

MASTER'S EXAMINER REPORT

GPS – Geopolitical Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	France's new strategy in the Francophone countries of Sub-Saharan Africa as a reaction to the growing anti-French sentiment.
Name of Student:	Mathieu Mouton
Referee (incl. titles):	Martin Riegl
Report Due Date:	10.9.2024

The submitted work does not show signs of plagiarism.

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the four numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Contribution and argument:

The thesis presents a highly topical and relevant issue from a broader strategic perspective, which is the ongoing French withdrawal from the Western Sahel. It is a widely discussed topic in the academic literature, with major regional to global implications, and also has implications for the EU-led crisis management operations. Recently, a number of analyses and policy briefs have been published on Russia's growing influence in Mali, Niger or Burkina Fasso, with the aim of better understanding Moscow's strategic objectives and the potential impact on the West's position in the region. However, Mathieu provides well-informed and detailed insights into the root cause of the changing geopolitical regional balance. He presents a critique of the French approach to security in the region, which in the eyes of local populations and elites has led to divergent security paradigms, and argues that Paris has failed to adapt to this trend.

The added value of Mathieu's work is not only in his analysis of the factors that led to the reorientation of the foreign policy of the aforementioned countries from Paris to Moscow, but he also provides concrete recommendations for the future policy and approach of France, which is still a natural partner for the Sahel countries due to its linguistic, cultural or economic ties. The critical tone of the conclusion, and in particular the author's argument that the diplomatic breakdown between France and the Sahel countries is a consequence of the fact that French African policy has been in crisis for several decades, is by no means trivial. On the contrary, most policymakers at the turn of the century were unaware of this. At the same time, it is a highly complicated topic that requires knowledge of behind-the-scenes motivations and relationships that often remain hidden and difficult to analyse in academic papers.

2) Theoretical and methodological framework:

Two research questions were set to explain Moscow's role in the sudden rise of anti-French sentiment, and a second question to test three hypotheses: whether the new strategy for Africa announced by the Elysee Palace could halt this trend. To show whether Paris is doomed to lose its influence and Moscow is set to win this beauty contest, the author examined three case studies of the Central African Republic, Chad and Madagascar. Each case differs in geographic location, history and the degree of current Russian influence, and the degree of French interest and involvement. At the same time, all of these countries have several common features that make the comparison meaningful. With regard to the subject matter, this is not a work that would exhibit a rigid application of theory and methods, which on the one hand would enhance the academic feel of the work, but such an approach would necessarily lead to an overly formal approach and would not contribute substantially to the content.

3) Sources and literature:

Author has gathered a sufficient amount of primary as well as secondary sources and proves his ability to critically analyze them throughout the paper. Given Mathieu's language background, the obvious added value of the paper is the extensive use of francophone sources.

4) Manuscript form and structure:

The submitted thesis meets all formal requirements for a master's thesis, including the scope of the text, logical continuity of chapters or formal editing of the text.

5) Quality of presentation

The linguistic and stylistic level is of high quality, which is also evident from the fact that the author is a native speaker.

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Contribution (research quality, analysis, and conclusions) (max. 40 points)</i>	33
<i>Theoretical and methodological framework (max. 25 points)</i>	17
<i>Sources and literature (max. 10 points)</i>	10
<i>Manuscript form and structure (max. 15 points)</i>	15
<i>Quality of presentation (grammar, style, coherence) (max. 10 points)</i>	10
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	85
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	B

Suggested questions for the defence are:

I (do not) recommend the thesis for final defence.

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.