protection of peaceful citizens of the country” and strive for “restoration of constitutional order” in Mali. The true reasons behind the coup of 2012 and the subsequent intervention were different. The President Amadou Toumani Touré used the arrival of China in Africa to diversify the foreign economic policy of the country and rid the country of the bad buy prices on the ores. He was more and more active in attracting Chinese investments into the Mali economy. Beijing was especially interested in the Mali zone of Sahel due to the rich uranium deposits in the north of the country. The growing sympathy of Amadou Toumani Touré towards China was the real reason for his removal from power.

Advancement of Al-Qaeda into Mali

This infamous terrorist organization has formed in the south of Sahara at the turn of the century. Mali has been considered as the reserve base of Al-Qaeda since 2001, from the beginning of the American intervention into Afghanistan. At the same time, there has been a migration of small groups of well-trained mujahideen over to the Sahel zone. During the spring of 2002 Al-Qaeda has attempted to absorb the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), but emir Hassan Hattab, who led this Islamic terrorist organization, has prevented this from happening, and soon after the Algerian security forces eliminated Abu Muhammad, who was responsible for infiltration of Sahel by Al-Qaeda^[25]. Later in 2004, the Al-Qaeda fighters have made an-

other attempt to establish a foothold in the north of Mali. But at the time the leaders of the Tuareg tribes controlling that territory, following the talks with the government suggested that the fundamentalists leave Mali territory. Fearing an armed conflict and intervention of the Mali army, the fighters have migrated to Niger. Even then several dozen of Tuaregs (Mali citizens) have joined the terrorist ranks. Sometime later, two terrorist groups have emerged in the northern Mali. One of them was comprised of Algerians and was the fighting force of the GSPC, and the other was comprised of Pakistani nationals and was a division of Al-Qaeda. But just a year later, in September 2006 the Salafists declared that they recognize the leadership of Osama bin Laden.

Being as it were, the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was becoming a more noticeable factor in the military and political situation within the region as a whole ^[26], and Mali especially. The huge sums of money that the Islamists were receiving from criminal activities allowed them to recruit supporters from among the leaders of Arab and Tuareg tribes, and attract the “desert knights” into their ranks.

In addition to everything else, the Islamists were interested in Sahel specifically because of the uranium, and that translates into money, and “dirty” bomb. There is no doubt that AQIM and some of the leaders of the Tuareg tribes will attempt to establish a trade for this dangerous material with rogue countries. In February 2012 it became known that Iran has established 19,000 centrifuges for enrichment of uranium in the underground nuclear facility near the city of Qom. In light of the recent talks between the European Union and the six international intermediaries with Iran their future is not yet clear: for now there is only the “agreement from the Iranian side to relocate the centrifuges into the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) controlled facilities” ^[27].

Central African Republic: new uranium peredel?

The uranium ore deposits in Central African Republic were discovered in 1963 near a town of Bakouma in the southeastern part of the country. To survey and develop this deposit, a new joint society was formed in 1969 called Uranium de Bakouma, with participation of the French Atomic Energy Commission, Central African Republic, and a private French mining company. In 1974 the Central African government along with the private French and Swiss Companies and participation of the French Atomic Energy Commission, have established a new joint society Uranium Centrafricaine — URCA). The survey in Bakouma has revealed existence of 15,000 tons of uranium ore. In the near future there are plans to build a refinery and enrichment plant for uranium, capable of processing 1,000 tons of uranium concentrate annually. The special attention towards the uranium deposit in Central Africa is yet again shown by AREVA ^[28].

The events in the Central African Republic were developing according to the script that we are already acquainted with.

In 2003, as a result of another coup, François Bozizé has seized power over the country (later, in May of 2005, he legitimized his position by winning the presidential elections). But despite the seeming legitimacy of the president, the government authority has degraded, and the country has fallen into unrest. The civil war began in 2004, when the rebels from the militarized group Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement — UFDR) lead by Michel Djotodia refused to acknowledge the authority of the coupists. Majority of the rebels belonged to Islam.

In November of 2006, thousands of Christian refugees seeking protection in the capital have stood outside the government building asking the authorities to stand up

to UFDR. But the authorities had neither the strength, nor the political will to oppose the rebels. The conflict was expanding; the combatants captured the towns of Sam Ouandja and Quadda, then continued towards Bria and N'Délé — evidently, the goal of this expedition was the diamond mines located near those cities.

For obvious reasons, France has again involved itself into the conflict. In December of 2006 the military division of the Republic of Chad (remember that the puppet regime of the General Idriss Déby was completely under control of Paris ^[29]) have captured the cities of Bernal and Betoko, and later, in April of 2007 the French Mirages have attacked the headquarters of UFDR in Bria. This motivated Michel Djotodia to sign an agreement with the authorities that provided redistribution of profits from the uranium exports, amnesty for the UFDR, acknowledgment of them as a political party, and integration of the combatants into the national army ^[30].

At the end of 2012, the barely smoldering conflict has burst into flames all over again. The diverse groups of Islamists have united into a coalition under the name of Séléka, led by Michel Djotodia. The union took place under the green flag of Islam, and the conflict gained a clear interconfessional character: the militants of Séléka were pillaging only the Christian villages ^[31]. On December 26, 2012 the citizens of the capital unhappy with Paris' position have stoned the French embassy, demanding that they protect them from the militants. Next day, François Bozizé has called on the United States and France to provide support in the fight against the rebels, the ranks of which were nearing the nation's capital Bangui. But France was not eager to get involved into the conflict: the conflict did not yet reach the desired level.

In the spring of 2013, Michel Djotodia accused François Bozizé in violation of the

former agreements and began advancing towards the capital. The advancement was temporarily halted 50 km. from Bangui thanks to the involvement of the peacekeepers from the neighboring countries. In addition to that, the Economic Community of Central African States has threatened the militants with war. Despite the military assistance provided to the government forces by the Republic of Chad, Gabon, Cameroon, Angola, Congo, and the South African Republic, on March 23 the Islamists have captured Bangui. Next day they have captured the presidential residence, and François Bozizé has fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and later to Cameroon. Michel Djotodia has declared himself the new president of the Central African Republic.

At the time, both the United States and France have declined the request of the Central African Republic's authorities to assist in the fight against the militants; François Hollande had stated that his country will not get involved into the conflict ^[50]. Yet by March 23, 2013 the Élysée Palace decided to send military into the Central African Republic to ensure the safety of the capital's international airport.

Next day, on March 24, 2013 approximately 5,000 militants from the Séléka coalition have entered the capital. Michel Djotodia has spread the statement, which read: «I consider it necessary to suspend the November 27, 2004 constitution, to dissolve parliament as well as the government» ^[32]. On April 1 a new government was formed, and two weeks later the National Transitional Council has declared yet another coupist the president of the Central African Republic.

Even though the situation in Bangui has somewhat stabilized, in the rest of the country the government authority did not exist. The crisis affected the entire country — 4.6 million citizens; 60,000 people fled to the neighboring countries, and 200,000 more

were displaced in their own country. In September of 2013, the fighting has resumed in the north of the country. The militants of the Muslim Séléka were killing, raiding and looting, abduct and torture people. Christians have formed a defense militia called Anti-Balaka, who committed their own terrorism against the Muslim minority. The country was engulfed in an interreligious war, even though the Christians and Muslims in the Central African Republic have always coexisted peacefully. This brings us to thin that the two confessions were put on a collision course by powers driven by the Machiavellian principle of “divide et impera”, the favorite principle of the manipulators of the networks of “Françafrique”.

The political field was cleared, and the managed chaos paralyzed the country; the state was declared “failed”. With a strange naivety François Hollande has stated: “I do not want to point fingers, but we cannot keep in place a president who was not able to do anything ^[to stop the violence], or worse, who let things happen” ^[33]. The French president did not even deem it necessary to conceal the fact that he makes the decision on who is going to be the president of a so-called sovereign nation.

On December 5, 2013 the UN Security Council sanctioned the joint African-French military operation in the Central African Republic. By this time, the French military presence was already significant: on March 24, 2013 the Élysée Palace spokesman Roman Nadal stated that at that particular time there was 1,250 French soldiers in the Central African Republic). On December 7, the French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian stated that there are 1,600 French soldiers in the Central African Republic “and that number will remain there as long as necessary” ^[34] (necessary to protect the interests of France, of course!).

The arrival of French military from the countries of African union did not put an

end to the bloodshed, rather only partially changed the vector of violence. Now it was the Christians that were evening the scores with the Muslims. Over the three days from December 5 to 8, approximately 400 civilians have lost their lives in Bangui alone. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the Anti-Balaka militia blamed the peacekeepers from the Muslim Chad for supporting their brethren and provoked the clashes resulting in casualties from both sides ^[35].

On January 9, 2014, President Michel Djotodia travelled to N’Djamena for the summit of the Economic Community of the Central African States. By Paris’ initiative the participants of the summit have called upon the deputies of the National Transitional Council of the Central African Republic to make an amendment to the temporary constitution that would allow impeaching the president, which was quickly passed. Next day, Michel Djotodia has been removed from power.

Just a week later, the mayor of the nation’s capital Catherine Samba-Panza was elected a new transitional president of the Central African Republic ^[36]. None of the Western supporters of democracy had any doubt as to the legitimacy of these elections! No one questioned that the elections were organized in less than 10 days, in a country overrun by chaos and at the brink of genocide, and that the elections were held under the conditions of a military intervention!

To understand the essence of the events in the Central African Republic, we need to pay attention to the seemingly insignificant events.

In November of 2011, in an attempt to curtail France’s ambitions, the Central African president at the time, François Bozizé has agreed with China on survey and subsequent mining of uranium. At the meeting between the president and the vice-chairman

of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Luo Fuhe they have reached the corresponding agreements. There was a heightened interest towards the Central African uranium from other BRICS countries as well: South African Republic and Russia ^[37].

There is yet another important fact. From the perspective of the geoeconomic interests, up to this point the most attractive in the Central African Republic were the northern oil deposits, including the Doba deposit operated by the American company ExxonMobil. It was this oil deposit that was the cause for a serious confrontation between President François Bozizé and the president of the RSM Petroleum Jack Grynberg (one of America's biggest oil tycoons and the head of the Grynberg Petroleum Company). In the heat of the polemic, the Bangui authorities even threatened the Americans to give the oil deposit to the Chinese ^[38]. After yet another coup, counting on France's support the new head of state Michel Djotodia declared his readiness to "review the earlier contracts with China on development of mineral deposits". But by then, it was too late...

The civil war in the Central African Republic was a result of an active involvement of outside forces ^[48], ^[49]. The "failed state" in the Central African Republic was not an outcome of a coup, but its goal: the purposefully created chaos was used by France as an excuse for military intervention into the "heart of the Dark Continent". Meanwhile, the official goal was the "prevention of interconfessional conflict", while the true goal was to maintain control over the uranium mines.

Conclusion

France is dependent upon nuclear energy as no other industrialized nation. The multiple and powerful nuclear power plants are the foundation of the competitiveness and the

means of survival of the industrial sector of the economy. It is evident that in the cost of French (as in all other) goods lies a very significant energy component. Its growth is directly proportional to the decline in the profitability of the industry. At the same time, the cost of electricity for the industrial sector of France is already noticeably higher than that of Germany: 46 and 36 euros per MW respectively. In 2012, France for the first time in history has become the net importer of energy: more and more of French households and businesses use power from the windmill, solar, and heat power plants of Germany ^[39].

The French practically has no uranium resources of their own, and only count on a shameless plunder of their former colonies. But this fact is becoming clearer to the African states. The former Tunisian ambassador to UNESCO Mezri Haddad has made this comment on the French involvement in Mali: "It is OK if you come and use resources; but it should be done in a way that would profit the locals, and elevate their living standard. But what is taking place is something completely different — it is just a form of slavery" ^[40]. In order to keep their African domains in obedience, the Élysée Palace more often than not has to use its army, which in turn exerts a very negative effect upon the price of the African uranium.

The aggressive economic policy of the new players in the African markets (first and foremost — China) presents yet another serious threat to the French interests. "French companies must go on the offensive and fight the growing influence of rival China for a stake in Africa's increasingly competitive markets, the competitiveness of which grows each day" ^[41] — said the France's Finance Minister Pierre Moscovici. One does not have to be the Delphic oracle to understand who will emerge victorious in this battle. In 2012, the positive foreign trade balance between France and Africa

has decreased, although remained in the black by 1.5 billion euros compared to the 2.9 billion in 2010, and 3.2 billion in 2009. In the same period the trade volume between China and Africa has grown to 166 billion euros or by 83% since 2009^[42]. Even the French themselves seem to understand the fact that France will be unable to permanently maintain control over the Sahel mines: it is explained by the passing of the

law on reduction of the portion of energy produced by the French nuclear power plants to 50%^[43].

All of these things make the situation on the African uranium markets very unpredictable and volatile. Most likely, in the foreseeable future we will witness drastic political and possibly military cataclysms within the countries of Western Sub-Saharan Africa.

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