The first post-colonial Franco-African summit was hosted by President Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1973. The ninth summit, held October 8-9, 1982 in Kinshasa, Zaire, established that France's role in the affairs of the continent has not diminished—indeed, has expanded into new areas—since the Socialist Party came to power in the elections of May 1981. Exemplifying France's unique style and unique clout were these aspects and consequences of the 1982 gathering (now officially titled the “Conference of France and the African States”):

The Widened Circle
A record 37 states participated in the 1982 summit. Of these, 19 (France, Benin, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Upper Volta, and Zaire) were represented by their heads of state. The other 18 (Angola, Cape Verde, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) sent ministerial-level delegations.

Originally conceived as an intimate gathering to discuss “family” matters with the leaders of former colonies that have retained close economic, monetary, and security ties with Paris, the circle has been expanded, especially in 1981 and 1982, to embrace all of the nations of Africa with which France has or is cultivating mutually rewarding relationships. Although non-francophone participants were designated as “observers,” the categories were non-operative in the actual proceedings. Zaire, whose president hosted this year's summit, was the Belgian Congo during the colonial era. Other participants whose ties with France have developed largely since independence included two besides Zaire that had been ruled by Belgium (Rwanda and Burundi), 10 formerly British-ruled states, all five of Africa’s lusophone states, and Equatorial (formerly Spanish) Guinea. The first-time attendance of Nigeria, represented by Foreign Minister Ishaya Audu, was viewed as a significant indicator that more cordial relations have been developed between Paris and Lagos on policy issues during the past year, and also underscored the fact that Nigeria is now France's major trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa.

Absentees
Invitations to the Kinshasa summit were sent by Zaire’s President Mobutu Sese Seko to all member-states of the Organization of African Unity. Of the 14 governments that declined for various reasons, four are historically linked to France: (1) Algeria, which has cordial relations with Paris but could not swallow Mobutu's recent resumption of diplomatic and other links with Israel; (2) Madagascar, whose present government views the summit as a neocolonial phenomenon that should not be encouraged; (3) Cameroon, whose (then) president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, did not revise the position he has taken since 1973 that the mixed colonial heritage of his republic (a merger of the former British and French Cameroons) rendered it impolitic to attend the more exclusive Franco-African gatherings of the pre-Mitterrand period; and (4) Guinea, despite President Sekou Touré’s formal acceptance and the developing rapprochement with Paris symbolized by Touré’s recent first official visit to France since independence in 1958. (There were unofficial reports that Touré stayed away in protest against the failure of the French government to control demonstrations by dissident Guinean exiles during his official visit to Paris in July 1982.)

Why Mobutu?
In contrast to the pattern of previous summits (for dates and venue, see page 3), where France played the role of catalyst and orchestrator of sessions that primarily celebrated the mutual rewards of Franco-African relations and ironed out problems and misunderstandings in the francophone family, the
1982 invitations went out from President Mobutu, who also acted as chairman.

Analysts were not certain what to make of President Mitterrand's decision to hold the 1982 summit in Kinshasa, and to accord such a central role to the African leader whose record of political abuse and economic mismanagement has been a major target of the French Socialist Party over many years. One reason, of course, was that the 1981 summit, scheduled for Kinshasa by the government of President Giscard d'Estaing, was shifted to Paris after the election that swept the Socialists into power. Mitterrand's explanation was that he especially wanted the heads of state to be his guests in the year that marked his "reunion with Africa."

From the beginning, when Mobutu's Israeli-trained presidential guard in full dress uniform lined the facade of the Chinese-built People's Palace to present arms to each arriving delegation, to the reading of the final communique as Presidents Mitterrand and Mobutu sat side by side, the message seemed to be that realpolitik considerations have led yet another French president to the conclusion that Zaire (and thus, as long as Mobutu is in charge, Mobutu) cannot be left to flounder into the chaos of a Chad. The test of French policy will not really come, however, until there is a Shaba III—or a Kinshasa I.

Family Matters

With 37 delegations seated around the table, the Kinshasa meeting lost some of its exclusivity, and some francophone "family" matters were dealt with outside the formal sessions. Two states that arrived with grievances were Chad and the Central African Republic; in both cases, French budgetary support to pay civil servants' salaries and French commitments to the security of the regimes have been more equivocal than either would like.

On the divisive issue of Hissene Habré's claim to be recognized as Chad's head of state, President Mobutu seized the initiative by sending Habré an unequivocal personal invitation to represent Chad at the summit, and subsequently succeeded (over initial French objections) in incorporating a reference to the Chad issue into the final communique. Moreover, the communique used Habré's and Mobutu's terminology calling for "reconstruction" rather than the "reconciliation" preferred by the French.

Factors contributing to the French acquiescence to the summit's implicit recognition of Habré's ascendency to power by virtue of his having taken Chad's capital city on June 7 were said to include the following: (1) a 45-minute private meeting between President Mitterrand and Habré, in which the Chadian leader reportedly pressed the case that his military victory had rendered political negotiations with defeated rivals of lesser priority than the economic assistance urgently needed to reconstruct his shattered country; (2) Mitterrand's basic policy of recognizing states rather than individuals; and (3) the age-old French tradition of realpolitik. There was no French commitment at Kinshasa, however, to major budgetary support of a salvage operation for Chad's economy. Moreover, subsequent developments—notably the polarization of the OAU membership over the right of Habré to take Chad's seat that resulted in the collapse of the second attempt to convene a nineteenth OAU Assembly in Libya at the end of November—confront France with new policy dilemmas.

The OAU Crisis

The Organization of African Unity crisis (see "Where Does the OAU Go From Here?" in CSIS Africa Notes, No. 3, September 1, 1982) was not on the Kinshasa agenda and was not mentioned in the final communique. To applause from the assembled leaders, President Mitterrand established in his address to the opening session that it would be inappropriate for a meeting held under the aegis of a non-African power to pontificate on the internal affairs of the OAU: "The conference of the heads of state of Africa and France has no intention of serving as a substitute for anyone and particularly not for the OAU. We have neither the mandate nor the intention to do this."

Despite these disclaimers, the fact that many of the states which boycotted the aborted nineteenth summit in Tripoli in August were present in Kinshasa rendered it inevitable that the major extracurricular topic would be the future of the OAU. The unofficial consensus was that the organization must survive at all costs—a consensus reflected in the subsequent (albeit again unsuccessful) efforts to marshal a quorum of OAU heads of state in Tripoli in late November. OAU bridge-building at Kinshasa was handicapped by the absence of some of the key players—notably Algeria, Libya, Guinea's Sekou Touré, and OAU Chairman Daniel arap Moi of Kenya.

The Center Ring

Most of what goes on at Franco-African summits (and, indeed, most African summits) takes place in the corridors, bilateral talks, and caucuses. But there is also a center ring—the plenary sessions on which the final communique is based. At Kinshasa, the focus of President Mitterrand's major address at the opening session and much of the subsequent discussion was Africa's economic crisis—specifically the deteriorating terms of trade, the state of the international monetary system, inflation, and recession. Franc zone members were particularly concerned about rumors of a third devaluation of the French franc before the end of the year.

Contrary to expectations, the Namibia negotiations generated little debate at Kinshasa. One explanation was that the Frontline states most directly involved were represented at ministerial rather than presidential level.

Mitterrand as "Economic Liberator"

A major weakness of U.S. policymaking with regard to Africa is the uncertainty created by many hands competing for the rudder that steers the decision-making process in Washington. Conversely, a major strength of France in Africa is that there has been no doubt since the days of de Gaulle that the basic thrust and style of French relations with Africa are set at the
Élysée Palace rather than the Quai d'Orsay. In the pattern of his predecessors, President Mitterrand maintains a special Africa bureau which serves as a direct channel between African heads of state and the president of France. And although there are some new faces since the Socialists came to power, enough of the Élysée's old-boy establishment has been kept in place to assure Africa's leaders that continuity and reliability remain basic to France's relationship with the continent. Since he became president in 1981, Mitterrand has reinforced this image by making official visits to eight African countries (Algeria, Niger, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo) and has confirmed that he will add Morocco, Egypt, Togo, Benin, and Gabon to the list in late 1982 and early 1983.

At Kinshasa, the one certainty that emerged from the varied plenary addresses, the bilateral conversations, the regional caucuses, the informal corridor exchanges, and the diffuse final communiqué was that President Mitterrand was the focal point of reference throughout. President Mobutu’s welcoming address was quite specific on this: “Recall, please, 1958—24 years ago—when General de Gaulle in Brazzaville ... tolled the bell for colonialism by giving a decisive orientation to the political destiny of the French-African states. That was in the political sphere. You are in Kinshasa today in different spheres—economic and security. In this case, Mr. President, we do not want to consider you simply as the French President, but we want you to be the one to usher in a new era by guaranteeing the security of African states to the advantage of their economic development ... Henceforth, Kinshasa will see you as the guarantor of the security of African states and the privileged advocate on whom they can count internationally for the defense of their economic interests.”

The mantle of economic liberator was accepted by Mitterrand with little further prompting and surprising vigor. He restated French support for international commodity agreements, stabilization of world prices, and North-South dialogue. Stressing the need to prepare for the 1983 renegotiation of the second Lomé Convention between the European Community and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific states, he pledged his support to the ACP states. He struck out at the lack of an adequate sense of responsibility toward Africa and other countries of the Third World in the current economic policies of the United States, observing *inter alia*: “Today [the dollar] is a dominant currency that does not respond in any way to economic realities. It is a currency of speculation that weighs heavily on the exchange rates of those who must obtain their primary resources [with] this currency. It is a currency that, having achieved this status, seems not to have understood its duty because by its unconsidered and erratic movements it leaves most of the world’s countries, above all the developing countries, in a practically intolerable situation.”

Continuity and Change in French Policy
French policy under the Socialist administration is still, as it was under predecessor regimes, a sometimes immiscible combination of caring idealism and economic self-interest. Until the cabinet reshuffle of December 8, 1982, the official given primary responsibility for translating into practice the principle that economic development of the Third World is the essential prerequisite to political security was Minister of Cooperation and Development Jean-Pierre Cot, whose mandate was expanded to cover all developing countries rather than just those with which France has post-colonial cooperation agreements. In a related development, the government pledged to increase the proportion of GNP spent on public aid to Third World countries to .53 percent in 1983 (about $3 billion), rising to .7 percent of GNP by the end of Mitterrand's seven-year term in 1988 (with .15 percent of GNP to go to the poorest countries, many of which are African).

With the broadening of the development mandate, the vocabulary associated with “cooperation”—the umbrella term used to characterize the close links in various fields with former colonies—underwent some adjustments. Cot began to speak of “decolonizing cooperation” to remove the stigma of “neocolonialism” from existing agreements and those reached in the future. At the same time, he justified the new outward reach of France’s economic and commercial horizons beyond the traditional francophone domain by emphasizing the commercial opportunities that would be opened up for French business. In sum, more aid to more countries means more development which means more trade.

Cot’s Resignation
Cot’s December 8 resignation was the culmination of an accumulation of differences between his ministry and the presidency regarding specific aspects of African policy. Cot, who made a point of carrying the Amnesty International annual report with him when he travelled in Africa, objected to the continued links with South Africa, thought that France should take a
stronger stand in favor of multiparty democracies, questioned the rapprochement with Guinea’s Sekou Touré, made no secret of his dismay at the implicit endorsement of Mobutu’s rule at Kinshasa, argued that Paris should have taken a stronger stand on the harsh sentences recently passed on political dissidents in Gabon, and has been among those questioning how much budgetary support France should commit to the regimes now in power in Chad and the Central African Republic. Conversely, some veteran Africanists in the government were concerned that the expanded tiers-mondiste mandate he sought and was granted was too general, spreading France too thin and carrying special risks for the francophone countries of Africa. (This is not a new argument, since both Pompidou and later Giscard d'Estaing were inclined to place greater emphasis on French commercial and mercantile interests than had de Gaulle. De Gaulle's primary concern was to implant French influence on the African continent in congenial territories for political and strategic reasons, with relatively little concern for the cost.)

Cot’s replacement by Christian Nucci, 43, reaffirms the traditional supremacy of the Élysée in African policymaking, and will permit Paris to speak once again in harmony on African policy issues. Nucci, who was Commissioner for the Overseas Territory of New Caledonia prior to the ministerial appointment, has close associations with Mitterrand.

Relations with the United States
Although President Mitterrand spoke critically and at length of U.S. policies on North-South issues at Kinshasa (and Minister of External Relations Claude Cheysson made a point of publicly disassociating France from the U.S. position on linkage of a Cuban withdrawal from Angola to a Namibia settlement during a Nairobi stopover), reports of profound Franco-American differences over Namibia should be treated with caution. The evidence suggests that France has concluded that it is only a matter of time before the issue of Namibian independence is settled. Since the United States has the ideological commitment and the economic clout to take on the thankless task of pushing the case for the Cuban removal, France is busily laying the groundwork to play a major role in supplying the Western technical assistance that Angola will need to develop its potentially rich economy. This is a classic example of French pragmatism, and nothing more.

The Next Summit
The Kinshasa summit, with President Mobutu in the chair, reflected a relaxed French view of the 1982 gathering as a forum for the informal debate of issues that reached far beyond the immediate concerns of the francophone countries. The subsequent resignation of President Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon and the November 7 coup in Upper Volta have provided new reminders that France's role as the linchpin of the francophone family is still the basic building block of its broader African aspirations. Like it or not, some special attention will be required in the year ahead to ensure that the strands uniting the core group do not become frayed. Africanists within the Élysée and the administration who favor the more restricted focus of French policy in the pre-Mitterrand period will continue to press their case.

One prediction can be made with certainty. The formal and informal agenda of next year's summit in Paris will be more controllable than it was in 1982 under Mobutu's chairmanship.

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