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THE SAHEL REGION: AFRICAN FRENCH RELATIONS AND THE BARKHANE OPERATION IN FOCUS

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Introduction:

Lying between the Sahara and Central Africa, the Sahel, 'shore' in Arabic (al Sàhil), has borders that, far from being stabilized and fixed, are rather fluctuating. Thus, the Sahel of climatologists is not that of European experts that of development agencies is not that of local leaders, nor that of military intervention forces. In reality, there is no single Sahel, but from one actor to another, the contours of the map are redrawn. The Sahel has become the "center of convergence" of policies, conflict management initiatives and counterterrorism interventions, to which dozens of programs or peacekeeping missions developed by a wide range of international actors have been added[1].
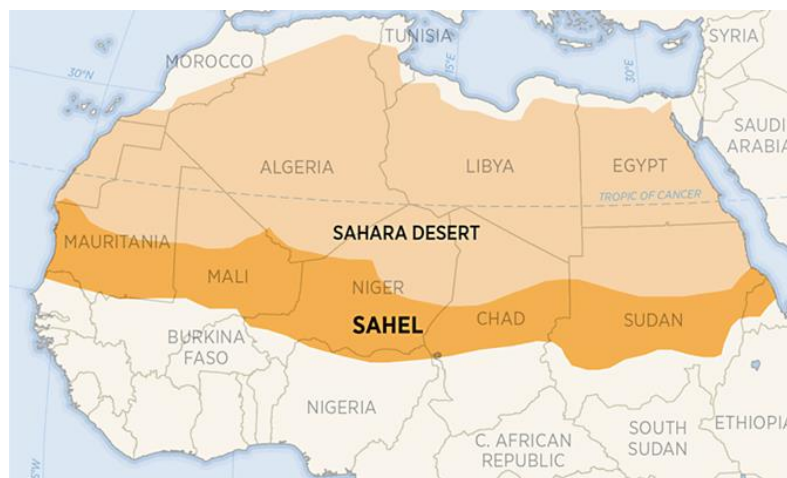
Source: World.Atlas.fr

Called from time-to-time North-West Africa, Sahel, or Sahara-Sahel, the Sahel is today subdivided by artificial borders. But it is also a space of contact between the nomadic universe of white Africa in the north ("Bilad el-Beidan") and the sedentary societies of the south (Bilad-el-Sudan) and a crossroads of transnational exchanges of men and goods. It has gone from being seen as a marginal area of the African continent to becoming a place where challenges and threats to international security: in a geographical cacophony, the Sahel is perceived as a mutable entity with fluctuating boundaries, or as a regional phenomenon delimited by exchanges between communities, the "Limes" of Europe, the frontier of Islam in Africa, a place of experimentation in the humanitarian sphere, or the 2002 space of crisis within the framework

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[1] Baldaro Edoardo, *Sahel: geopolitiche di una crisi, Carocci Editore*, 2022, pg 11-12

of the global war on terror. The Sahel is thus a scenario in which various actors project their own priorities and projects, often in competition with each other.

Chapter 1: Sahel Region, Three Imaginaries

I.   Three spatial images

Different spatial imaginaries define the Sahel and lead to various mappings of the area, including or excluding a state: the geometry of the region is thus extremely variable.

The United States, in 2002 initially named the area consisting of Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad the Sahel (Pan-Sahel Initiative). It later included the 'trans-Saharan' region from Algeria to Nigeria.

The EU's first Sahel strategy in 2011[2], on the other hand, covers only Mauritania, Mali and Niger and then includes Chad and Burkina Faso in 2015. The same year, the Sahel cell of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs is created for relations with Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad.

In parallel, the vision of the region also changes over time for the other actors: in 2005-07, the local branch of al-Qaeda takes the name 'al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb', emphasizing the continuity in Mali of the jihad proclaimed in Algeria. Ten years later, the local branch of the Islamic State named itself 'Islamic State in the Greater Sahara' (ISGS).

A third actor in the competition that has emerged in the jihadist galaxy, the Katiba Macina born around 2015, carries out the fight in the Macina, the historical region between Mali and Burkina Faso.[3] The continental organizations, the African

Source: LeMonde.fr

Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the G5 Sahel also

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[2] http://eeas.europa.eu/index_en.htm

[3] Edoardo Baldaro, Sahel: *geopolitiche di una crisi. Jihadismo, fragilità statale e intervento internazionale*, Ed. Carocci, 2022.

[4]devise crisis response strategies by proposing alternative areas of intervention, sometimes including a space ranging from Libya to Côte d'Ivoire or just the territories of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad.

Finally, other visions of [5]a socially constructed space lead to the identification of the Sahel as the southern border of Europe, or as an area of Algerian influence, or even as a set of neo-patrimonial spaces.

Thus, we find ourselves in an arena defined as a regional security complex where different actors converge, drawing up projects and exploring different securitization processes, each with a specific solution. Behind this geographical competition, there is therefore a political struggle to redefine governance, management and organization and to build a region corresponding to its needs and purposes.

The Sahel can thus be interpreted as a region in the process of reconfiguration, a place of interactions and clashes between different spatial imaginaries elaborated by international actors, jihadist groups or even local regimes with very different political and security projects. If security can also be understood as a 'technique of governance' insofar as defining the threat or advancing one's own 'truth' with respect to security potentially redefines the power relations between different actors here, we are faced with at least three interpretations.

Three different Regional Projects: international actors/ jihadists/ local heads of state

In order to contain and counter migratory flows and insurgencies in the 'ungoverned' Sahelian spaces, international security actors have aimed to reinforce and control historically porous borders. The United States, France, and the European Union have operated a process of securitisation by identifying a core of states - Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad - considered as an autonomous system in the grip of shared threats[6].

The expression 'Sahelistan' thus [7]designates an area of conflict located at Europe's southern border but ready to expand from Lake Chad to the Algerian desert, the frontline of the War on Terror, the site of all trafficking destined to destabilise the continent.

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[4] Bagayoko, *Le multilatéralisme sécuritaire africain à l'épreuve de la crise sahélienne* : un rapport du projet Stabiliser le Mali, 2019.
[5] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eu-racc-sahel/common-border-security-sahel-matters-europe_en?s=4439
[6] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eu-racc-sahel/common-border-security-sahel-matters-europe_en?s=4439
[7] Sahel and Afghanistan, used in July 2012 during a speech by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius.

In opposition to this regional project, and simultaneously with the separatist insurgencies, Jihadist insurgencies emerged from the Salafist armed groups that played a leading role in the Algerian civil war (1991-2002). Initially they split between Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State to gradually integrate themselves into the social and economic context, rejecting the forms of space management of their adversaries and positioning themselves as the power centres of a new system of order, in a process of 'Sahelialisation' of the region. After the conquest of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu, these groups have become hybrids - AQMI, Ansar Dine and MUJAO - and aim to flood, conquer and exercise power in accordance with the dictates of Islam but with a local agenda?.[8]

The third actors are local regimes often of an authoritarian and neo-patrimonial nature where only the institutionalization of new forms of international cooperation can guarantee the survival of governmental elites. Using appropriation strategies to strengthen their own positions of power, they make the regional project of international actors their own. United by the will to strengthen their state sovereignty and to maximize material and symbolic gains, the heads of state of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, competing for security and development strategies with the African Union or ECOWAS, have created the G5 Sahel.

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[8] D. Eizenga and W. Williams, *The Puzzle of JNIM and Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel*, No 38. Dec 2020. file:///Users/

II.   Historical Dynamics

This competition around the definition of the Sahel fits within a long series of constructions that have shaped it for centuries, and it is necessary here to reconstruct a "genealogy" of the region that highlights how certain narratives still influence current conflicts today.

The first empire to arise in Senegal and Mauritania was the Ghana Empire in the 9th century. It ruled over the region until c. 1078 and was the first to organize and control trans-Saharan

trade along the western route through present-day Mauritania and Morocco. Its decline is linked to the rise of the Almoravid kingdom in the

Source: https://legrandcontinent.eu/
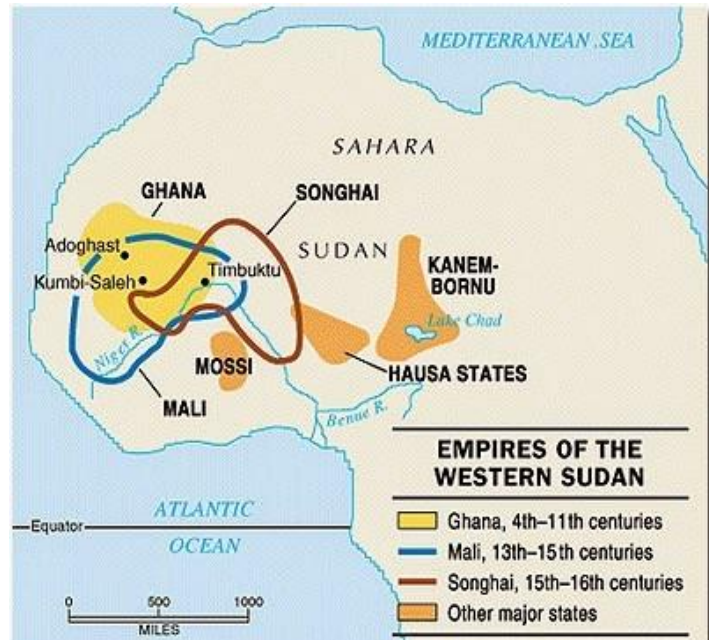
western Maghreb around the 12th century.The Mande Empire of Mali (c.1235-c.-1670), successor to the Ghanaian Empire, linked up with the Almoravids, and shifted trade to the Niger River basin, creating new routes and turning cities such as Gao or Timbuktu into leading commercial and cultural centers.

In the 16th century, the term "Sahel" appears in two Arab travel chronicles chronicling the fates of the Mali Empire and the Songhai Empire. It is not until the 1600s that the word "Sahel" will be adopted in the Bambara, Peul, and Tamasheq oral traditions.[9]

After a struggle among vassal states, the Songhai empire (1468-1591) emerged, extending from Cameroon to the Maghreb and forming the largest kingdom in West African history.

Following the invasion of Morocco's Saadi dynasty, its territory fragments but the North African kingdom will fail to maintain control over the lands south of the Sahara. An era of fragmentation would follow, lasting until the arrival of the French colonizer in 1901.

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[9] Ki- Zerbo Joseph. *Histoire de l'Afrique noire*. Ed. Hatier. 1972

To the east, at the shores of Lake Chad, the Kanem-Bornu kingdom (9th-19th centuries) asserted itself in the central Sahel area, and the Haoussa city-states coexisted with difficulty. Central within these empires is the control exercised over the trade routes through which salt, gold, textiles, dates and slaves pass.[10]

As a Way of Connection

The Sahel, this fluctuating margin according to climatic episodes is for merchants crossing the immensity of the Sahara the place of markets as open ports on the desert to the north and connections with the forest kingdoms to the south along roads controlled by "empires." The separation between Sahara and Sahel, the historical pivot of the empires supplying North Africa with luxury products and slaves is clear : Sahil will be the "shore" of the Sahara or great "sea of sand "stretching from West Africa to the Red Sea for more than 4,000 km, along a line of "market-cities" and a system of crossroads and with two levels of circulation: long distance and "ant-hill."[11]

Source: https://www.prb.org/
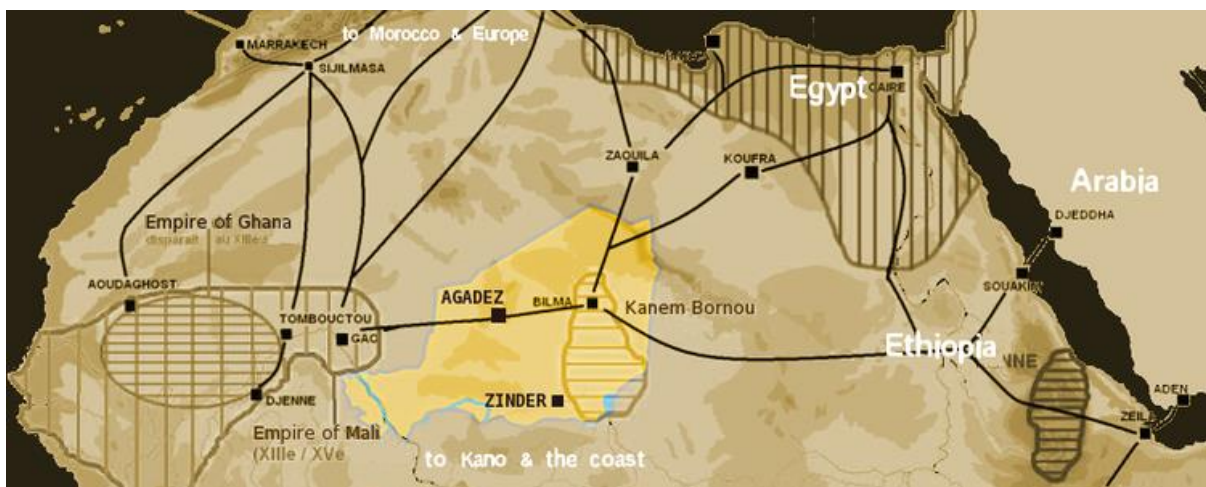
This autonomous geopolitical entity can thus be ascribed a dual nature, i.e., barrier but also connecting space. Within it, flexible boundaries separate centers of power where authority is exercised based on trade and mobility, controlling vast reservoirs of slave approvals : on the

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[10] Adu Bohaen A., *Histoire Générale de l' Afrique – VOL VII* – Ed . UNESCO, 1987
[11] Bernard Nantet, *D'un Sahel à l'autre*-– Books.openedition.org

one hand rich urban centers, (Ghadames, Mzab, Sidjilmassa in the north, Timbuktu, Oualata, Tegdaoust in the south) seats of power on trade routes and on the other predated peripheries.[12]

Tuareg

The heart of the central-western Sahara, between Mali, Niger, Algeria, Libya and Burkina Faso, has been dominated for more than a millennium by the Tuareg, a nomadic population of Berber origin who speak Tamasheq. There is no Tuareg pattern but groups that belong to the same culture and speak the same language : There will be Kel tamasheq (those who speak tamasheq), or Kel tigelmust (those who wear the veil)...Extremely hierarchical, Tuareg society is divided into 3 real castes : Imajaghan or nobles who have a monopoly on arms and dromedaries, Imghad or vassals who practice animal husbandry, and Iklan or slaves obtained as war prizes. Fratricidal wars and raids between the "federations" that make up the immense Tuareg puzzle occurred : Kel Dinnik versus Kel Ahaggar, Kel Ajjer (Tassili) versus Kel Air, Kel Gress, Ifoghas, etc.

Their identity was built around their function as "passeurs" or escorts of the great caravans, and they thus elaborated a management of space based on exercising the right of passage through the connecting routes and occupying the nodal points of transnational trade networks.

However, this model proved difficult to reconcile with the modern territorialized conception of political power, fueling conflicts among populations even today.[13]

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[12]Denis Retaillé, Olivier Walther *Terrorisme au Sahel. De quoi parle-t-on?- L'information géographique* 2011/3.

[13] Edmond Bernus- *Pastteurs et guerriers des sables* - Ed. Berger-Levrault Les Touaregs -

Islam

These intensive trade exchanges with the Arab Muslim world facilitated the spread of Islam and thus a common Islamic heritage was established. Converted to Islam in the 11th century, Mali's emperors were devout Muslims and many made pilgrimages to Mecca. The most famous was Mansa Musa, whose pilgrimage in 1324 was widely discussed in the Maghreb and Egypt until the end of the century. Mansa Musa lived in great style, with a retinue of about 10,000 people; he and his retinue completely

Source: https://www.prb.org/
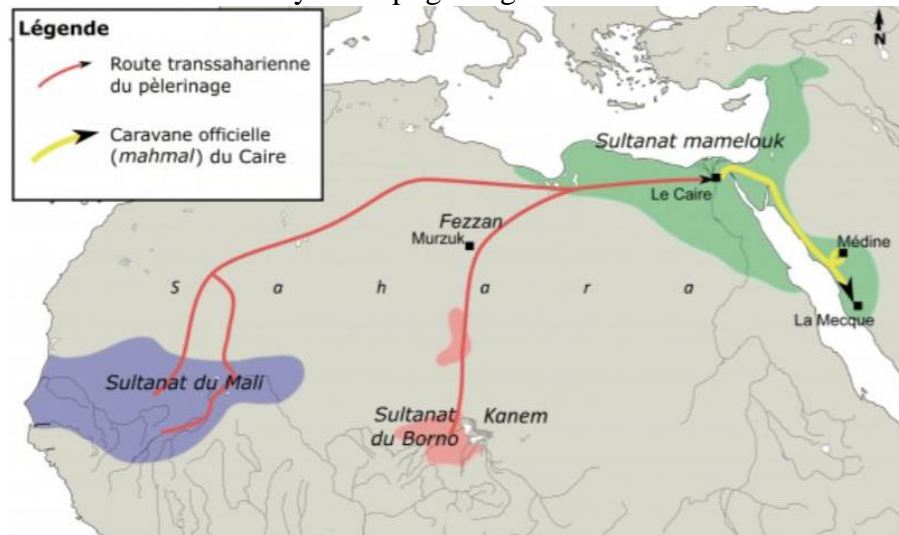
flooded the Egyptian capital with so much gold that the value of the dinar collapsed.

This 'Islam "adapted" by the ruling classes of the Mali and Songhai empires is absorbed by the Sahelian populations to become a profound identity engine in the region to this day. Centuries later, the spread of Christianity with colonial forces will lead to the emergence of another frontier, one based on religious confession.[14]

As a Barrier between Civilization and Barbarism

The Sahelo-Saharan space is not only a connector between different worlds, but for centuries has been interpreted as a barrier between Mediterranean civilization and the Africa of "barbarism." Greek and later Roman culture saw the Sahara as a boundary between a civilized world and an anarchic world. Even in the medieval Arab world, North African scholars including Ibn Khaldun distinguished a white and civilized North Africa and a black and savage

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[14] Niane, Djibril Tamsir, *The Different aspects of Islamic culture, v. 6, pt. I: Islam in the world today, retrospective of the evolution of Islam and the Muslim world*, p 53-62.

Africa, reinforcing the idea of Arab Muslim superiority , a powerful justification for the slave trade.

Savage heath "badiyya" in Arab sources, the Sahelo-Saharan space therefore had to be "normalized" through the religious principles of Islam thus legitimizing wars against Sahelian empires.

The French colonial empire [15]also sought to organize the administration of its conquests by dividing the territory into two main areas: a "white" Arab North Africa and a "non-civilized" black Africa to the south. Further division was implemented by military administrators who identified the axes of military expansion along the Niger and Senegal rivers and the caravan routes of former empires. Following these guidelines, France divided the historic core of the Sahel into two administrations: French West Africa (AOF) and French Equatorial Africa (AEF).

Crisis and Intervention Space

Between January and December of 1960, no fewer than 17 countries in sub-Saharan Africa gained independence from European colonial powers, including 14 former French colonies. With the end of colonization and independence comes a new phase , but the Sahel is soon reconfigured by outside observers. The World Bank and large organizations inspired by the Bretton Woods system redefine it as a region of extreme poverty where new development schemes can be tested. In an attempt to "modernize," regional production specialization programs are initiated with the result of creating a separation between a productive South, the recipient of development policies, and a useless North left behind where state sovereignty imposes nomadic sedentarization and deportations.

With the great drought of the 1970s[16], production systems are disrupted, famine causes thousands of victims and lays the foundations of the migratory flows on which the great transnational trafficking of drugs, weapons and human beings will be grafted from the year 2000 onward. Famine and the inability of local states to manage it offers a coherent picture of the region, poverty becoming its unifying factor : archetype of a sinister region. In 1973, the United Nations Economic and Social Council defines the geographical framework for

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[15] Pluchon Pierre, *Histoire de la colonisation française*, tome 1. Le Premier Empire colonial des origines à la restauration. 1991.
[16] FAO Rapport 1973

humanitarian aid : the Sahel will be composed of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Alto-Volta (Burkina Faso), Niger and Chad. The Sahel becomes a space-laboratory and the birthplace and strengthening place of many nongovernmental organizations-Médecins sans frontières, Amnesty International, World Vision, and Care.[17]

On the other hand, the democratic breakthroughs of the 1990s foster civil liberties that lead to the rise of Salafist proselytism supported by the Gulf countries. [18]Sharia law is institutionalized in the federated states of the Sahelian North while in Algeria the civil war sees the authoritarian regime and Islamic movements confront each other, later moving into the Sahelian territories of Mauritania and Mali. At the same time, regimes such as Qaddafi's Libya and Omar Bachir's Sudan cultivated insurrectionary Islamism. When the United States determines in 2001-2002 that the Sahel will be one of the fronts in the war against global jihad, the region becomes a site of securitarian crisis.

III.   Ungoverned Space to Contain

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, it shifts within the U.S. strategic framework from being a site of humanitarian crisis to a threat-generating space. The main theatres of the global war on terror, made up of distant and multifaceted interventions, include Africa, the "soft underbelly" of the world of terrorism. The narrative that saw the Sahel as a place of chaos open to external conquest and control is transformed, and African "barbarism" becomes a threat to the whole of international security[19]. "Sahelistan" is part of this picture, and for the next two decades it will be the theatre of global warfare, the space of military intervention for French security policies, and a laboratory for the management of the European Union's southern border.

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[17] UNESCO Report, 1975 , pp 13.

[18] Jean-Louis Triaud, L.A.Villalón, *L'islam subsaharien entre économie morale et économie de marché : contraintes du local et ressources du global,* Dans Afrique contemporaine 2009/3 (n° 231), pages 23 à 42

[19] Rice S.E., *The Africa Battle*, in " The Washington Post", 12/11/2001

Mappatura di Gruppi armati in Mali e Sahel

Gruppi non-Jihadisti
CMA *Coalition des Mouvements de l'Azawad*
CME *Coordination des Mouvements de l'Entente*
Plateforme Piattaforma
Dan Na Ambassagou

EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
ecfr.eu
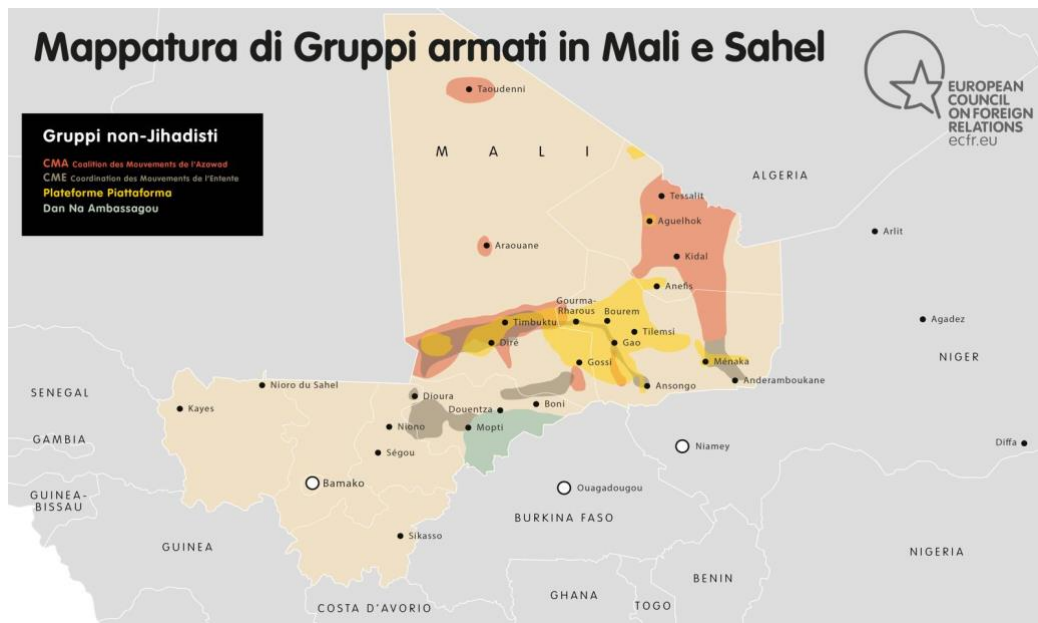
Source: ecfr.eu

Added to this narrative is the concept of an "ungoverned space" composed of "fragile states." [20]In the 1990s, the idea arose that part of the global South had entered a phase of chaos capable of threatening the liberal global order established at the end of the Cold War. Against the ideal of the Western Westphalian state, these "fragile" or "failed" states offer institutional frames incapable of exercising sovereign functions and authority within their own state, as well as posing a danger to the international system. In this vacuum, areas are created where terrorists and criminals can insert themselves. Where there is "lawlessness and lack of government capacity," "terrorist sanctuaries" are born.(U.S. Congress)[21]

Interventions in these new theatres must therefore be transformative and normative, reforming both institutions and local governance, strengthening the capacities of local states, and securing ungoverned spaces by strengthening their military capabilities.

Since the new millennium, these three interconnected imaginaries have been interpreting the Sahel : a front for the war on terror for the United States, a border to be sealed for the European Union, and a space for military intervention for France.

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[20] Newman, E. *Failed States and International Order: Constructing a Post-Westphalian World.* Contemporary Security Policy, 30, 421-443 (2009).
[21] https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf, 2004 , pp 365-366

USA: African Front of War on Terror
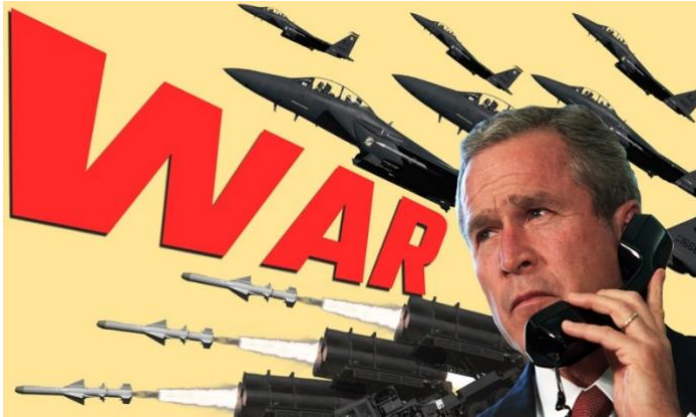
Coining the phrase "War on terror" was George Bush in reference to the strategy the United States intended to pursue against anti-Western Islamic terrorist organizations and the states that harboured and financed them. It is characterized as unconventional asymmetrical conflict: a state or coalition of states against territorially unidentifiable organizations.

The key act is the launch of the Pan-Sahel Initiative operating in 2003[22]. Within the international War on Terror framework, African countries are identified for an action plan aimed at re-establishing state control over territories and borders. For Africa, the Defense Department, influenced by Algerian intelligence, places the area between Mali, Mauritania and Algeria as the second most dangerous after Somalia. During the two-year run, PSI has a small budget (about $10 million) and essentially provides equipment, apparatus for logistics and training for border control.

The GSPC (Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat), born during the Algerian civil war is already present in the area in the early 2000s. In 2007 it transformed into al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) but its activities still remain limited.

To integrate counterterrorism, development and diplomacy, AFRICOM (United States Command), a military command responsible for missions in Africa, is created. In 2005, PSI is complemented by the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI), which broadens the theater of action to include Niger, Chad, Senegal, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Morocco in the program, joined by Burkina Faso (2009) and Cameroon (2014). With funding of $350 million, the TSCTI implements training and equipment programs but also development aid projects, public diplomacy initiatives, and training for [23]officials and local elites with a view to fostering good

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[22] Stephen Ellis, *Briefing: The Pan-Sahel Initiative,* African Affairs Vol. 103, No. 412 (Jul., 2004), pp. 459-464

[23] https://www.state.gov/trans-sahara-counterterrorism-partnership/

management and governance practices.

Over the last ten years, U.S. strategy will focus on a monitoring and rapid intervention system on the one hand, remote warfare with the use of lethal drones and reduced special forces on the other, and Niger will be given a central role in the U.S. arrangement (two bases in Niamey and Agadez).

With the French intervention in Mali (2013), the U.S. role reconfigured by focusing on the provision of materiel and logistical support. However, the U.S. contribution in defining the Sahel as a unified theater of insecurity dynamics remains crucial.

France: French Military Interventionism

The origins of France's securitarian turn in [24]the Sahel are linked to worsening security conditions already in the early 2000s.

The first episode is the cancellation of four stages in Niger of the Paris-Dakar-Cairo motor race due to the threat of attack from a terrorist group[25]. Later, France increased its monitoring in the region, reinforcing its civil and military intelligence presence and installing a stable base of Special Forces in Burkina Faso, with a mandate to act between Mauritania and Niger. Chad was already covered by the Epervier mission deployed since 1986 to contain Libyan expansionism. In the years that followed, a series of kidnappings [26]and attacks against French interests and the rise between 2003 and 2007 of the GSPC, which concentrates its terrorist actions in Algeria and Mauritania, led France to a change of strategy : the 2008 Defense "Livre Blanc" [27]identifies the Sahel as the locus of all threats from an "ungoverned" space, and France adopts Plan Sahel to ensure stability in the area by strengthening security and development. The framework includes Mauritania, Mali, and Niger and is later expanded to include Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Chad. The key points are a regional approach, ensuring effectiveness for the receptor countries involved, and coordination among partners with modes of action based on combating terrorism,

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[24]https://www.herodote.net/11_janvier_2013_15_aout_2022-evenement-20130111.php#:~:text=Le%2011%20janvier%202013%2C%20le,du%20Sahel%20avec%204000%20hommes

[25]   https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2000/01/13/une-menace-terroriste-contraint-le-rallye-paris-dakar-le-caire-a-eviter-le-niger_3588986_1819218.html

[26] Carlos Echeverría Jesus, *Kidnappings as a terrorist instrument of AQIM and the MUJAO*, 2013, pp 161-62. file:///Users/pierrepellegrini/Downloads/Dialnet-KidnappingsAsATerroristInstrumentOfAQIMAndTheMUJAO-4580269.pdf

[27] https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/0000.pdf

trafficking and radicalization, aiding the development of populations, and regional cooperation. These principles will form the strategic basis of Opération Barkhane.[28]

In 2013, mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 2085, and thanks to the "special relationship" between France and the former African colonies, Opération Serval is launched. At the request of interim President Dioncounda Traoré, 4,000 French soldiers flanked by AFISMA and two thousand Chadian soldiers are deployed with the mission of halting the southward descent of AQMI and Ansar Dine rebels. Towns are recaptured and one can speak of success but when Barkhane picks up Serval's baton, he faces political and strategic limitations and problems.

Barkhane, in cooperation with the G5 Sahel develops an all-inclusive approach: security, development, and politics, with a system of permanent (Gao, Niamey, N'Djamena) and temporary bases. The objectives are precise: control of borders and logistical hubs, containment of the mobility of armed troops, training and coordination of national armies.

Barkhane, however, will fail to ensure the protection of civilians and will encounter growing political and strategic problems. And France, having incurred human and material costs will thus lose support and legitimacy in the eyes of local populations who will demand its withdrawal.

EU: European Border to be sealed

The third security actor in the Sahel is the European Union, influenced by American and French initiatives. After the 2024-2015 migration crisis, Brussels and European chancelleries identify the Sahel as Europe's new southern frontier and rely on the concept of self-policing to stabilize

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[28] Rémi Carayol, *Le mirage sahélien: La France en guerre en Afrique. Serval, Barkhane et après ?,* Ed. La Découverte, 2023

the region. The priority will therefore be to strengthen military and security capabilities and structure a synergistic defence, development, and humanitarian system.

Urged by France, which calls for a sharing of commitments, and the EEAS, eager to launch a serious common foreign policy, the European Union focuses on development cooperation. But with the deteriorating situation in Libya in 2011, the EU approves the Sahel Security and Development Strategy to allocate €660 million to Mali, Mauritania and Niger, identifying four lines of intervention of the security-development nexus: economic development, humanitarian and governance, diplomacy and
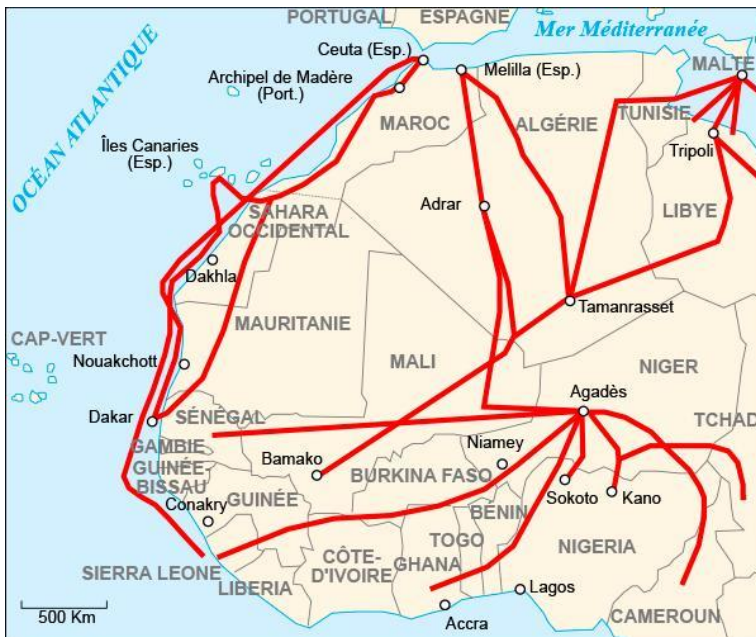
Source: https://www.cairn.info/

politics, security and rule of law, and anti-radicalization. Between 2011 and 2014, the EU launches three civilian-military missions. EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUCAP Sahel Mali, and EUTM Mali. [29]But the lack of coordination between different European agencies and the increasingly securitized approach during the four-year implementation of the Sahel Strategy will lead toward an increase in hard security actions, at the expense of development objectives.

In 2014, as the crisis widened, Chad and Burkina Faso were included in European programs and the Sahel Regional Action Plan was updated to include preventing and countering radicalization, youth, migration, mobility and border control, and combating trafficking and transnational crime. Indeed, the European Union is seeking partnerships to manage and reduce migration flows that seek to reach Europe through Libya. After the Valletta summit (2015) Mali and Niger get funding from the new Africa Trust Fund to strengthen controls and reduce migrant departures. The G5 Sahel is thus identified as a privileged partner to be entrusted with the implementation of the European strategy. A strategy that places the issue of security at the center and gives less and less space to interventions aimed at strengthening development.

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[29] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eucap-sahel-mali/about-eucap-sahel-mali_en?s=331

In 2020, France announced the formation of a joint operation of Special Forces from several European countries (Italy ,Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Greece), Operation Takuba, which will reach full operational capability in 2021. This mission operates under the French command of Operation Barkhane and focuses mainly on training and supporting the light reconnaissance and intervention units (ULRIs) of the Malian armed forces, but the deteriorating political environment in Bamako and diplomatic tensions between the ruling junta and France force the European Special Forces to leave Mali. The changing political environment in Bamako, Mali's capital, with the coup led in two stages by Colonel Assimi Goïta, and the arrival in Mali of the Russian paramilitary group Wagner, forces European special forces to leave the country. Then France's decision to reorganize its military presence in the Sahel and withdraw its troops from Mali marks the end for the Takuba mission.

"The reorganization of the French military system in the Sahel, decided in close cooperation with European and North American partners, led to the end of Takuba operations in Mali as of June 30."[30]

In May, as the jihadist threat spread towards the Gulf of Guinea, Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum called on the French and Europeans to "*take more risks and not be haunted by losses*" in the Sahel, and demanded that their forces be deployed *"with substantial air capacity, effective rules of engagement, sacrifices, financial resources, with many more helicopters and bombs"*.[31]

IV.   The Sahel as an Islamic Caliphate

Today, the Sahel is included in the expanded Mediterranean region. For European and Italian policy, this region has been perceived as the first border of access to Europe and therefore the place phenomena of strategic and security significance, primarily migration and terrorism, and

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[30] Général Pascal Ianni, porte-parole de l'état-major français
[31]   https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/mali-la-france-officialise-la-fin-de-la-force-europeenne-takuba-01-07-2022-2481742_24.php#11

particularly in recent years a site of jihadist insurgency.

The Sahel played this role as a fault line between two worlds, a connective frontier: thus this political and moral geography was traced based on the distinction, also of a racial kind, between a North Africa inhabited by a white population and a sub-Saharan Africa inhabited by a black population where the penetration of Islam was very difficult and exposed itself to the risk of perversion of the original message of the prophet or paganism. This differentiation will be taken up again during colonization and political, moral, ideological and religious traits will also be superimposed: in the 1920s-30s there is talk of a North Africa at risk of Wahabism therefore of an intransigent, radical and literary reading (opposed to the modernization that the colonizer wanted to bring) opposed to a more open Black Africa, more open to cultural and religious tolerance. There is a vast colonial literary production that reinforces this stereotype of black Africa and white, Arab, intransigent Africa. In this strong tension, the Sahel disappears and is devoid of an identity: the identity of the Tuareg (called "pieds rouges") and their claims disappear, their unrecognizability will be the source of a malaise that will lead for some to adherence to jihadist ideals.

Since 2012, the Sahel has been included in the international macro-narrative of counter-terrorism, and the Sahel has only become a space of securitarian crisis. Earlier in the first decade of the 2000s, Mali was undergoing a potential resurgence even though as early as 2001 the first programs to counter jihadist insurgencies were being implemented even before the presence of jihadist-inspired armed groups was recognized.

Until 10 years ago, the Sahel was regarded as a space of religious tolerance, an open place of peaceful coexistence. How do you explain that it has become so? Jihadism in the Sahel is not an exogenous phenomenon, of conquest by terrorists who have come from elsewhere. We know that many young Sahelians join these groups and take up arms in the name of Jihad.

Various theories have been advanced to explain this phenomenon. The first is that of the opposition between local and global: the advance of jihadism in the Sahel would be part of a more or less centrally planned expansion from the Middle East area to annex new peripheral provinces connected to the heart of the global Jihad.

The opposite view is the one that reads the instances of Sahelian jihadism as strictly local and merely opportunistic instances. The rebellions would have no connection with global Jihad but would use the banner of Jihad to give themselves credibility and legitimacy against their adversaries.

Concrete analysis says that both theories have matching, factual, and truthful elements: the Al Qaeda-linked groups are derived from Algerian groups, already derived from the mujaidin who fought in Afghanistan, and the Islamic State in Africa grew out of a strong push from the central Islamic State in Syria conveyed by Libyan groups.

On the other hand, the importance of local instances characterizing the participation of the majority of fighters cannot be denied.

Other theories state that the emergence of Jihadism in the Sahel would be due to the polarization between ideological radicalization and social radicalization: widespread poverty has certainly contributed to the recruitment of jihadist groups, but we know that participation in Sahelian jihadist groups does not offer particularly advantageous conditions. Organized crime allows more immediate, secure and effective opportunities for enrichment.[32]

The ideological aspect should not be set aside: some of the main leaders of both al Qaeda and the Islamic State have gone through a path of ideological and religious radicalization starting from instances political or social, influenced by preachers.

The reading that meets with favor among scholars is a polarity between two opposing visions : presence of weak states versus abuse of power by states in the region. Indeed, Sahelian states have been incapable of projecting force and sovereign prerogatives over the totality of the territory, but at the same time there have been incidents of abuse of power and violence against civilians perpetrated by the security forces of Sahelian states. All strands of research converge toward this explanation, and while it is not the only factor, it remains particularly important.[33]

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[32] www.africaconnect.santannapisa.it

[33] Luca Raineri, Edoardo Baldaro, *Jihad in Africa, terrorismo e controterrorismo nel Sahel*, Ed. Il Mulino

The regional imaginary of jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel can also be considered as a coherent project, but even if this imaginary is linked to the construction of the Sahel as an Islamic caliphate, it is important not to consider the jihadist movements currently operating in the Sahel as homogeneous and monolithic, as they
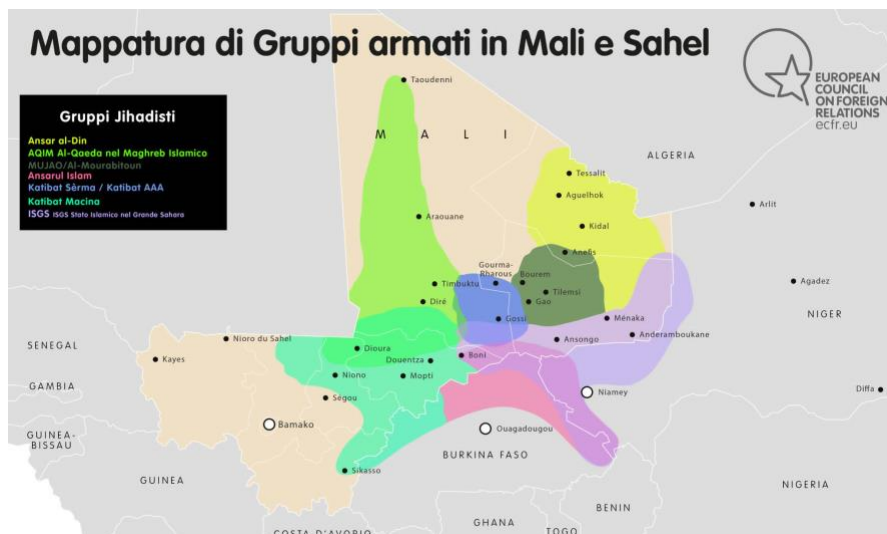
Source: ecfr.eu

differ both in ideology and affiliations, as well as in modes of action and areas of presence or influence. Although most of these jihadist groups have chosen to be affiliated with the two main international jihadist organizations, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, they also have deep local ramifications and are well established in some local communities.

The first phase of this imagery is the "descent southward" of jihadists from Algeria, heirs of Algeria's GIA (Armed Islamic Group) terrorist groups, after losing the civil war against the regime in Algiers. In the early 2000s, the GSPC (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) formed its first nucleus and established operational bases and links with communities in northern Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

AQMI joins forces and together they begin to develop a capital accumulation strategy, thanks in part to the "kidnapping industry," to become autonomous. With the merger of AQMI with al-Murabitun (Mokhtar El Mokhtar's group), the MUJAO (Movement for Jihad Unity in West Africa) and other regional terrorist groups, the GSIM (Support Group for Islam and Muslims) or JNIM was born, a coalition of jihadist movements affiliated with al Qaeda's Salafist ideology that form a circumstantial alliance with the MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) Tuareg rebel movement, which has no religious claims but territorial and independence claims. This coalition led by Iyad Ag Ghali, a former Ifoghas Tuareg rebel leader active in the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s and 2000s who later became head of the jihadist group Ansar Dine is joined by Katiba Macina, founded by preacher Amadou Koufa in central Mali. Several "big men" or militia leaders who control the drug trade and territory become

negotiators or accomplices of the GSPC/AQMI.

In a second phase, some of these groups manage to establish themselves locally in northern Mali (in the cities of Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao) and in the Mopti region, build a solid base of support in the population by redistributing some of the proceeds of kidnappings, marrying local women, or recruiting among communities, and actively participate in the 2012 offensive that marks the beginning of the war in Mali. But they will have to reorganize after the French military intervention in 2013.

The system of governance created by AQMI, Ansar Dine, and MUJAO is based on three pillars: they hold a monopoly on the use of violence through collaboration with traffickers; they build a new judicial system based on Salafist interpretation of Sharia law; and they redefine borders by imposing a notion of space linked to local social practices. To this end, they destroy civil administration archives, reminders of the colonial past, and Sufi shrines in Timbuktu, symbols of a deviant Islam.

2013 -2020 is the period of maximum expansion and success. In a third phase, AQMI expands toward Niger and Burkina Faso, and pursues a campaign of attacks and kidnappings, the group's "core business," in Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, and Mali. In a process of regionalization, it finds favourable conditions for its entrenchment by forging ties with "big men" linked to a clientelist and predatory operation toward communities and puts into practice forms of "jihadist governance" even as religious struggle has become mixed with local disputes and claims in a process of hybridization. Gradually, the jihadist insurgency turned into contestation against local states, perpetrators of violence and abuses against specific communities-peul and daosahak-stigmatized and accused of sympathy with the jihadist enemy.[34]

We can identify three sub periods: after the defeat in northern Mali, the two-year period 2013-2014 sees the reorganization of jihadist groups that become unavoidable actors in northern Mali by posing as protectors, welfare organizers, and holders of coercive force. From these bases, penetration in 2015 begins in the region of Mopti (Central Mali), the province of Soum (Northeast Burkina Faso), and the Macina, and the various jihadist groups organize themselves into areas of influence, each with their own methods of managing power and territory. Large portions of national territories are thus taken away from local states, and the caliphate project,

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[34] Jacky Bouju, *La rébellion peule et la « guerre pour la terre » Le gouvernement par la violence des ressources agropastorales (Centre-Mali, Nord-Burkina Faso),* Dans Revue internationale des études du développement pages 67 à 88, 2020/3 (N° 243).

despite the clash between al Qaeda and the Islamic State, will extend beyond the Sahel. After splitting into subgroups until 2015, the jihadist front regains organizational unity around JNIM and ISGS since 2016. During the two-year period 2016- 2017, the two poles enter a new phase of development and despite ideological differences create a "pax jihadist" demonstrating a great capacity for endurance: the JNIM, aware of its negotiating power, conducts secret negotiations with the government in Bamako and the project of the two formations, despite the elimination of their leaders, seems destined to expand towards the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea.

Relations between different jihadist groups have long been difficult to decipher, oscillating between cooperation and competition before precipitating into clear hostility. These oppositions between rival groups lead them to further regional expansion. Beyond the "three borders" region, the core of the Sahel, there are thrusts of jihadist cells into Benin, Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Togo. Reproducing previously implemented strategies, they exploit ethnic and local conflicts or claims against predatory states to establish themselves and expand their project.

The imaginary of an Islamic caliphate in the Sahel thus deconstructs borders, states and institutions inherited from colonization, rejects the Western idea of sovereignty, and wants to reconstruct a regional identity in the name of a Sahelian "ummah" embedded in a "nomadic state": elimination of duties linked to the "droit de passage," embryonic forms of "welfare state," creation of security forces, a parallel administration and justice.

After the French defeat, the spread of jihadist terrorism became increasingly widespread:

the Califatto reconstruction attempt followed several stages but the turning point came after the French withdrawal when, moving southward the first cell came into contact with Boko Haram. At this point a dimension of its own , linked to the Black Califatto, is recognized. The last act is the oath to the last caliph of the fighting force in the province of the three borders: the Sahel province of the Islamic State will be born[35].

V.   The shadow regionalism of local regimes

The third geopolitical imaginary is that of local regimes. The G5 Sahel was born in February 2014 at the Nouakchott summit with the goal of strengthening peace, security, prosperity and cooperation in the five founding states, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad. In

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[35] Francesco Strazzari, *La nuova stagione (ma vecchia) del terrorismo nel Sahel*, atlanteguerra, 31 agosto 2023.

continuity with the European Union, it adopts the security-development concept to develop its initiatives. Equipped with functioning bodies, the Convention [36]is based on four pillars namely defence and security, governance, infrastructure and resilience. The Sahel states thus equip themselves with a common framework for action to deal with the conflict in northern Mali.

Prior to the creation of this regional framework, the five members were not part of a single regional organization. Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso were members of ECOWAS, Mauritania of the Arab Maghreb Union, and Chad of the Economic Community of Central African States (CEMAC).

The G5 Sahel was thus born at a time of "securitarian gridlock" in the region: the United States, France, and the European Union are already deploying stabilization initiatives against jihadist activities, the United Nations is launching the MINUSMA mission, and the African Union and ECOWAS are competing to intervene in the area. Thus, the regional project of the G5 Sahel actors has relied on the recognition of the jihadist project to strengthen its legitimacy and ensure the regimes' survival.[37]

Indeed, it seems that this project pursued by Sahelian governing elites may stem from a strategy aimed at strengthening the legitimacy and power of local rulers, based on neo-patrimonialism. In fact, beginning in the 1970s, governance systems were transformed: as they saw their capacity to control the country as a whole shrinking, and as non-state actors were brought into the regulatory systems, power relations became increasingly clientelistic and predatory. Hybrid forms of public affairs management thus arise, where loyalties and dependencies prevail and where the distinction between public and private interests is blurred. Government elites hold and accumulate material and symbolic resources, build clientelistic networks, and grow corrupt practices that fuel inequality. Even development aid provided by international partners becomes resources at the disposal of local powers.[38]

The creation of a regional organization such as the G5 Sahel thus becomes an example of shadow regionalism in which government elites have been able to capture resources, gain international support, and re-appropriate "external" political dynamics to strengthen their power

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[36] Nicolas Desgrais, *The G5 Sahel Joint Force Gains Traction*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies February 9, 2018

[37] Helly D et al. *Sahel strategies: why coordination is imperative ,https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/PolBrief76Eng.pdf,* Institute for Security Stidies, Dakar, 2015

[38] B. Venturi, The *EU, the US and the International Strategic Dimension of Sub-Saharan Africa: Peace, Security and Development in the Horn of Africa*, with Pirozzi N., Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Rome, 2016

and self-preserve. But this process of hoarding has developed in parallel with failed democratic breakthroughs.

Lack of democratic breakthroughs

In the State Fragility Index and Matrix 2018, all independant countries are listed and scored on both Effectiveness and Legitimacy in four performances dimensions : Security, Political, Economic and Social. The Index ranges from 0 "no fragility" to 25 "extreme fragility". This fragility is associated with the state capacity to manage conflicts, to implement public policy, to deliver essential services, to maintain cohesion and quality of life, to respond effectively to challenges and crises and to sustain development. In 2016 Index, Chad scored 19/25 (9th most fragile state on 167 countries) Niger 18/25 (14th) , Burkina Faso, Mali and

	Fragility Index	Effectiveness Score	Legitimacy Score	Security Effectiveness	Security Legitimacy	Armed Conflict Indicator	Political Effectiveness	Political Legitimacy	Regime Type	Economic Effectiveness	Economic Legitimacy	Net Oil Production or Consumption	Social Effectiveness	Social Legitimacy	Regional Effects
Dem. Rep. of Congo	24	13	11			War			dem						Afr
Central African Rep.	23	12	11			War			DEM						Afr
South Sudan	22	12	10			War			SF			na			Afr
Sudan (North)	22	11	11			War			aut						Mus
Afghanistan	21	11	10			War			aut			+			Mus
Burundi	21	12	9			War			aut						Afr
Yemen	21	10	11			War			SF			+			Mus
Somalia	20	10	10			War			dem						Mus
Chad	19	10	9			*			aut			3			Mus
Ethiopia	19	9	10			War			aut						Afr
Myanmar	19	9	10			War			DEM						
Guinea	18	10	8			*			dem						Mus
Iraq	18	8	10			War			DEM			36			Mus
Niger	18	10	8			*			dem						Mus
Nigeria	18	9	9			War			DEM			3			Afr
Angola	17	8	9			*			aut			24			Afr
Côte d'Ivoire	17	9	8			*			dem						Mus
Guinea-Bissau	17	10	7			*			DEM						Afr
Zimbabwe	17	9	8						dem						Afr
Burkina Faso	16	9	7						DEM						Afr
Cameroon	16	8	8			War			aut						Afr
Mali	16	8	8			War			dem						Mus
Mauritania	16	8	8						aut						Mus
Pakistan	16	8	8			War			DEM						Mus

State Fragility Index and Matrix 2016   Page 1 of 10

Mauritania scored 16/25 (19th, 21st and 22 th). In 2018, Chad scored the same 19/25, Niger got worse with 19/25 , Burkina Faso and Mauritania remained at 16/25, and only Mali improved 15/25.[39]

The 1990s saw a process of political liberalization and reform in different ways for the five Sahelian countries. Blaise Compaoré's Burkina Faso, Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya's Mauritania, and Idriss Déby's Chad had a limited democratic opening with multipartyism, but this opening remained under strict control of the military elites so as not to pose a threat to power. Often these democratic breakthroughs turned out to be cosmetic operations designed to

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[39] systemicpeace.org

meet the demands of international donors while at the same time strengthening those mechanisms of clientelistic redistribution and neo-patrimonial governance.

Ali Aibu in Niger initiated a transition process in 1991 (Mahamane Ousmane was elected the first president democratically) but a succession of military coups hindered this democratization. However, after Mahmadou Issoufou's presidency, in 2021 Mohamed Bazoum emerged as the winner of elections considered free by international observers. Administrative reforms, decentralization were initiated to co-opt local leaders who could ensure the resilience of the state.

Decentralization was also applied in Mali, and the democratic transition initiated in the 1990s seemed to succeed. After the coup that ended the decades-long regime of Moussa Traoré, elections in 1992 brought Alpha Omar Konaré to power and he remained in office for 10 years. At the end of his term Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) was elected, and Mali, hailed as an exemplary democracy by the international community, established itself as a prime recipient of international aid. But democratic transitions were primarily a tool to perpetuate himself in power and obtain international aid.

Neopatrimonialism and war on terror

As the "War on Terror" begins in the region, the strategies of the Sahelian regimes shift.
President Ould Taya initiates timid reforms but Mauritania continues to be dominated by a military and business elite. Between 2003 and 2005,

he denounces and has the internal opposition arrested, accusing them of being linked to the GSPC. Following a coup Abdel Aziz implements a cosmetic democratic transition and implements an ambivalent approach toward international partners and AQMI. Accused of corruption by his successor Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani in 2019, he ends up in prison.

In Chad, the Deby regime relies on the military and repression. Because of its geographic location, the country presents itself on the international stage as an inevitable counterterrorism actor, appropriating aid funds from U.S. programs, the World Bank, and investors (pipe line Chad Cameroon). However, a share of these funds must be forfeited by Deby, and the development project is transformed into a tool of the authoritarian regime.

This mechanism of capturing international aid is made even more systematic by Amadou Toumani Touré in Mali where through oligopolistic rents local elites perpetuate their power. With the "politics of unanimity," ATT builds a patronage network by co-opting within its coalition civil society members who could pose a threat in the opposition, in exchange for money or state jobs. This corrupt practice also penetrates the security apparatus of the state, which relinquishes direct control over the North: ethnically constituted militias in the North are also co-opted, and close relations are also forged with criminal networks or jihadist insurgencies.

This predatory behaviour is implicitly endorsed by international actors with the disbursement of aid and the creation of local agencies intended for development but in fact instruments of redistribution of wealth and favours.

In March 2012, with the rebel advance toward the centre of Mali, international actors seek to halt a conflict that threatened to engulf the region. ECOWAS is the first to open a negotiating table and to want to launch a peace enforcement mission, MICEMA. It delegates the initiative to Blaise Compaoré, president of Burkina Faso, and asks the UN , the EU and the United States to fund the intervention. But due to lack of leadership and tensions between English- and French-speaking states, the mission will not see the light of day.

The worsening crisis in Mali prompts France to intervene with the Serval mission in January 2013. But this intervention by the old colonial power highlights Africa's inability to manage internal conflicts on its own, so ECOWAS decides to relaunch peace negotiations (Ouagadougou Accords of June 2013) and the African Union to create a new framework for intervention and cooperation with the Nouakchott process : the AU launches AFISMA, a Mali stabilization mission that, under UN leadership will become MINUSMA.

Thus, a competition emerges between the AU and ECOWAS to position itself in the eyes of international partners as the most effective organization to which to allocate support and funding. The AU, with a desire to assert its leadership within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) bases its strategy on an alternative spatial interpretation of APSA that goes

against the structure's principles of subsidiarity and complementarity: the continent should be divided into five sub-regions, each with a regional organization of reference, in this case ECOWAS. At this point, each African organization puts forward different proposals among themselves to resolve the crisis: ECOWAS claims the legitimacy of its spatial dimension and emphasizes the need to develop integrated initiatives to address the root causes of the conflict, the African Union presents itself as the only organization that can offer a framework for coordination among African countries for a securitarian response.

In the face of these alternative readings due to competing bodies, France and the European Union are lobbying to create a single common coordination framework for the military staffs of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad. For the governing elites of these countries, the creation of a new regional framework represents a new mechanism for attracting resources and a means of strengthening the legitimacy and safeguarding the regimes. The G5 Sahel will thus develop a legitimacy strategy based on "Sahelian identity" and security by affirming the homogeneity of the territory-economic, physical, geopolitical, and historical-in the face of the securitarian challenge. The G5 Sahel thus becomes a coherent complex, rightly formed to address specifically Sahelian issues.

In 2014, the G5 Sahel presents an investment plan to obtain $14.8 billion in funding, and in 2015, joint military operations begin with MINUSMA and Barkhane. As of 2017, a 5,000-strong international force distributed in three border areas (Mauritania-Malian border, Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, and Niger-Chad border) operates. At the request of the UN Security Council, the international community provides logistical, financial and operational assistance, and in 2018 the G5 Sahel receives a dedicated international fund of $145 million and the European Union invests more than €200 million to train personnel through the EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Mali missions. The G5 Sahel thus succeeds in appropriating the funding despite ECOWAS and the African Union's vague attempts to capture at least some of the funds.

Crisis of the G5

As of July 2020, the G5 Sahel encounters difficulties due to the widening of the conflict outside its borders toward the Gulf of Guinea-Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Benin, and Togo-an enlargement that delegitimizes an organization based on a specific and well-defined territorial format. Add to this a predatory operation of governments that continue to favour a wealthy few at the

expense of the common welfare, and widespread violence against civilians by Sahelian armies. Finally, the joint force has failed to limit the conflict in the three borders point.

Frustration of armies due to government relations and popular dissatisfaction lead to two coups in Mali (August 2020, May 2021), two in Burkina Faso (January 2022, September 2022), one in Chad (April 2021), and one in Niger (July 2023).

On May 15, 2022, following the coup, the Malian authorities announced their withdrawal from the G5, due to the failure of the Bamako government to assume the rotating presidency. Mali effectively breaks with its international partners-France and the European Union-to make deals with the Wagner Group and try to negotiate with jihadist actors. With Mali's withdrawal, the G5 Sahel regional project will come to an end.

VI. Conclusion

The crisis in the Sahel is the result of a geopolitical competition between three different imaginaries brought forth by international counterterrorism actors (the United States, the European Union, and France), jihadist insurgencies, and local regimes. A fourth collective actor has developed its own peculiar spatial imaginary: the one born out of the interaction between local societies threatened by jihadists, central regimes, poverty, and climate change. These communities have constructed survival strategies through social, migratory, and economic practices to configure an "archipelago " of micro-regions. Placed on the margins of central states, these areas far from capitals have found alternative forms of securitarian, political and spatial order and assumed a hybrid character, between self-sufficiency and dependence.

These interconnections were created through historical alliances and contacts between pastoral, nomadic, and merchant communities (Tuareg, Peul, and Hausa) along caravan and transhumance routes. Local chiefs such as "big men" or religious leaders have redefined the rules and new principles of order, and for local entrepreneurs and criminal organizations, the frontier has become a "natural resource" to be exploited by trafficking through the inability of states to enforce the law. Thus, one can speak of a social and geographic space where regional subsystems interact connected by ethnic, clan, historical and economic ties with hybrid forms of governance.

The competition between the imaginaries we have seen may explain the crisis in this area. Seen as a space ungoverned by international actors, the Sahel needed to be contained through the

reconstruction of full sovereignty and control of borders by opening new possibilities for governmental elites. The military solution offered the regimes on the one hand the opportunity to strengthen the patronage system and the hoarding of resources, and on the other hand to be able to suppress dissent, provoking the use of arms as the only possible solution for the opposition and fostering jihadist insurgencies.

Support from international actors for the G5 Sahel also reduced the legitimacy of ECOWAS and the tight border control required weakened the principle of free movement it promoted within its regional integration project. This border management forced micro regions to limit the trade on which the livelihood of cross-border communities depended but did not prevent the activities of larger entrepreneurs and organized crime, often backed by government elites, feeding the corrupt system of states.

These choices have resulted in the rejection of the international securitarian presence by local communities, the undermining of the authority of state representatives often village chiefs or religious leaders, and the cracking of the established order in favour of jihadist insurgencies that have found the ideal theater in which to develop the "sahelization" of their project.

The situation in the Sahel today thus results from the impossibility of finding a balance between these projects and from the terrorism-counterterrorism pair applied to a pre-existing dysfunctionality due to root causes (fragility of states, corruption, violence, climate change, and underdevelopment). It would be necessary to deconstruct the idea of Sahel as a crisis area in order to rethink the space and re-attribute to local populations the possibility of new imaginaries.

Chapter 2: COIN as a legacy of the French colonial conquest

I.   The heroes of the colonial conquest inspire French strategy

When Francois Hollande launched Operation Serval on 11 January 2013[40], it was not a war of colonisation or an intervention to reclaim territory or populations, and France had no mining interests in the area. Nor can we speak of a neo-colonial intervention such as those undertaken after independence to support or destabilise a regime and defend economic interests.

With its intervention in the Sahel, France will be renewing the legitimacy of its military posture in Africa, and above all combating international terrorism. [41]This operation will enable France to show its power, play in the big league and keep the army busy.

On 6 November 2019, General Francois Lecointre, head of the French army from July 2017 to July 2021, told the French National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee that the army's doctrine in the Sahel is largely based on a "global approach" as a crisis management strategy centred on the people and their perception of the crisis. "*This concept is inherited from our colonial adventure (...), we have long held the idea of a global approach and a victory that must be won in the hearts and minds of the people. (...) This recalls the "oil spot theory", theorised by Lyautey, which aims to secure and develop conquered areas by re-establishing law, order and civil authority (...). In the way in which the French military, from Gallieni to Lyautey, conceived the establishment of a colonial empire, there was first and foremost a humanist vision of crisis management and war. (...) I simply observe that what makes French know-how in crisis management is also this heritage"*.[42]

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[40]   https://www.france24.com/fr/20140731-carte-operation-barkhane-armee-francaise-sahel-sahara-aqmi-infographie-ndjamena-gao-drones-serval

[41] Colomba-Petteng Léonard, *Les dilemmes des armées françaises au Sahel, Une mise en perspective des débats sur la transformation de l'opération Barkhane,* Afrique contemporaine 2020/1-2 (N° 271-272), pages 169 à 186

[42]*https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/comptes rendus/cion_afetr/l15cion_afetr1920012_compte-rend*

This operation therefore drew from the experience of the colonial conquest and meant for some army officers, particularly navy troops, a return to the "Saharan adventures" of colonial pacification and a rereading of a mythical imagination based on the stories of the "méharistes". In the French army today, there is still a mystique of the Sahara as the conquering ground of General Laperrine's companies, the "méharées" recognisable by their white kepi and sirwal, travelling on camels. The legacy of "Lyautey the African" and Joseph Gallieni still persists in the conception of a global approach to crisis management, in the desire to conquer "hearts and minds" [43],in the doctrine of the "oil spot" to secure the conquered areas and perpetuate the French presence through social and economic activities. This colonial heritage is now openly claimed in counter-insurgency doctrines and wars of conquest are no longer taboo in the teaching of the Joint Defence College. "*Military traditions are rooted in the history of our armies, referring to conflicts that are sometimes forgotten by the general public, but from which soldiers still draw their references*".[44]

But what were these operations? What are the great Saharan expeditions that still inspire the French military today? And what is the weight of the colonial heritage within the French army? Between 1880 and 1914, the whole of West Africa was colonised, with the exception of Liberia. This phenomenon, which essentially meant the loss of sovereignty, independence and land for the Africans, took place in two phases. The first wave ran from 1880 to the early 1900s, the second until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

In the mindset of the time, the conquest was not just about land: it was also about people.

The aim was to bring the benefits of modern civilisation and technical progress to Africa, and to carry out a "civilising mission". In the France of the "Republican moment"[45] the men of the

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[43] Galula David, *Counterinsurgency warfare, Ed Praeger, 1964*

[44]Paul La Combe, *Contre-insurrection au Sahel, une manière francaise?* Revue militaire générale N. 55, 2019, pag 49-60

[45]Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment : Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France*, Harvard

Third Republic supported this idea, according with this period of strong democratic identity, which could consolidate national prestige: the dissemination of a model of civilisation would also be a way of shining. Gilles Manceron describes this discourse as "trumped-up universalism": "*The Republic in France, especially from the beginning of the Third Republic, formulated a specific discourse that used human rights to justify colonisation and, in reality, distorted the message of human rights to authorise their violation*".[46]

This idea of colonisation as benefactor of mankind was full of contradictions. Firstly, because it involved a whole series of economic interests. Colonial expansion meant the promise of immense reserves of raw materials (rubber, wood, ore, etc.), untouched areas for plantations and livestock farming, new markets, a workforce that could be more easily corralled than in Europe, all within a vast area of French free trade... From the 1870s and 1880s onwards, these perspectives were expressed by a vast colonial lobby, up to the French Chamber of Deputies. "*This was the discourse of organisations such as the Committee for French Africa, the Geographical Societies and the economic circles of major ports such as Bordeaux, the gateway to the West Indies and Black Africa. Ever since the end of the slave trade, these ports had been hoping for a new golden age when it came to setting sail for the colonies, and this was to come in the 1870s*".[47]

Conquest

At the end of the 19th century, Black Africa was to become the focus of France's new

University Press, 1995

[46]Gilles Manceron*, Marianne et les colonies , Ed*. La Découverte, 2003

[47]Pascal Blanchard, *Décolonisation francaise*, la chute d'un empire, Ed. de la Martinière, 2020

colonialism, which extended over a large part of the continent, from the Sahara to the Congo - not forgetting Madagascar. At the outset, in the 1870s, most of this immense area was still untouched by any Western presence and represented no real challenge. For centuries, Europeans had remained on the coasts, where local intermediaries supplied them with slaves and exotic products, as did French traders in Senegal, Saint-Louis and Gorée. Exploration of the interior of Africa began in the 19th century, and intensified from the 1850s onwards, particularly in the southern part on the initiative of the British.[48]

In the 1850s and 1860s, under the impetus of Colonel Louis Faidherbe, the French began to conquer the territory and "develop" the economy of the interior of Senegal. With a small number of troops, reinforced by indigenous battalions, Faidherbe penetrated deep into the country, establishing protectorates and putting down uprisings, such as that of the Peuls and the Toucouleurs.

These pioneering operations were only the first steps in the scramble for Africa that began in the 1870s with the determination to take brutal control of the land and resources, with a backdrop of exacerbated competition between the European powers:

"We had to plant the flag as far away as possible, before the others managed to do so. For the French, rivalry with other European countries, and especially the English, was a major driving force behind territorial conquest. And since the English assumed more than the French to conquest for economic and strategic reasons, and strived to be in the forefront, the French had to move as quickly as possible to conquer as much land as possible".[49]

To describe this fever of conquest, Jules Ferry used the expression "steeple-chase".

"An irresistible movement is taking the great nations of Europe to conquer new lands. It is like an immense steeplechase on the road to the unknown... This race to the top is barely five years old, and every year it accelerates, as if driven by the speed it has acquired."[50]

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[48] Adu Bouahen A. *Histoire Général de l'Afrique - Vol 7 – L'Afrique sous domination coloniale*, Ed UNESCO, 1987
[49] Nicolas Bancel, *Colonisation et propagande*, Ed. du Cherche-midi, 2020
[50] Henri Brunschwig, *Journal of African History, vol XII, 1*, 1971

The age-old confrontation between the English and the French over the possession of Africa was at its strongest: the former wanted to possess Africa from Egypt to South Africa, along a North-South axis; the latter dreamed of mastering Africa from West to East, from Dakar to Djibouti - antagonistic ambitions which the conflict at Fachoda, paradigmatic case of the so called "Democratic Peace", [51]in 1898, brought to a climax, but from which the French came out losers.

From 1880 onwards, the French adopted a policy of extending their zone of influence over the entire region, from Senegal to Niger and then as far as Chad, linking the conquered territories via their outposts in the Gulf of Guinea, the Ivory Coast and Dahomey. The implementation of this policy was entrusted to officers of the French Navy, who had been responsible for the administration of the Senegal region since 1881. To extend their domination over the region, the French opted almost exclusively for military conquest rather than concluding protectorate treaties as the British had done.

The army enabled, firstly, to draw a slightly more precise map of Africa and, secondly, to delimit the territories explored and therefore conquered. It is among the militaries that we find the most famous French players in this phase of conquest, like Joseph Gallieni, who in the 1880s crisscrossed the west of the continent, Senegal, Mali and Niger, before setting off to subdue Madagascar. And the naval officer Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, who led the colonisation of the Congo.

Exploration went together with domination. The main method used to ensure France's control

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[51] https://www.theguardian.com/notesandqueries/query/0,,-3134,00.html

over land and populations was the treaty: when a chief was identified in a region, a text was signed with him placing him under France's protection and authority.

"France concluded 344 treaties of sovereignty or protectorate with black chiefs between 1819 and 1890, two-thirds of them after 1880".

The most famous was the agreement signed in 1882 between Brazza and the chief of the Makoko people, under which France obtained the control of the right bank of the Bas-Congo. This "diplomatic" channel could provide various compensations (money or keeping the local potentate in power), and had the advantage of being peaceful, but was obviously to the advantage of the colonisers.

"Many [treaties] were not legally valid, either because the explorers, who had not received instructions and forms, had not observed the rules in use, or because the black chiefs had not been, according to European standards, fit to contract. (...) Often company agents, explorers or adventurers also drew up agreements for the needs of their cause and deliberately misled the blacks".[52]

But the French also came up against organised kingdoms with a defence system. This was the case for the French against the Wassoulou empire of Samory Touré in Haut-Niger, the Toucouleur empire of Ahmadou Tall in what is now Mali, or in the 1890s, against the king of Dahomey Behanzin, not forgetting Madagascar. Even if, in general, resistance remained modest, the French were vastly superior in military terms. On the other hand, they did not mobilise the armies of metropolitan France: the troops were mainly made up of black soldiers (many of them slaves bought back from their African masters), led by white officers. This practice was pioneered by Louis Faidherbe, who created the Senegalese Tirailleurs corps in 1857.

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[52]Henri Brunschwig, *Le Partage de l'Afrique noire,* Ed. Champs Histoire Flammarion*, 2009*

1885 Berlin Conference

Germany also wanted to participate and hosted the Berlin Conference in 1885, caused by the rivalry for control of the Congo Basin. The Europeans laid down the rules for the division that would continue until the beginning of the twentieth century. Following the Berlin Conference, military expeditions displaced the explorations of the first half of the century. From then on, the aim was to subdue populations and to appropriate territories. The last decade of the nineteenth century was characterized by intense territorial competition ("Scramble for Africa"), between European imperialisms: the division of Africa had become a matter solely for the European powers.[53]

In France, the 1880s also saw the start of a real structured colonial policy, with the creation of an Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1882 and then the Ministry in 1892, the formalization of the Code de l'Indigénat and the emergence of a colonial propaganda discourse based on two characteristics: on the one hand, the staging of the colonial epic with a positive representation of the "civilising mission" of the soldiers and colonizers and the euphemizing of the facts - "liberation", "civilisation", "necessary" or "bold" actions to evoke the war -, and on the other, a vision marked by racism and the exoticism of faraway lands populated by savages subjected to tyranny. Propaganda used to convince the public of the need for colonisation. This is combined with the fiction of pre-colonial times, during which Africa, associated with a feudal world, would have belonged to a primitive past.

It is also a time when a vision of "French Africa" is emerging: "*We imagined a continuity from Algeria to Madagascar, a sort of Paris-Alger-Tombouctou-Antananarivo axis. At the time, there were plans to build a trans-Saharan [Mediterranean-Niger] railway... This vision remained a utopia, but it motivated a whole policy of exploration and investment in the field*".[54]

This "French Africa" was associated with the idea of France as a "Muslim power": the military

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[53]Clélia Coret, *La Conférence de Berlin et le partage de l'Afrique* , Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe, ISSN 2677-6588
[54]Pascal Blanchard, audio : *Francafrique, une histoire postcoloniale*, France Culture, 28/08/2022

used Islamic rhetoric and saw Islam as an asset: they used to say that Allah had given them power and used suras from the Koran to justify their victories. Commandant Lamy called himself "*al-Hajj Lamin*", recited the Fatiha before any negotiations and used the Tidjaniya rosary. On 20 July 1899, Captain Voulet sent a letter to the Sultan of Sokoto which begins: "*In the name of Allah, the King, the all-powerful, "le juste"* "...

The French, blind to social hierarchies, had difficulties to identify their interlocutors. Focused on their racial grids, they fail to understand the complexity of power relations. The ambiguity they maintained with regard to Islam, joined to the atrocities that punctuated their missions, created an imbalance: their supposedly egalitarian discourse encouraged the court slaves, for example, to support them in order to improve their condition. This double discourse of the military colonisers - on the one hand convincing the weakest that colonisation would abolish privileges and predation, and on the other proposing to the elite and the great Muslim scholars an alliance based on hierarchical connivance - ensured domination fuelled by the social inequalities of the Sahara and the Sahel[55]

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[55]Lefebvre Camille, *Des pays au crépuscule, Le moment de l'occupation coloniale (Sahara-Sahel*), Ed.Fayard, 2023

II.   Missions

For the military, the first years of colonial occupation were those of confrontation with a hostile environment that was difficult to understand, and at the same time of dependence on indigenous knowledge. The appropriation of space and occupation could only be effectively achieved through the mastery of geographical knowledge.[56]
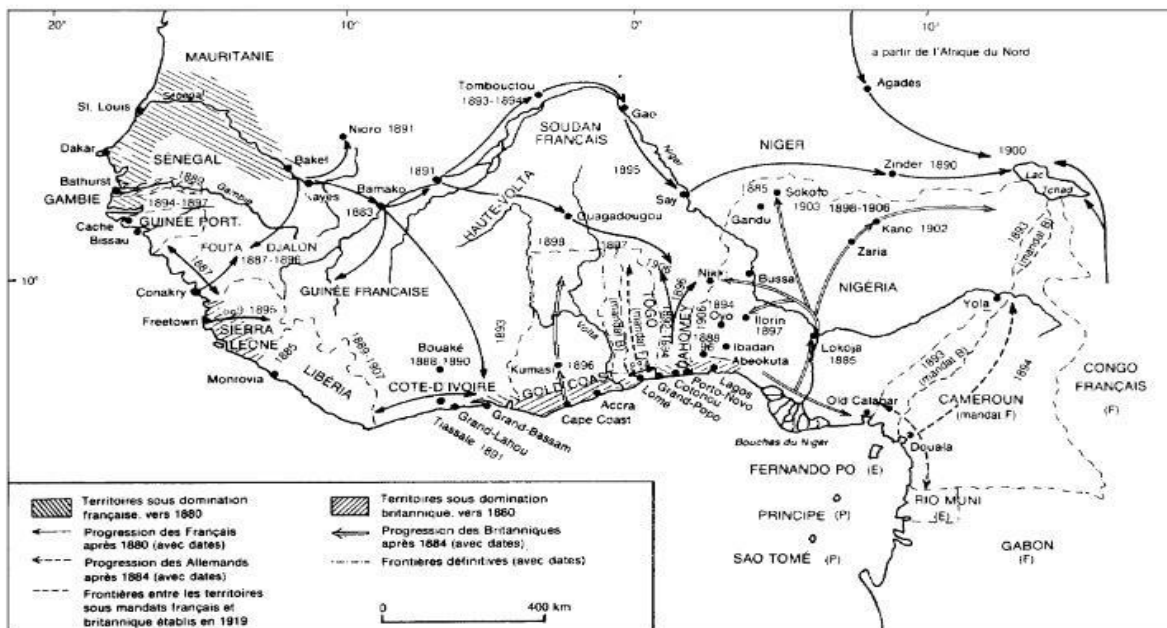
6.2. La progression européenne en Afrique de l'Ouest, 1880-1919. [Source: J. D. Fage, op. cit., 1978.]

For the French authorities, exploration was the key to discovering the usefulness of these territories from a strategic and commercial point of view, and therefore to defining the form that these links could take. The order of colonial action was therefore as follows: mapping, exploration and conquest. It was through expeditions, which were ordered by military logic under the guise of scientific and political missions, that the territory was taken over.

The aim of these expeditions [57]was to give shape to a whole, to determine France's interests in these regions and to define the shape of the frontier that had been drawn. To achieve this, they had to travel as far as possible, gather information on the geography and political organisations, and sign treaties. Six missions crossed the region between 1890 and 1900: the Monteil (1890-1892), Toutée (1894-1895), Hourst (1895-1896), Cazemajou (1897-1898), Saharan Foureau-

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[56] Boulanger Philippe, *La géographie, reine des batailles*, Ed. Perrin, 2020.
[57] Lefebvre Camille, *Des pays au crepuscule, Le moment de l'occupation coloniale* , Ed. Fayard, 2019

Lamy (1898-1900) and Central Africa (1898-1900) missions. They took very different forms and had very different results, ranging from peaceful observation to the extreme violence of the "Central Africa" mission led by Voulet and Chanoine, but they all played a key role in defining the territories. Placed under the supervision of the State, their objectives and organization were defined by official institutions and their members were mainly military.[58]

Negotiations

All the missions of the 1890s-1900s took place at the same time as negotiations in order to precisely define the boundary between the French and English possessions in the region. All their instructions contained references to this border. Although they were not delimitation missions, their objectives were linked to French interests in these negotiations. The aim was to identify the territories to be shared and to bring back information that could guide those negotiating. In addition, the presence of a Frenchman in a coveted region consolidates the French position, and the signing of treaties gives France arguments during negotiations, according to the perspective adopted at the Berlin conference. The itinerary of these missions followed the evolution of these issues. The aim of Colonel Monteil's mission was to recognize the area allocated to France by the Franco-British agreement of 1890, to sign treaties with all the native chiefs who were not committed to another power, and to act cautiously in regions where France's rights were not clearly defined.[59]

French interests then moved westwards, into the unexplored and as yet unappropriated region of northern Dahomey and Borgou in particular. The first objectives of the Toutée and Hourst missions were to test the navigability of the river, map it and clearly define the British presence along the Niger.

The Cazemajou mission was to recognize the Say-Barroua line, as well as the French territories to the north of this line, Adar, Gobir and Damergou, and above all to sign a protectorate treaty with the Sultan of Damagaram and with Rabah, the conqueror of Bornou. Cazemajou was assassinated by Rabah.

The Central Africa mission and the Foureau-Lamy Saharan mission were part of a plan to

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[58]Lefebvre Camille, *Frontières de sable, frontières de papier* , https://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/36549

[59] Lefebvre Camille, *Sahel et Sahara, Une emprise française*, 4 Decembre 2021, France Culture

conquer the regions designated as French. Their aim was to give concrete form to France's possession of these regions and to connect the various French possessions by symbolically bringing together three missions in Chad, one from Algeria (Foureau-Lamy), another from Sudan (Voulet and Chanoine) and the last from Congo (Gentil).

Three types of mission

Three kinds of practices and objectives can be identified. The first was reconnaissance expeditions, in which France asserted its interest by ranging a region it hoped to dominate. These missions preceded or accompanied border negotiations and were aimed at acquiring additional rights and arguments for negotiation. The Monteil mission is a case in point.

LA MISSION VOULET-CHANOINE

The second were the expeditions of conquest, which appropriated territory. They can serve as an affirmation to assert France's rights over an area and to mark French domination over a region, but they did not actually occupy it. This was the case, for example, with the Foureau-Lamy mission in the Sahara.

Finally, the third was the occupation expeditions. These missions crossed the regions by setting up posts, and their passage materialized the occupation of the territory. This was the case for the Central Africa mission once it arrived in Zinder, when Major Lamy took charge.

Each mission could take different forms during its travels. For example, the Toutée mission, an expedition to occupy the north of Dahomey, became a reconnaissance mission along the Niger. These missions differ in terms of objectives and size. Reconnaissance expeditions were small and were accompanied by an armed escort and moved quickly, since their main objective was to cover ground. Expeditions for taking possession, on the other hand, form huge columns designed to make an impression as they pass through, as they come to signify the occupation of a territory. And all these troops are armed throughout their journeys.

These missions are organized by the military and include civilians. They direct and organise them hierarchically. They moved around the country in military order. The Foureau-Lamy mission and the Central Africa mission were organized in combat marching order.

All these missions adopted heavy formations, characterized by large numbers of baggage, pack animals and people: their own personnel, personnel recruited locally, porters and camel drivers. Reconnaissance expeditions were not heavily staffed, with an average of around thirty people, including Europeans and Africans.

In all these missions, the number of European personnel was extremely small. Two Frenchmen for the Monteil, Cazemajou and Toutée missions, four Frenchmen for the Hourst mission, eight for Voulet and Chanoine, but 49 for the Foureau-Lamy mission. All of them, whether reconnaissance or conquest missions, were weighed down by a great deal of baggage, riding and transport animals. The Monteil mission used 100 carriers to transport its equipment, and the Hourst mission used 70 to carry its 150 boxes of supplies and three boats to the river.

The Cazemajou mission required 33 porter oxen. The case of the expeditions to take possession, such as the Foureau-Lamy and Voulet-Chanoine missions, is specific.

The Foureau-Lamy mission, which brought together almost 350 people, including 276 soldiers and nearly 1,800 camels, stretched out in a huge convoy. In the Matankari region, the Voulet-Chanoine mission consisted of 1,870 people, including 8 Frenchmen, 567 riflemen, 700 porters/conveyors, 300 women and children, 200 auxiliary horsemen and 100 other people (conveyors, prisoners, etc.), as well as 15 camels, 300 oxen, 200 donkeys and 180 horses carrying 950 parcels, or 25 tonnes of equipment. As the decade progressed, these expeditions became heavier and heavier, until they took on the form of real armies.

Armament followed the same pattern. Reconnaissance expeditions generally had fairly limited military equipment, with around twenty rifles divided between the members. Conquest expeditions, on the other hand, were more heavily armed. The Foureau-Lamy mission, in addition to its 276 soldiers, all armed with the 1892 model artillery musket with sabre and bayonet, was equipped with 2 Hotchkiss 42-mm cannons, each supplied with 200 rounds. The Voulet-Chanoine mission was by far the best equipped, with 450 model 1874 rifles, 50 model 1892 muskets, 180,000 rounds of ammunition and an 80-mm mountain gun armed with 125 rounds.

Little by little, these missions will no longer adapt to local ways of travelling. The route, the timetable, the rhythm of the walk, the stop-off points and the stops were all decided by the head

of the mission, and the journeys were not adapted to the seasons or to the seasonal practices of the local populations. The guide was not respected for his knowledge, but became an employee who had to obey orders, and whose skills and loyalty were questioning. The more military the missions become, the more difficult it will be to recruit guides.

There was also the problem of language. None of the French members of these expeditions knew any of the African languages spoken in the region. Apart from the interpreters, nobody knows Arabic. In addition, staff and interpreters are recruited at the start of the mission, so it is often necessary to use a system of double interpreters recruited during the trip.

In general, the missions settle outside the towns, often refusing to enter them, and their camps function as microcosms with little access to the outside world. Relations with the local populations are limited to contact with the chiefs and political authorities. The leaders of these expeditions saw themselves as representing France, and they establish a position of strength during negotiations at the end of which France must emerge victorious.

Cartography

Distance and speed are the main criteria for success, and missions have to cover as much distance as possible in a short space of time. They are constantly on the move and above all gather intelligence useful to their own interests: routes, watering holes, supply possibilities and strengths of the enemy, identifying hostile groups, understanding the personalities of leaders or local issues, navigability of rivers, seasonal changes to routes. To do this, spies were hired and interrogations were carried out.

All these expeditions took maps with them, and observations in the field enabled their representation to be updated. In addition to the guides, the maps were used to compare data provided by informants or during interrogations. However, they are not yet precise enough to do without a guide. Cartography itself was therefore an important part of the mission's work, and the European soldiers became producers of geographical knowledge.[60]

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[60]Marie de Rugy, *La géographie en contexte colonial*, *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe*, Sorbonne Université, ISSN 2677-6588
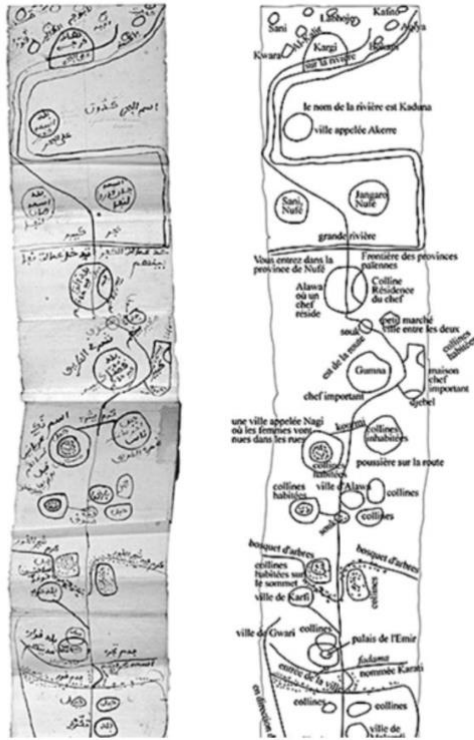
Ill. 2. Carte de la route de Kano à Nyffé (Nupé), par l'esclave d'Hat Salah, années 1820. Royal Geographical

For local populations, geographical knowledge is an important tool that enables them to travel without risk, to sell it for money or to turn it into a profession. There is a high degree of professionalization in the travel industry, and mastery of this knowledge is based on experience. The professional training of "madugai" (caravan leaders) begins at an early age with experienced madugai. The first lesson is mastery of space and time: reading the landscape, memorizing itineraries and knowing travel times. Added to this is social knowledge: the ability to ensure the safety of the journey by combining political and diplomatic know-how, based on politeness and submission to social conventions and customs, thanks to negotiation skills.

When Europeans asked them for topographical information, the natives were aware that they were providing important data, and often refused, knowing that mastery of cartography would give them an advantage.[61]

While the aim was to serve French interests, these missions nevertheless recognized African political authorities and sought to define a colonial frontier in African history and geopolitics.

Treaties

Therefore, members of these missions produced cartographic data and concluded treaties with the natives to enable France to assert itself in international negotiations. These diplomatic decisions were then implemented on the ground in Africa, with commissions being sent out to delimit and demarcate borders at a local level.[62]

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[61]Camille Lefebvre, *Ce que l'itinéraire nous dit du voyage*, Afrique, histoire de territoires, journals.openedition.org
[62]Clélia Coret, *La Conférence de Berlin et le partage de l'Afrique*, *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe*, ISSN 2677-6588

According to the heads of the expeditions, the African sovereigns signed these treaties without understanding their meaning, out of naivety, ignorance or fear. According to the members of these missions, local sovereigns would only agree to sign a treaty if they felt obliged to do so and were forced to do so.[63]

But the reality is more complex. In this region, the establishment of chancelleries and written diplomatic exchanges in Arabic have been common practice since the Middle Ages. The recognition of the sovereignty of a power following a military defeat, the cession of territory or an alliance between two powers, on political, religious or ideological grounds, is accompanied by the drafting of written documents and exchanges of correspondence. While the main vehicular languages of these regions are Hausa, Kanuri and Tamashek, diplomatic reports are written in Arabic. Written treaties and the exchange of flags have been part of the region's political practice for several centuries.

The French proposed that the local sovereigns sign agreements in which they described their territorial possessions, declared themselves allies of the French, undertook to promote trade and not to sign treaties with other Europeans. After signing, they were given a copy of the treaty and a flag. For the local sovereigns, this was an alliance agreement like those practised in the region, i.e. a temporary agreement, based either on a community of interests, or on an ideological agreement, as in the case of the jihad, or on an unfavourable balance of power. So the misunderstanding is not about the practice of treaties per se, but about the meaning given to them by each of the two contracting parties.

The aim of the French [64]is to use these actions in international negotiations. For the rulers of the region, it is also a way of being able to make the most of this alliance in their international environment. In the event of conflict with a regional enemy, they will be able to take advantage of a powerful ally who apparently asks for nothing in return. The ambiguity concerns the meaning of the alliance that now links the two parties.
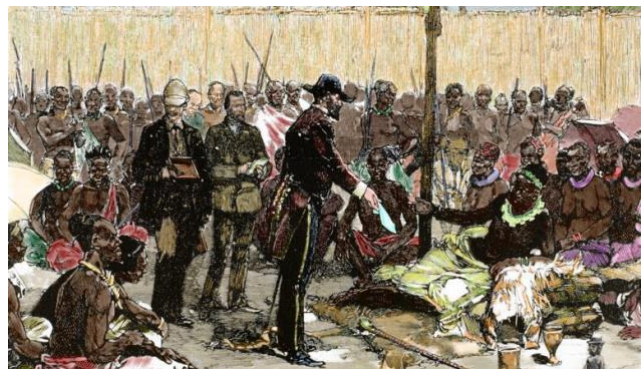
[63] Pierre Michel, Sahara: le defi d'un long reve, France Culture, 2015
[64] Lefebvre Camille, Des pays au crepuscule, Le moment de l'occupation coloniale , Ed. Fayard, 2019

Reactions

Little by little, the military and hostile aspect of these missions grew stronger and stronger, until they became, with the Foureau-Lamy and especially Voulet and Chanoine missions, huge warlike columns practising raids, coercion, threats and feeding on the country. French penetration from the coast provoked hostile reactions from the inland peoples. This resistance proved far more violent than in other regions of West Africa, for two main reasons: firstly, the French chose to extend their domination by force; secondly, Islamisation was very strong and "*for the Muslim societies of West Africa, the imposition of white domination meant submission to the infidel*".[65]

Between 1900 and 1914, Africans preferred to emigrate *en masse* to protest against the harshness of the colonial regime. Between 1882 and 1889, a large proportion of the Fulani population in the suburbs of Saint-Louis emigrated to the Ahmadu Empire. Of the 30,000 Fulani living in the town in 1882, only 10,000 remained in 1889. In 1916 and 1917, more than 12,000 people left the Ivory Coast for the Gold Coast. The same period saw significant emigration from Senegal to the Gambia, from Upper Volta to the Gold Coast, and from Dahomey to Nigeria. These rebellions and migrations were essentially the work of rural people in the hinterland, who had no direct contact with Europeans until the 1880s and 1890s. In the coastal regions, where an elite and a working class were beginning to emerge, reactions were less violent: strikes, boycotts, ideological protests, newspaper articles and, above all, petitions and delegations sent to the local and central colonial administrations by various groups and movements.[66]

Over the last fifteen years or so, the myth of Lyautey and colonial officers has once again become a powerful one within the French army. This colonial heritage, neglected since the 1960s, is now being reclaimed. This development is partly due to the United States, which in the 2000s rediscovered the French counter-insurgency strategists - Gallieni and Lyautey - and recycled their methods, particularly in Afghanistan. This is COIN ("Counter-Insurgency"). According to Michael Shurkin, "these men conquered and pacified the colonial empire in Indochina and Africa (...) Their ideas served as the basis for doctrinal developments in the 1940s and 1950s, when colonial wars were transformed into counter-insurgency campaigns, and the

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[65]Michael Crowder, *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, Cambridge University Press, 1972

[66]Albert Adu Boahen*, Le colonialisme en Afrique, impact et signification*, Histoire générale de l'Afrique pag. 818-864, unesdoc.unesco.org

colonial doctrine became a counter-insurgency doctrine, a variant of which the Americans applied in Afghanistan and Iraq (...) This doctrine was a taboo subject in the French army because of torture and the Algiers putsch".[67]

III.   Lyautey

At the end of the 19th century, Marshall Lyautey learned from General Gallieni how to practice "pacification", i.e. colonial warfare. The Gallienists' approach advocated the use of force as the ultima ratio, rather than as a prerequisite for negotiation. This vision, theorized as the "oil spot" theory, was based on the principle of conquest "on the cheap" and on the need to organize the conquered territories within a peaceful framework. The search for alliances was the driving force behind this doctrine: alliances with the troops, then with former enemies and finally with the political world and the press in metropolitan France.

The first alliance was that between the leader and his soldiers: for Lyautey, the ideal officer should be a guide for his men and his charisma should enable him to "win the hearts" of the troops. This essentially religious and philanthropic relationship would enable him to get more and better out of the soldier. He would select a solid, dedicated 'colonial phalanx' to work with him. Inspired by British colonial policy, which favored association rather than French assimilation, and by the legacy of Bugeaud and Cambon, Lyautey theorized an "indigenophile" colonial thinking and made Morocco a laboratory for alliances in successive concentric circles: the protectorate treaty, which materialized the alliance between Lyautey and the sultan, known as the "*policy of respect*", consisted of giving the sultan the means to remain in power and in return receiving the support of his

[67]Michael Shurkin, *L'intervention française au Sahel et la doctrine de contre-insurrection Etude* n.90, Irsem, Novembre 2021.

authority in order to widen the circle of alliances to other notables -viziers, cheriffs, caids or elama- and support them ("caidalité").

This was to be the "*policy of smiles*", inspired by the "*policy of markets*" of Bugeaud and Gallieni: commercial and festive exhibitions to underline the strength of Franco-Moroccan relations. Marshal Lyautey attributed the following phrase to Marshal Gallieni: "*All officers know how to take over a village at dawn; I want officers who know how to take over a village at dawn and open the market there at noon*".[68]

In mainland France, inspired by the British illustrated periodicals (Graphic, Black and White), Lyautey learnt to use the press to promote his missions and to rally the popular masses: the "Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique française" was thus used as "colonial propaganda". Lyautey was to widen his circle even further, surrounding himself with journalists and creating study "caravans". In this way, he became part of a tradition of communication known as "*savoir-faire et faire savoir*".[69] The rhetoric of "*conquering hearts*" helped to burnish the image of the colonial enterprise by appealing to this "humanitarian conscience". As far as security practices in the colonies were concerned, it appeared that repression alone was counterproductive for colonial troops who had to control vast areas with limited resources, and who were anxious not to stir up local resistance by escalating violence. The ensuing changes in practices meant, on the one hand, convincing metropolitan opinion of the value of colonial work and the know-how of colonial troops and, on the other, governing by working with the indigenous elites, involving them in the enterprise and redistributing certain material and symbolic benefits.[70]

France's involvement in Operation Barkhane means that it is operating in territories that were already traversed in the 19th century and facing similar challenges. For Niagalé Bagayoko[71], the Navy troops (TDM) and the Foreign Legion, which were the main instrument for preventing and resolving crises in Africa and which, as today, occupy a 'central' place within the French

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[68]« *Gallieni à Madagascar et Lyautey au Maroc, deux œuvres de « pacification » complémentaires* », Cahiers de la Recherche doctrinale, Centre de Doctrine et d'Emploi des Forces, 2011, p. 74.

[69]Julie d'Andurain*, La méthode Lyautey*, Inflexions 2019/2 N.41 pag.35-40

[70]Christian Olsson, *De la pacification coloniale aux opérations extérieures, Retour sur la généalogie « des cœurs et des esprits » dans la pensée militaire contemporaine,* Centre d'études et de recherches internationales Sciences Po

[71]Niagale Bagayoko, *les stratégies françaises et américaines*, Afrique, Ed. L'Harmattan, 2003

forces pre-positioned in Dakar, Djibouti and Abidjan, have always had a framework for action formed by the mythical evocation of the weapon's past: the biographies of Archinard, Lyautey and Faidherbe, Leborgne's dialectal grammar books and the logbooks of the units stationed there have created the foundations of this mythology.

Lyautey's study on the "*social role of the officer*" is the benchmark of this colonial culture, and even today numerous publications are devoted to it within the Ministry of Defence's Command Doctrine and Education Centre (CDEC). In the Ministry of Defence's 2006 document "*Doctrine for the use of land forces in stabilization*", the thinking of Gallieni and Lyautey is judged to be "modern, pragmatic and respectful" of the population, although it needs to be adapted to "contemporary imperatives",[72] and in the "Counter-Rebellion Doctrine", there are further references to Gallieni and Lyautey: "*oil spots, grids and sweeps, nomadic units to bring insecurity to the insurgents outside the oil spots*".[73] For Christian Olsson, while colonial interventions based on an imperialist approach were internally coherent, and the indigenous people were represented as big children to be educated through sanctions, post-colonial military interventions are now rejected by the populations. There is "a gulf between the harmless rhetoric of winning hearts and military coercion on the ground".[74]

For Douglas Porch[75], speaking of Lyautey, "*his aim was to deceive the public by masking the reality of colonial operations under a relatively human façade*".

IV. The History of French COIN

"The standard narrative of French COIN doctrine focuses on either the colonial doctrine of Gallieni and Lyautey or the Cold War-era doctrine associated with the wars in Indochina (1945 to 1954) and Algeria (1954 to 1962) and men like David Galula, Jacques Hogard, and Roger

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[72]Maréchal Lyautey, *Le role social de l'officier*, Editions Lavauzelle, 2004 / https://www.defense-et-republique.org/1Fichiers/etudes/2006%20ADT%20doctrine_emploi_FT_stabilisation.pdf

[73]Rémi Carayol, *Aux origines coloniales de Barkhane,* afriquexxi.info, 2022

[74]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281932268_De_la_pacification_coloniale_aux_operations_exterieures_retour_sur_la_genealogie_des_coeurs_et_des_esprits_dans_la_pensee_militaire_contemporaine_Questions_de_Recherche_CERISciences_Po_n39_avril_2012

[75]   https://www.penseemiliterre.fr/en/in-reaction-to-lyautey-s-news-rmg-54-douglas-porch-the-conquest-of-morocco-_114247_1013077.html

Trinquier. There was a third generation of French COIN doctrine developed in the 21st century in response to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which prompted French officers to dust off the Indochina-era doctrine and update it. Each generation of France's COIN tradition merits discussion, for the differences are as noteworthy as the similarities. In each instance, what is regarded as "doctrine" is often more accurately described as "myths" or "representations" regarding the French army's approaches and experience. It has to do with the stories French army officers tell themselves, or about how they imagine their predecessors". [76]

French military engagement is based on counterinsurgency thinking inspired from French military experiences in Africa during the colonial era: Marshal Lyautey, an important player of the colonial conquest, famous for having ensured to "win hearts and minds" in North Africa, is today cited as a reference by French officers. Thus, military operations have to facilitate the development of a space and time for political action and the "Global Approach" aims to facilitate the consolidation of local and regional political orders, to contrast with the stated objectives of restoring the state, to maintain its territorial integrity, and to facilitate national reconciliation.

When President François Hollande ordered the beginning of Operation Serval in January 2013, he did not plan for a long-term military engagement. Serval was meant to recover the territorial integrity of the Malian state thanks to a military control of the country and French soldiers were to secure the necessary space and time required for the actors involved (Malian Armed Forces, the UN, ...) to put into place "political solutions".

By 2014, the French government transformed Operation Serval into Operation Barkhane, which expanded to cover the G5 Sahel states and anchored the French military presence over this space in the long-term: this approach should make it possible to support the armed forces of BSS partner countries, to strengthen the coordination of international military resources accompanying and training African troops, to prevent the reconstitution of terrorist refuge zones in the region. It is in this spirit that Operation Barkhane was launched on August 1, 2014.

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[76]Shurkin , https://tnsr.org/2020/11/frances-war-in-the-sahel-and-the-evolution-of-counter-insurgency-doctrine/

Military Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, General
François Lecointre, described this French "Global Approach"
for the Sahel "as a crisis management strategy centred on the
populations and their perceptions regarding the development of
the crisis. This concept has been inherited from our colonial
adventure." The General continued by referencing 'French
know-how' in counterinsurgency thought developed during
colonial conquests "from Gallieni to Lyautey": he argued that
victory consists of "winning the hearts and minds of the populations to whose aid we come in
the regions we seek to stabilize." This is the theoretical framework in which international
military engagement in the Sahel is rooted : based on counterinsurgency thinking inspired from
French military experiences in Africa, and adapted by experiences gained during NATO
operations in Afghanistan.

Entitled Counterinsurgency, Joint Doctrine (DIA) 3.4.4(A) is the counterpart to Allied Joint
Publication (AJP) 3.4.4: Counterinsurgency.[77] Derived from earlier documents dealing with
Crisis Management (CM), Armed Forces Contribution to Stabilization (STAB), Operations
against an Irregular Adversary (ADIR) and Operational Military Assistance (AMO), this text is
the national reference for counter-insurgency operations.

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[77]DIA-3.4.4(A)_COIN(2013)   ou   la   doctrine   interarmées   de   contre-insurrection
https://www.guerredefrance.fr/DOC/COIN.pdf

V. French COIN (Counterinsurgency, Joint Doctrine (DIA) 3.4.4(A))
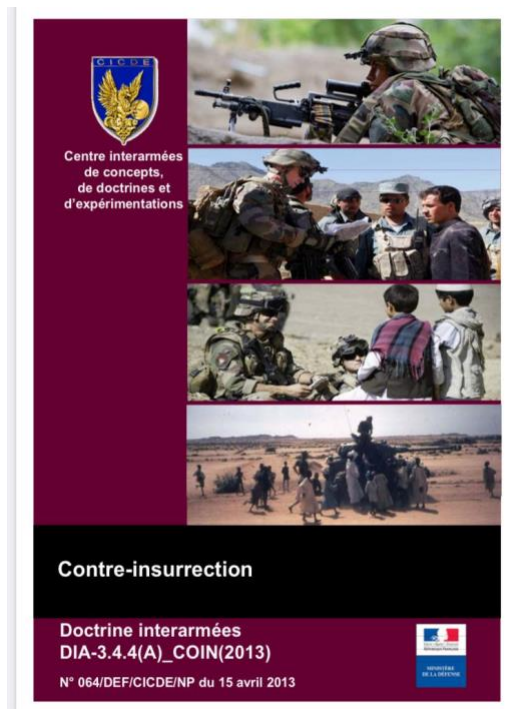
The text defines insurgency and counter-insurgency, its framework, purpose, actors, interventions and means, strengths and weaknesses.

Counter-insurgency (COIN) aims at national reconciliation in the host country, in the case of fragile or failed states. It has a highly political dimension, and the local population is one of the key players.

Contemporary insurgencies are complex and difficult to understand. For them, propaganda remains essential, and they know how to use information and communication technologies to spread it.

Current COIN engagements are characterized by the fact that they take place in sovereign host countries with specific contexts, in a multinational framework and under pressure from public opinion. Intervention forces must therefore work within a limited timeframe, with local security forces, the country's elites and external civilian stakeholders.

The role of the forces is to restore security with local forces, whose operational capabilities they must develop. As part of a comprehensive approach to crises, they are also involved in supporting other COIN components in the fields of governance and development. Their operational approach is based on the following four pillars: PREPARE, SECURE, RESTORE and REBUILD (PRESTER).

In the global approach, the operational level is decisive, acting on the adversary, the terrain and the population. Operational manoeuvring must enable an economy of forces, extend the areas under control and transfer them to local security forces as soon as possible.

COIN requires special operational skills, particularly in terms of operational preparation, command, intelligence and influence.

'AJP 3.4.4 (§ 0109) :"*Insurgency is defined as the actions of an organized, often ideologically motivated, group or movement that seeks to effect or prevent political change of a governing authority within a region, focused on persuading or coercing the population through the use of violence and subversion.*"

For Galula[78], insurrection is "*a long-term struggle, carried out methodically, step by step, with specific intermediate objectives, leading ultimately to the overthrow of the existing order*". The insurgent possesses a considerable asset: the ideological power of a cause on which to base his fight. The loyalist, on the other hand, must shoulder a heavy burden: that of maintaining order throughout the country. So, while insurgency is flexible, counter-insurgency is rigid, expensive and leaves with an ideological handicap. [79]

The term "counter-insurgency" refers to what used to be called "counter-guerrilla", "counter-subversion", "pacification" or, more recently, "stabilization" or "counter-rebellion". If it was during colonial operations that the French armed forces acquired tactical and strategic know-how of engagements within populations, when France engages in theatres within populations (Sangaris, Serval, Barkhane), what is the strategic and tactical heritage of counterinsurgency? it has adapted to ethical and technological evolutions, while preserving its fundamentals: the stake of the population, civil-military coordination and adaptability as tactical primacy.

"*The counterinsurgent reaches a position of strength when his power is embedded in a political organization issuing from, and firmly supported by the population*" writes Lieutenant Colonel David Galula . Centred on popular support, Galula's theories were to form the cornerstone of American and NATO counterinsurgency doctrines, the need for which reappeared in the Afghan and Iraqi theatres in the 2000s. For Galula, the objective of counter-insurgency warfare is not the conquest of territory but of the population, and this objective is not achieved by destroying enemy forces but by winning over the population.

Since insurgency is a deliberate and methodical attempt to destabilize through violence and subversion, counter-insurgency will combat this violence through efforts in the field of

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[78]David Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice, Publ. Frederick A. Praeger, Inc. Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 64–13387, 1964 https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/Galula%20David%20-%20Counterinsurgency%20Warfare.pdf
[79]Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor, *La propagande entre insurrection et contre-insurrection*, Topique 2010/2 n.11, pag.73-81

security.[80] In a country in the grip of an insurrection, counter-insurgency intervention is part of the stabilization process, which aims to restore political and social living conditions, at the request of a legitimate authority, by rehabilitating governance, security and economic and social development.

In the majority of cases, insurgency proliferates from a fragile internal situation, marked by a lack of governance and economic and social development. This fragility of the state generally has internal causes (lack of structures and leadership, corruption, etc.) or may have been provoked by neighbouring countries, which will provide support for the insurgency. Conversely, the state system in place may be authoritarian in its governance. In this case, the insurrection is an expression of demands for freedom and justice.

Insurgency is therefore based on the dissatisfaction of the population and causes a profound deterioration in the social bond within the nation. This social bond is based on three pillars that contribute to stability: governance, security, and economic/social development.

The population is divided into factions, groups or tendencies, sometimes antagonistic. Their allegiances are volatile, and they seek security, justice and order to develop their economic activities. Their only alternative is between legal indigenous power and insurrection. The population is therefore a major issue, as each pole seeks to extend its influence and win over as many inhabitants as possible.

A political confrontation

Against the insurgent project, counter-insurgency requires a clear political objective based on a "social contract" project, led by a legitimate indigenous power. The legitimacy of the existing political system and the effectiveness of the institutions are therefore fundamental: if this legitimacy is weak, external interveners will be perceived by the population as accomplices of an unjust order, they will not receive any support and the population will remain favourable to the insurgents. The fight against corruption and the criminal economy is imperative. Insurgency

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[80]Doctrine interarmées DIA-3.4.4(A)_COIN(2013) https://www.guerredefrance.fr/DOC/COIN.pdf

has several types of actors: insurgents, institutional actors (government, justice, police, army, at national and local level), non-institutional actors (moral and religious authorities), the population, external actors, state or non-state, providing support.

The interactions between these groups are complex: external players can alter the balance of power and establish a new equilibrium. They must therefore be taken into account.

There are three determining factors in an insurgency, which make it possible to differentiate between each group of insurgents: motivations, capabilities and legitimacy.

Recent insurgencies are most often "composite", formed by distinct insurgent groups, allied or not. Each group is characterised by its political, ideological, religious, economic or criminal motivations, which are often intertwined.

Insurgency takes advantage of the fragility of the State system and is based on the demands of the population: unsatisfied political demands, feelings of injustice (social inequality, sharing of resources, poverty, unemployment), loss of confidence in the public authorities (corruption, lack of justice), feelings of revolt in the face of brutal repression, religious persecution, etc.

These reasons for dissatisfaction must be identified in order to combat them or to avoid reinforcing them through clumsy actions (detribalisation, population displacement, etc.).

Finally, an insurrection may receive external support from states, religious, political, community or criminal movements. The aims range from capturing resources or conquering parts of the territory to identifying outlets for criminal networks, the imposition of a religious belief or nationalist demands.

Human factors

Certain socio-anthropological characteristics seem to favour the emergence of insurgencies: clan- or tribal-type societies, which ignore any form of central power; compartmentalised, isolated or xenophobic societies; demographically dynamic societies, with a high proportion of young, unemployed men; culturally violent societies (warrior tradition, culture of "vendetta", "razzias", etc.); societies undergoing rapid change (loss or weakening of values, breakdown of the traditional family and social model, religious persecution, etc.); societies with a high proportion of young, unemployed men.), societies undergoing rapid change (loss or weakening of values, breakdown of the traditional family and social model, religious persecution, etc.). fanaticism and illiteracy, exploited by insurgent propaganda. This is why knowledge of the culture of the people concerned is essential to understanding the psycho-sociological underpinnings of an insurgency.

On the other hand, certain characteristics of the geographical environment (refuge zones) can also be factors conducive to insurrection: cut-off regions with difficult access ("viscous" environments: mountains, marshy areas, deserts, etc.), covered or "opaque" environments (anarchic urbanisation, underground infrastructures, dense and extensive forests, etc.), uncontrolled borders and "porous" regions (coastal areas), or contested borders, etc.

Insurgency strategies vary. In the classic model, the insurgency moves from clandestineness to guerrilla warfare, until it confronts the security forces in open conflict.

Other models exist: the clan model, the community model, the mafia model and the ethno-nationalist model, as in Northern Mali, where Islamic proselytism is applied to the ethnic claims of the Tuareg.

These insurrections seek to provoke a rupture between the population and the legal government, in order to establish a new political balance, by capitalising on the grievances of the population and taking control of it. The aim of this enterprise of destruction through violence is to block or remove the intervention forces.

The population is therefore one of the major stakes of the insurrection, [81]which cannot survive without this popular base. Through violence and persuasion, the insurrection discredits the authorities by attacking targets with a high symbolic value (authorities, official buildings, etc.) and by eliminating the loyalist powerbrokers among the elites.

The insurgency will also use propaganda to exploit the collateral damage caused by external actors, seeking to provoke a psychological shock within the population (intimidation, terrorist actions), or making the population the victim of the "terrorism - brutal repression" spiral of the forces of law and order. It also seeks to tighten its grip on the population (recruitment, indoctrination).

The insurgency may seek support through persuasion, manipulation and/or terror, to cover up its clandestineness, ensure its logistical needs (human, financial and material resources) and obtain information. It can also use the population as a tool, either passively ("human shield") or actively (recruiting "auxiliaries"), exacerbating inter-ethnic or inter-religious tensions to create chaos that suits its interests.

The territory

Territory is the other major stake in the insurgency. The insurgency may concentrate its efforts on seizing key areas (refuges, rear bases, border and transit zones), or selected zones to divide up the area, with a view to partitioning the country or bogging down the conflict. If the insurgency is unable to perform the functions of government in the territories it controls, it may seek legitimacy from external support.

The use of violence in insurrection

The use of violence is characteristic of insurgency and takes many forms: intimidation, kidnappings, terrorist attacks, harassment, military attacks, etc. The same insurgent group may use different modes of violence, which must be responded to by security forces with extended capabilities and who cooperate with each other (police forces or military response). This violence, which can be extreme, primarily serves insurgent propaganda.

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[81] Paret Peter, *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Princeton University Press 1943

Propaganda is the insurgents' main weapon and is consubstantial with an insurrection. Thanks to propaganda, the insurrection compensates for its weakness by increasing its influence in local and international public opinion. Propaganda enables the insurgency to exist and to win by turning the local population against it, by creating a current of sympathy which provides it with resources (human, material and financial), by provoking international public opinion to become weary of the insurgency so that, in the long term, it rejects the intervention, and finally by acquiring legitimacy on the local, regional and international scene, giving it the status of a credible interlocutor.

It precedes direct military action and permanently contaminates people's minds. Its messages are adapted to the target's level of education and external relays are identified to strengthen its influence and discredit the regime being fought, without any concern for truth.

This propaganda is based on an ideological message and takes advantage of access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) to have an international resonance.

If it cannot achieve a quick victory, the insurrection seeks to "rot" the situation. But the population's weariness may then lead it to prefer the powers that be, synonymous with order and relative peace.

In order to last, an insurrection relies on the social fabric from which it springs. It can remain "dormant" for long periods within the population that shelters it. In this case, it will only exist through rare actions with a high propaganda impact.[82]

Structure and methods of action of the insurrection

Recent insurgencies are most often made up of movements of groups acting in networks. These "composite" insurgencies are made up of distinct insurgent groups with political, ideological, religious, economic or criminal motivations. They also differ in terms of their capabilities (manpower, weaponry, material and financial resources, discipline and training, etc.), which are more or less well-developed and condition their modes of action.

Each group has varying degrees of legitimacy. This degree of legitimacy determines its freedom of action and the level of human and material support it can receive from abroad.

Each group is distinguished by a combination of these three characteristics, which may change

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[82] Bouzoumita Mehdi, *Mao et la guerre révolutionnaire,* Stratégique 2016/1 (N° 111), pages 63 à 87

over time. These different groups can form lasting alliances, join forces from time to time, or fight each other.

Insurgents are made up of a core of permanent members (cadres, fighters, infiltrators, etc.) and non-permanent members (auxiliaries, sympathisers, etc.), who are difficult to distinguish because they are often drawn from the local population. Intermittent" members can make up the majority of the workforce and therefore constitute an inexhaustible human reservoir.

Their commitment reflects the frustrations of the population, but their motivations can be individual. They will be recruited by offering them a framework for action and transcending them through propaganda in a higher project to change society. Their main asset is their great freedom of action and movement.

They are in a strong position thanks to their ability to hide within the population, their "fluidity", their freedom from normative constraints and their many connections at all levels of society.

However, these groups have limited combat capabilities, are often poorly coordinated and divided, lack a chain of command, and depend on support from the population or from outside sources. They need "safe havens" and their tactical communications are still largely vulnerable to electronic warfare.

Insurgencies are often dual: insurgents carry out violent actions in parallel with regular activities. This dual nature makes it more difficult to identify and neutralise them.

The insurgent's capacity to adapt is high: terrorist attack, possibly "suicide", conventional military attack, guerrilla-style harassment, and renunciation of direct confrontation. On the other hand, in "power-equalizing" environments (urban areas or jungles), they will compete in conventional confrontations. This selection of modes of action is guided by the psychological impact on public opinion.

The insurgents now have access to information and communication technologies or ICTs (internet, satellite phones, etc.), available on the civilian market. They therefore have access to the international media and social networks for their propaganda. Modern insurgencies also have access to military capabilities such as night vision, sophisticated weaponry and nuclear, radiological, bacteriological and chemical (NRBC) capabilities.

Counterinsurgency

Because of its particular human and geographical characteristics, each counter-insurgency engagement is specific to the theatre of intervention and the regional environment.

The context of intervention also includes the legal and political framework of the engagement (international organisation), as well as the nature and number of players (military coalition, institutional and non-governmental civilian players, etc.).

Each insurgency is therefore unique, and responses must be tailored to suit: knowledge of the specific features of the context, and consideration of cultural, religious and historical characteristics are essential.

Only a legitimate indigenous power can lead an alternative political project against the insurgency. It is therefore the legitimacy of the existing political system that constitutes the centre of gravity of the counter-insurgency: "*Political action [...] plays the principal role throughout the war"*.[83] Intervention forces must transfer responsibility for security to local forces, and their actions are guided by the legitimacy of local power. Without this legitimacy, any operational success is doomed.

The intervention forces must respect the political decisions of the host country, encourage local leaders and the population to support the reconciliation process, support the legitimacy of the public authorities and the security forces, ensure the protection of loyalist elites and ensure that the rights of the population are respected.

The population has a central place and the forces will seek its support by avoiding offending its

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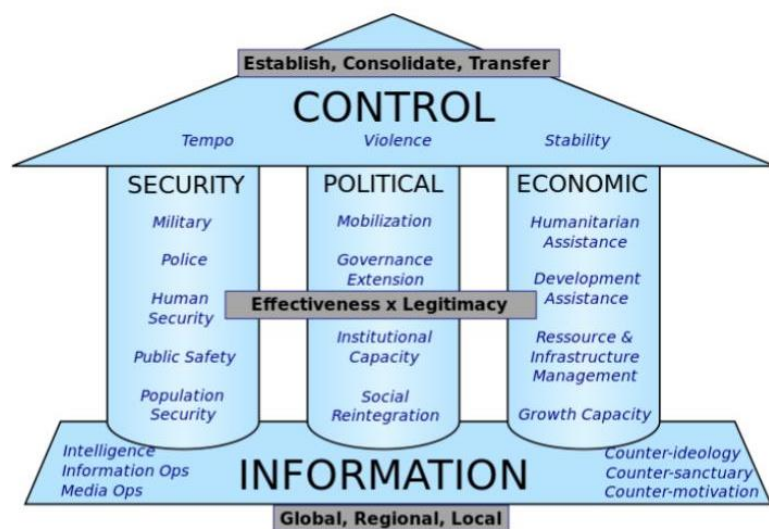
[83]David Galula. *Contre-insurrection*, Économica, Paris, 2008 (pages 17-18).

beliefs and customs, and will protect it from insurgent action and propaganda.

The absolute priority is to maintain the legitimacy of the forces. The objective of "winning hearts and minds" must be translated into the creation of conditions favourable to the indigenous government's alternative project. The intervention forces must avoid causing collateral casualties and unnecessary destruction in order to preserve the quality of their image among the population.[84]

The multinationalisation of counter-insurgency operations

Today's counter-insurgency operations are generally multinational. This strengthens the legitimacy of the intervention, but multinationalisation is also an operational constraint. The insurgency will also seek to undermine the cohesion of the coalition, for example by adopting different modes of action for different contingents.

For intervention forces, unlike insurgents, respect for the law is imperative. They are subject to the law of armed conflict and must therefore comply with its fundamental principles: the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants, between military objectives and civilian property, the principle of proportionality, the principle of humanity, and the management of prisoners in the absence of a legal principle for captured insurgents.

In the event of collateral damage, the insurgents will seek to publicise the losses within the Force or among the population, as well as the detention or execution of its prisoners, in order to initiate national and international support for the intervention. National public opinion is fundamental to the insurgents. This is why, in the communications strategy, the protection of the Force and the indigenous population, and the avoidance of collateral casualties, are imperative.

The time factors

The time factor is a decisive parameter in strategic planning for intervention forces. The first few months of an operation are crucial for exploiting the new equilibrium created by the intervention. While the insurgency's military capabilities have been reduced, its remilitarisation

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[84] file:///Users/pierrepellegrini/Downloads/medact-Iraq-report-collateral-damage.pdf

must be avoided by prioritising public security. This action will be accompanied by progress in the areas of governance and economic and social development, to retain the support of the population ("Oil spot").

Concepts of "zero death" wars with surgical strikes are ineffective against enemies determined over time. Similarly, the objectives of military intervention must remain realistic and concrete. Tangible results must be achieved by deadlines that are compatible with the impatience of Western public opinion. To this end, significant indicators will be developed to assess the evolution of the situation and the progress made.

Asymmetries

Various positive asymmetries can be considered: the forces have a superiority over the insurgents, in terms of capabilities, particularly in air actions (fire support, transport, intelligence, responsiveness, etc.), for continuous and all-weather combat (night vision capability, thermal vision, radars, etc.), through the firepower of both direct and indirect fire weapons, for protection (personnel, vehicles and infrastructure), for command and control (C2 thanks to the Command and Control Systems), and for air support (fire support, transport, intelligence, responsiveness, etc.).), through the firepower of both direct and indirect fire weapons, for protection (personnel, vehicles and infrastructure), for command and control (C2) thanks to the Operational Information and Communications Systems (SIOC) and for technical intelligence research resources (image, electromagnetic and computer research).

They also have a superiority in terms of legitimacy at international level, as their intervention is most often backed by a United Nations Security Council resolution. Finally, their intervention is generally well received by the local population. These positive asymmetries must be exploited, in particular to compensate in part for the small number of troops deployed.

On the other hand, negative asymmetries can have an impact: intervention forces have fewer troops than are needed to control large areas over the long term. Vast areas are then left to the

insurgents, who can regenerate and move around.

The need for protection, caused by the sensitivity of Western opinion to losses, can limit the use of forces: individual protection limits the mobility of fighters in rough terrain to the benefit of insurgents who are tactically very mobile. Nor do they facilitate contact with the population. The use of armoured vehicles can give rise to public protest (damage to roads, congestion, dust, noise, aggressive image, etc.). Stationing troops in large, protected bases gives the image of a timid, inward-looking force and provides static targets for insurgents.

It is difficult for intelligence sensors to penetrate the population (local languages and dialects, culture, etc.), but cooperation with the host state's intelligence services can compensate for this handicap.

Intervention forces have air superiority, but they do not have superiority in terms of tactical ground mobility: the geographical nature of the theatre can severely limit the use of their means of transport (poor road network, isolated and cut-off areas, etc.).

Similarly, maintaining logistics routes and flows is a particularly sensitive issue. Their need for airmobile transport vectors is therefore generally high (in particular, heavy-lift helicopters). Finally, forces are subject to constraints in their actions that make them predictable (political and legal constraints, multinationality, media coverage of their actions, force protection, etc.). This visibility can undermine the element of surprise for insurgents.

External military intervention is often due to the weakness of local security forces. (Re)building their capacity must be a priority, which means training local auxiliary troops and paramilitary police. The integration of civilian teams at battalion level to identify governance issues and mobilise public support can also enhance COIN's efforts.[85]

Such teams have the capacity to respond to the needs of civilians for policing, infrastructure, healthcare, education and agriculture, and function as a vanguard of government services. This Operational Military Assistance (OMA) mission is a major objective planned and led by the ground, gendarmerie and special forces components. Similarly, the intervention forces must act in support of the local forces, as soon as the latter have regained an adequate operational level.

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[85]Eeben Barlow, *Composite Warfare : The Conduct of Successful Ground Force Operations in Africa* (Pinetown, Afrique du Sud : 30° South, 2016). – Kilcullen David, *Counterinsurgency ,* Oxford University Press, 2010 - https://mwi.westpoint.edu/irregular-warfare-podcast-a-twenty-year-retrospective-on-irregular-warfare-and-counterinsurgency/

However, this training poses a high risk of infiltration by insurgents. This is a threat of "insider attacks", which can cause a high volume of casualties and create a climate of mistrust between local soldiers and trainers. This insider threat must therefore be avoided by screening local soldiers, sharing intelligence and introducing rules of behaviour and force protection.

Local elites

Securing consensus of local elites is crucial for the success of military operations. Disregarding these figures, as witnessed in Iraq, can lead to significant repercussions. For example, the decisions taken by US military leaders to eliminate Baathist civil servants and disband the Iraqi army proved to be a disaster. [86]

Indeed, local notables, whether institutional, traditional (clan chiefs, religious authorities, etc.) or economic, can have a decisive influence on the population and become "guarantors" during negotiations. The intervention forces need to get to know them, interact with them and make the most of them, as these loyalist elites will act as relays for the legal government's policy towards the population. Protecting them is an imperative for the security forces, as the insurgents seek to eliminate or intimidate them. In contrast to "Positive influencers", "Negative influencers", by their behaviour or words, must be disqualified by all available legal means because they undermine the credibility of the reconciliation process.

The same positive attitude must be adopted with different partners : intervention forces operate in the midst of an ever-increasing number of institutional (international organisations [IOs], governmental organisations [GOs]) and non-institutional (non-governmental organisations [NGOs], private companies, including Security and Defence Services Companies [SDSCs]) civilian players.

With them, it is necessary to look for possible synergies and avoid friction, even if the objectives are not always shared, thanks to coordination mechanisms.

Civil action must respect local culture and Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) must seek to strengthen the legitimacy of public authorities by involving local players in projects, monitoring the use of resources and accompanying these projects with a promotional campaign.

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[86] Ricks Thomas E., *Fiasco: The American Military adventure in Iraq*, Penguin Group, 2006 – Biddle Stephen, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare, Council on Foreign Relations, 2003, pp. 31-46*

Even with the protection and the positive relationship with the population, achieving goals is facilitated: the main role of the armed forces in counter-insurgency is to restore security in close liaison with the local security forces, and to reduce the insurgents' capacity for action. The second major priority is to train and strengthen the host country's military forces (AMO). The protection of the population, described as one of the aims of the military contribution to counter-insurgency in AJP-3.4.4 (§ 0501 and 0548), must be achieved in the key areas under control, by protecting favourable local elites and shielding the population from insurgent propaganda. The secondary role of the armed forces is to support the other aspects of counter-insurgency (governance and development), by supporting the alternative political project and promoting local security forces.

Fundamentals of military action in counter-insurgency

"The profound nature of insurgent warfare is political, and counterinsurgency can snatch victory only if it demonstrates skill in the political arena," wrote Michael C. Conley of the Pentagon-funded Center for Research on Social Systems (CRESS) in 1966. [87]

The first is the primacy of politics, i.e. the project of the legitimate power of the host nation. All those involved in counter-insurgency must share this political orientation, otherwise military action will be doomed to failure. This political project must be recognised by the authorities and the local population to guarantee the legitimacy of the intervention forces in the host country. The political nature of counter-insurgency requires a comprehensive approach (security, governance, economics, social and educational action, etc.), because military action is only one aspect of the overall multidimensional approach. Understanding the context will guide action, and intelligence plays a key role in the planning, conduct and evaluation phases of operations. Lastly, the strategy of influence is decisive, because it is in public opinion that the legitimacy of the players is at stake. The fight against propaganda involves acquiring information superiority in order to undermine the adversary's credibility.

Principles of action by armed forces in counter-insurgency

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[87]https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1975/02/KLARE/32937

The foundations of counter-insurgency for armed forces are based on ten principles of action: adapting to the local context, reinforcing the credibility of the Force by exploiting positive asymmetries, gaining and maintaining the upper hand by imposing the decision-making rhythm on the insurgency and controlling operational time, seizing opportunities and seeking continuity in action, acting as soon as possible in support of local forces. Then the Force has to plan and conduct a joint operational manoeuvre combining military action and influence. And exploit the insurgents' weaknesses, win over the least hostile, marginalise and neutralise them. At the same time, remove the population from the influence of the insurgents, protect those with a positive influence, seek synergy between military and civilian actions and, finally, keep violence to the lowest possible level.

To implement counterinsurgency and, in particular, the military contribution to a global approach, the operational framework adopted by AJP-3.4.4 is as follows[88]. Envisages three areas of effort: "clear" (secure), "hold" (hold) and "build" (rebuild). The national French doctrine explicitly adds "shape" (preparing and shaping, in particular, perceptions) to these areas of effort**.**

The national operational approach therefore favours the "PRESTER" framework: PREPARE, SECURE, TEnir, Reconstruct (Prester). This is an operational framework that can be applied to both military and civilian action: it involves the intervention forces, the host nation and the intervening civilians. These four areas of effort are simultaneous and intertwined, weighted in different proportions depending on the situation and the evolution of the level of security in each zone under consideration.

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[88]https://info.publicintelligence.net/NATO-Counterinsurgency.pdf

The specificities of operational manoeuvres in counter-insurgency

The operational level is decisive: located in the theatre, it understands the specific features, measures changes and implements joint capabilities over time.

Counterinsurgency will act in three complementary ways: in counterinsurgency, a strategy of attrition is often useless, because the popular base provides the insurgents with an almost inexhaustible reservoir of human resources. Intervention forces must therefore look for other means: Know, Rally, Isolate, Divide, Neutralise.

The second axis is on the ground: on the ground, by reducing the insurgency's freedom of manoeuvre through close control of key areas, by guarding the borders to isolate the insurgents, by extending the controlled areas, and by preventing uncontrolled regions from being used as "refuge" zones.

The third priority is to target the local population and elites in order to deprive the insurgency of its popular support. An alternative to the enemy's propaganda must be created and this project must be supported by Information Operations (IO): convincing, denying, carrying out CIMIC actions, fighting propaganda, spreading a positive image of the Force.

The aim is to control the representations, allegiances and loyalties of the population by diverting them from the political influence of the insurgent enemy through psychological actions to "protect" communities[89] but also civilian development and assistance activities. Military skills are regularly used, for example, for local medical assistance, for work requiring the use of specific engineering equipment, and for individual know-how.[90]

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[89]David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice*, Londres, Praeger, 2006
[90]https://www.penseemiliterre.fr/en/plugins/cdec/documents/114218/rmg-n-55.pdf

Population control will be carried out by local security forces (curfews and checkpoints), and any forced displacement of the population is to be avoided.

Self-defense militias must not be armed, as they could join the ranks of the insurgents. If this solution is chosen, it must be strictly supervised.

The population can be involved in the security forces under the responsibility of the host state. Any military action must be backed up by a communications campaign, and the mediation of local elites will be sought.

Integrating the Force into the global counter-insurgency approach

The global approach is, in principle, coordinated at international level, but the host government's aspirations must be taken into account.

The population-centered approach characteristic of COIN involves civil and military interventions designed to improve living conditions and ensure respect for law and justice.[91]

The intervention force's actions must be consistent with those of local players and civilian stakeholders (IOs, NGOs, private companies), and carried out in close liaison with the host government. A "high representative" can coordinate all these actions, supported by local "expeditionary administrators".

A regular system of information exchange must therefore be set up between the operational level command (COMANFOR) and those involved, such as NATO's civilian and military "joint commissions". This operational planning will define humanitarian assistance, reconstruction or security needs and priority areas of interest, and will determine objectives, deadlines and security level indicators.

The operational headquarters will develop an integrated operational plan to define the "lines of effort" (military, political, economic, etc.) that will guide the action and objectives of the intervention forces. This operation plan, defined by AJP-01140 and AJP-5, is based on NATO's Comprehensive Operational Planning Directive (COPD).[92]

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[91]Michael Shurkin, https://africacenter.org/fr/publication/renforcer-la-strategie-sahelienne-de-contreinsurrection
[92] https://info.publicintelligence.net/NATO-COPD.pdf

The mission of the CIMIC function is to facilitate coordination between the Force and the various players involved, and to contribute to civilian reconstruction. However, its main objective is not humanitarian.

Its action will be focused on the populations of secure zones, in order to increase its attractiveness. In this way, dependency links will be created between the population and the established order, and the insurgency will be rejected. To have a positive impact on the population, we need to identify real needs (medical aid for the population, veterinary support for livestock breeders, etc.).

Operational agility at theater level

Because of their limited resources, intervention forces divide their efforts into zones in order to establish priorities. The zoning of the theater is carried out by the operational command and the authorities of the host country.

Three types of zone can be distinguished: "priority" zones (ZP), "control" zones (ZC) and "surveillance" zones (ZS). The borders of the theater will be given special treatment, as their control is absolutely essential.[93]

Sea fronts are generally covered by Surveillance Zones (ZS).

Priority Zones (ZP) are key areas held by intervention forces before they are handed over to local forces. They are strategic because they are the country's vital regions (crossroads of communication routes, maritime or airport hubs). They are often densely populated, so the forces must have adequate capabilities for engagement in urbanized areas.

They must be neither too numerous nor too extensive, so that the ratio of security forces to population is sufficient. They must be conquered gradually, and then controlled by a network of checkpoints and patrols: local security forces survey the population, and CIMIC actions are implemented to create dependency.

Control of the information environment is also a necessity. These ZPs need to be consolidated over time to prevent them falling back into the hands of insurgents.

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[93] Doctrine interarmées DIA-3.4.4(A)_COIN(2013) https://www.guerredefrance.fr/DOC/COIN.pdf

Zones of Control (ZC) are less decisive, but must be controlled so as not to threaten the ZP. Security forces must maintain permanent insecurity in these areas to prevent adversaries from establishing themselves, through intelligence, search and seizure missions, joint cordon-and-search operations, interventions and interceptions, aerial surveillance and observation, the use of supporting fires, and exceptionally, local self-defense militias.

Light counter-guerrilla units contribute to these operations: made up of forces from the host country, and accompanied by specialized teams from the intervention forces, they benefit from fire support capabilities and air assets (planes, helicopters, drones).

These units are only employed when the insurgents have been reduced by joint operations.

Local recruitment provides an advantage in terms of knowledge of the physical and human environment. This proximity to the population enables better contact and counteracts the influence of insurgents. Civil-military assistance (CIMIC) will reinforce the population's loyalty.

The modes of action of these light counter-guerrilla units are similar to those of guerrilla warfare: immersion in the local population, long-term nomadization, observation/intelligence and systematic search of the "hunting zone" to detect hideouts, harassment and reduction of residual insurgent bands, night action to take advantage of the positive asymmetry of night vision equipment.

Surveillance Zones (ZS) are the more remote, less populated areas where ground troops are not permanently deployed. However, they are subject to constant aerial surveillance to prevent the insurgency from taking root: neutralization of targets spotted by air-ground resources and occasional actions by special forces.

Components

At theater level, success depends on a joint operational maneuver. Each component - air, land, sea, special forces and gendarmerie - contributes with its own specific capabilities. Efforts must be shared between these components to achieve good operational synergy and economy of forces.

The role of the **land component** is to control the land and human environment in Priority Zones

(ZP), contribute to joint action in Control Zones (ZC), and support other components in Surveillance Zones (ZS).

It can gather intelligence, support local ground forces, contribute to CIMIC and OMI actions, and participate in Operational Military Assistance (OMA) to local forces.

The **maritime component** manages intelligence and surveillance of coastal areas, protection of maritime traffic, counter-piracy and control of port and offshore platforms. It supports coastal and lagoon operations, contributes to the targeting process and participates in Operational Military Assistance (OMA) to local forces.

The **air component** contributes to battlespace control (air superiority; airspace detection, surveillance and control), intelligence support (reconnaissance, surveillance, geographic support, etc.), kinetic support for land maneuver (fire support; armed escort; interdiction), non-kinetic support for land maneuver (demonstration of presence and strength, jamming, listening, participation in information operations, etc.), mobility support (inter- and intra-theater logistics transport, air delivery, medical evacuation, airborne medical support, implementation and creation of airport platforms, air-to-air refueling, etc.).), mobility support (inter- and intra-theater logistics transport, air delivery, medical evacuation, airborne medical support, implementation and creation of airport platforms, in-flight refueling, etc.), contribution to the targeting process and operational military assistance (OMA).

The **"special forces" component** contributes to intelligence gathering and the targeting process, supervises local forces, provides specific support for military operations of influence (OMI), and participates in operational military assistance (AMO) for local forces.

The **"armed force with a police mission" component** contributes to the overall maneuvering of civil and military missions. It carries out intelligence, public security, advises commanders

on judicial police matters, provides expertise, participates in AMO and contributes to specialized operations.

The operational manoeuvre will be based on the capabilities of the various components, adapting the "leading / supporting" relationship to the zone in question:

In Priority Zones (ZP) to be controlled from the ground, the ground component "leads" the main action, while the other components "contribute" to the action;

In Surveillance Zones (ZS), the air component is the "leader" (air surveillance), with the other components "supporting" its action.

In the Zones of Control (ZC), the distribution of efforts can evolve: the "leading" component is initially the air component, then the special forces component, and finally the ground component.

This rebalancing by zone enables more efficient use of resources and better economy of forces. For all zones, the "special forces" component is particularly effective at the beginning of the phase and during transfers of responsibility, thanks to its special capabilities (flexibility, responsiveness and discretion).

Joint operations combining heliborne and airborne operations, ground envelopment and sweep manoeuvres, and fire support, are carried out to (re)take control of priority areas, and then in control zones. These operations require seasoned intervention troops and extensive transport and fire support resources.

Because of the predictability of these operations, the enemy often has time to disperse. The area must therefore be sealed off, and operations must last long enough to cover the whole area, neutralize the insurgents and destroy their caches and depots. Finally, the enemy must be prevented from reconstituting itself, by maintaining light counter-guerrilla formations on the ground.

Extending controlled zones

There are different methods for extending controlled zones: the aim is to progressively expand Priority Zones (ZP) to reduce the insurgency's hold over the territory.

The historic "oil stain" method, invented by Gallieni during the pacification campaigns, needs to be updated. On the one hand, this method corresponded to an objective of conquest, which is no longer the current objective. Secondly, the reduced numbers of ground troops available for intervention mean that this type of manoeuvre can no longer be carried out without dangerously clearing out secure areas and risking losing a secure zone.

Gallieni and Lyautey's "oil spot" strategy has been adapted into the Anglo-Saxon "shape, clear, hold, build" doctrine. It involves gradually advancing towards insurgent areas, having first secured all rear lines. To achieve this, the loyalist forces move among the population to convince them of the legitimacy of the operation, during patrols or at "checkpoints". Thanks to these daily contacts, the soldiers are able to build trust and gather intelligence.[94]

Two other methods can be used to modernize the "oil spot" concept and gradually expand ZPs. The first is the transfer of ZCs to local forces, so that they can intervene in another region.

The other method is the "domino" effect, when controlled zones are extended "by capillary action" to neighbouring regions. In this way, regions adjacent to secured zones are turned upside down, creating a desire among the population to join the loyalist camp (CIMIC actions).

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[94]Benjamin Hamm, https://www.penseemiliterre.fr/que-reste-t-il-des-theories-de-la-contre-insurrection-4-4_114226_1013077.html

Operational readiness

Counterinsurgency requires special capabilities. The first is operational readiness: versatility of the units involved, modularity of forces and pre-projection readiness (PCR) adapted to the theatres.

Committed forces undergo training specific to the intervention context. This training is joint and often multinational (English language, multinational procedures). As part of their combat training in semi-desert and hostile environments, each year, future lieutenants take part in an internship at the Ecole du Désert in Djibouti (Centre d'Entraînement au Combat et d'Aguerrissement au Désert, CECAD), which trains units in joint combat in a joint and combined context.[95]

Efforts are focused on getting to know the physical and human environment in order to make contact with the population and avoid behavioural errors. Equipment is also adapted to the situation, by modifying and acquiring certain items. Commanders also need to know all aspects of the environment (politics, history, culture, human and physical geography, religion, economy, etc.) to better understand the intentions of the protagonists.

Human geography, unlike physical geography, is evolving. In 2005, for example, the US Army developed the Human Terrain System (HTS) (2007-2014) to survey and provide information on local populations and cultures, using personnel from the social sciences (archaeologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, linguists, etc.). General Petraeus, following in Lyautey's footsteps, felt that this overlapping of knowledge would enable him to turn the population around.[96]

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[95] https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/actualites/ffdj-entrainement-au-cecad-80-stagiaires-garde-cotes-eleves-officiers-djiboutiens

[96] Audio: Pierre Servent, *La Géographie et les cartes: des outils pour faire la guerre?* France Culture , 17/02/2022

In addition to recruiting and training interpreters and listening linguists, learning local languages fosters contact with the population and its elites, improves the Force's image and enhances intelligence.

The "command and control (C2)" function

The command decision-making process must ensure unity of effort between civilian and military players. At the strategic level, national and international players (IO and coalition member countries) will be involved in preparing the operation.

In the case of a coalition, the global approach is first developed at multinational level. At national level, the planning of the French contribution must involve the relevant ministries and institutional operators.

Exchanging information with non-institutional players (NGOs, private companies) enables strategic planning, leading to an integrated operations plan.

To better seize opportunities, tactical leaders need autonomy. Command will therefore be decentralized down to the lowest level. Command posts must be reactive to adapt to the situation: they must be able to rapidly deploy light elements to command operations as closely as possible. In air operations, command remains centralized, with decentralized control provided by liaison detachments located as close as possible to ground elements.

Counter-insurgency is a constant process of learning and adaptation. It must be based on a continuous process of RETour d'EXpérience (RETEX) at all levels. Thanks to continuous assessment and information, commanders can update planning and verify that objectives are being met. Operational information and communications systems (SIOC) must enable this reactivity, to facilitate decision-making, the preparation of orders, and the implementation of support and operations with local forces, allies and civilians.

PCs must have enhanced expertise in intelligence and influencing actions.

Operational command posts

The media and political resonance of operations requires solid operational planning.

The operational HQ must therefore remain flexible, adapting to changing circumstances and COMANFOR directives.

The expertise offices are coordinated around the following three functions:

understanding the operational context, managing capabilities/resources, and operations/organizing action.

The operational HQ must also have high-level expertise (POLAD POLitical ADvisor, LEGAD LEGal Advisor , GOVAD GOVernment ADvisor , DEVAD DEVelopment Advisor etc.).

Thanks to theatre zoning, the command structure is based on regional commands, with joint reserves at each level (theatre, zone, sector). These regional commands adapt operational planning to the local context.

The "intelligence" and "counter-intelligence" functions in counterinsurgency

Geographical and human intelligence plays an essential strategic role in counterinsurgency. At the strategic level and prior to COIN intervention, intelligence must enable us to grasp the complexity of the environment, the situation and the threat, to calibrate the Force's needs and determine the focus of its efforts.

First and foremost, this involves documentation (historical, geographical, academic) concerning the physical and human context in which the intervention force will operate.

Research also focuses on the population, the economy, governance, the information environment, etc.

In theatre, the intelligence chain is made up of cells responsible for orienting, researching, exploiting and disseminating intelligence.

Specialized units and sensor systems must cover all intelligence needs, down to the lowest tactical level. Among our research resources, new forensic capabilities are helping to uncover clandestine networks. In surveillance zones, technical intelligence uses satellite, aircraft and drone imagery research, and electromagnetic research to intercept insurgent communications.

But it is the combination of all these resources that produces reliable intelligence.

The involvement of all units is essential to gather information that can then be used in conjunction with specialized sensors. This requires special analysis tools and methods, such as systemic analysis. All intelligence services will work together to detect any threat of terrorist attack, and allies and local security forces will need to exchange information.

The **Counterinsurgency (CI) function** manages the threats posed to the Force by the insurgency (espionage, sabotage, subversion...) and the indiscretions that insurgents could exploit (soldiers' "blogs"...).

Its action is preventive (criticality, vulnerability and risk studies), and it recommends the necessary security measures against the risk of attack or sabotage.

Locally recruited civilian personnel (LRCP) are under particular scrutiny: cooperation with these forces increases the risk of compromise.

The IC shares data collected through biometric measurements to detect those responsible for hostile action attempts and contributes to Military Influence Operations (MIO) by analysing the discourse of insurgents and their sympathizers.

Counter-insurgency operations require a number of specific capabilities: in Zones de Contrôle (ZC) and Zones de Surveillance (ZS), air-land manoeuvring requires appropriate air assets, the ability to deploy support rapidly, cooperation between ground forces, special forces and airborne reserves, and consequent heliborne capabilities (manoeuvring helicopters).

In counterinsurgency, units have to learn continuously (feedback, RETEX) and adapt to the situation (re-articulation, change of posture, change of equipment, etc.).

Gradation in the use of force is necessary, and forces must give priority to indirect approaches, targeted actions and precision over firepower.

The Force needs to be able to manage insurgent prisoners, isolate them and gather information using appropriate means. Similarly, the training and support of local forces requires capabilities adapted to their specific characteristics (human, cultural, material, etc.) and special training.

On the other hand, mastery of the information environment and coordination of influencing actions are essential to combat insurgent propaganda and maintain the Force's legitimacy in public opinion by delegitimizing the opponents of reconciliation. We therefore need to strengthen our capacity to influence and coordinate physical actions in the field with messages.

This influence is planned at a strategic level. Special Forces expertise makes a major contribution to Information Operations (IO).

The "protection" function

The best protection in counterinsurgency is contact with the local population. A compromise must therefore be found between security and relations with the locals. So, rather than large, overprotected bases cut off from the population, it's better to opt for smaller, mutually supportive posts. Access to these bases and infrastructures must be protected both actively and passively.

Vital logistical axes are always priority targets for insurgents. They must therefore be monitored, protected and cleared of mines and explosive devices.

To protect the population, access to the ZP must be controlled (protection and surveillance devices, checkpoints at entry points, etc.), and the main public places must be monitored with appropriate means (special forces, etc.).

The protection of authorities in favor of the stabilization process must remain discreet, so as not to expose them to accusations of "collaboration with foreigners".

Logistical support in counter-insurgency

From a logistical point of view, counter-insurgency imposes particular constraints.

Logistics resources, including medical support, are prime targets for insurgents. Indeed, all logistical deployments and routes are vulnerable to attack, and must be protected accordingly.

Convoys, for example, must be conceived as genuine operations. Even if they have an escort, logistics vectors must be able to ensure their own self-defence in the event of an attack (armoured protection, armament, transmissions and training).

Medical support must be adapted to take care of the wounded as soon as possible. Because of

the violence of certain actions, psychological and psychiatric support for combatants is essential to mitigate the consequences of their engagement.

Medical support must also be able to take into account the indigenous population, collateral victims of the Force or civilian victims of attacks, and contribute to CIMIC actions.

VI. Conclusion

Examining the French counterinsurgency doctrine (COIN) highlights the complexity of modern military engagements and the vital role of strategies in fighting insurgent threats. The French military strategy, shaped by the historical roots and refined by contemporary challenges, is the demonstration of a multifaceted approach to counterinsurgency.

This type of approach underlines the importance of political legitimacy, engagement with local populations, and the integration of military actions with broader governance, development, and influence efforts. The French COIN doctrine reflects a practical understanding of insurgency dynamics and stresses the importance of the need for a coordinated and adaptable response that goes beyond the conventional military tactics.

The last chapter will give a concrete analysis of the outcomes of Operation Barkhane, by taking in consideration the elements of the global approach of the French COIN Doctrine.

Chapter 3: Operation Barkhane

Key dates

March 2012: Aqmi takes several towns in northern Mali

In 2012, Mali experienced a series of Islamist attacks aimed at removing President Amadou Toumani Touré from power and demanding independence for Azawad, in the north of the country. In March 2012, independence rebels, ousted by their Islamist allies associated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Aqmi), took control of Kidal, Gao and then Timbuktu.

11 January 2013: Operation Serval begins

France launched Operation Serval on the 11th of January 2013 to halt the advance of the jihadists. Paris deployed up to 5,000 soldiers (a year later, the number had fallen to 2,500).
At the end of January, the French troops recaptured Gao, a town of 124,000 inhabitants in the north-east of the country. The French army entered Timbuktu, 400 km west of Gao, without a fight, and took Kidal airport, north of Gao. On the 2nd of February 2013, the French President, François Hollande, was welcomed in Timbuktu as a liberator. In July, a UN mission, Minusma, took over from a pan-African force.

1 August 2014: Barkhane replaces Serval

On the first day of August 2014, Operation Serval became Operation Barkhane, a regional mission focused on the Sahel. A few months earlier, in May, Tuareg and Arab rebel groups had retaken Kidal, a small town of 25,000 inhabitants in the north-east of the country.
Operation Barkhane involves 4,000 troops, eight fighter jets, 300 armoured vehicles, 300 logistics vehicles, 17 helicopters, transport aircraft and five drones. It is the largest ever deployment of French troops on an external operation. It is part of a partnership with five Sahel countries: Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger and Chad.

Almost a year later, in May-June 2015, the Algiers peace agreement was signed between the Malian government and the former Tuareg rebels. But its implementation remains at an early stage. The violence spread south-eastwards, now affecting Burkina Faso and Niger.

2015-2019: more and more attacks

From 2015 onwards, attacks against Sahelian and foreign forces and against places frequented by foreigners increased. In March 2017, jihadists linked to Aqmi federated into the "Groupe de soutien à l'islam et aux musulmans" (GSIM). In 2019, thirteen French soldiers were killed in the accidental collision of two helicopters.
The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (EIGS) launches major attacks on military bases in Mali and Niger. It is declared enemy number one at a summit in early 2020 between Paris and its G5 Sahel partners.

2020: French forces kill jihadist leaders

In early June 2020, the leader of Aqmi, the Algerian Abdelmalek Droukdel, was killed by Barkhane soldiers. In November, Bah Ag Moussa, "military leader" of the GSIM, was also shot dead by French forces. The jihadists continued their attacks. On the 9th of August, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahel (EIGS) killed six French aid workers in Niger. The leader of the EIGS, Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui, was killed in September 2021 by French forces.

18 August 2020: a first military coup d'état

On August the 18th 2020, the Malian president Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, elected in 2013, was overthrown by a putsch after months of political crisis. Relations between Paris and Bamako deteriorated after another coup d'état on 24 May 2021. The military junta took control of the country.

10 June 2021: Paris begins a gradual withdrawal of French troops

On 10th of June, Emmanuel Macron announced the gradual departure of Barkhane's 5,000 troops. Initially, however, a force of 2,500 to 3,000 soldiers will remain in place.

On 25 September 2021, Mali's Prime Minister accused France of "abandoning in mid-air" with the reduction of the Barkhane force, justifying the need to "look for other partners".

December 2021: the involvement of a Russian paramilitary group causes confusion

At the end of December, around fifteen Western powers, including Paris, denounced the beginning of the deployment of the Russian paramilitary group Wagner in Mali, a group known since 2014 for its involvement in Ukraine, then in Syria in the wake of the Russian army.

On 9 January 2022, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) closed its borders with Mali and imposed an embargo, sanctioning the postponement of the elections scheduled for 27 February. On 24 January, a coup d'état took place in Burkina Faso. It is now the third of the four countries where Barkhane is deployed to be ruled by a military junta.

31 January 2022: The French ambassador to Mali is expelled

At the end of January 2022, the ruling coalition in Mali demanded that Denmark immediately withdraw the hundred or so soldiers who had recently arrived as part of the Takuba special forces, claiming that it had not given its consent to the deployment.

On 31 January, Mali decided to expel the French ambassador.

On 8 and 10 February, three homemade bomb attacks killed at least nine people, including a 50-year-old Frenchman, in northern Benin. On the 14th of February, the head of French diplomacy, Jean-Yves Le Drian, estimated that a thousand Wagner mercenaries were now in Mali and stated that the conditions were "no longer met"for the continuation of the Barkhane mission in the country.

17 February 2022: Emmanuel Macron makes the military withdrawal from Mali officially

On the 17th of February, France and its partners formalised their military withdrawal at a mini-summit of the African Union. But French forces have no intention of leaving the Sahel region.

"With the agreement of the Niger authorities, European elements will be repositioned alongside the Niger armed forces in the region bordering Mali".

15 August 2022: the last French soldiers in Barkhane leave Mali

On 15 August, after nine years in the country, the last French soldiers in the Barkhane anti-jihadist force left Mali: *"Today at 1pm (Paris time), the last detachment of the Barkhane force present on Malian soil crossed the border between Mali and Niger".*[97]

From 2020 onwards, countries across the African continent suffered military coups d'état. By 30 August 2023, six countries had experienced coups d'état by military juntas, and a seventh had emerged along Gabon's borders: Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Chad, Sudan and Niger. Burkina Faso will see two putsches in 8 months (24 January 2022, 30 September 2022), Mali in 9 months (18 August 2020, 24 May 2021). These coups are part of a struggle for influence between the West and Russia in Africa, where the rise of "anti-French sentiment" has left the door open to the Kremlin.[98]

The last French soldiers deployed in Niger will therefore be leaving the country three months after Emmanuel Macron announced on 24 September 2023 that he was withdrawing all troops deployed in Niger in accordance with the orders of the ruling government. The French army will complete the dismantling of its facilities at the Niamey base on 22nd of December 2023. This "theatre closure" marks the end of more than ten years of French presence in the sub-region. Following the end of Operation Barkhane in Mali in autumn 2022, and the closure of the Ouagadougou bases in Burkina Faso, the withdrawal from Niger completes the dismantling of France's counter-terrorism operations in these three countries.[99]

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[97]   https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/mali/guerre-au-mali/mali-serval-barkhane-on-vous-resume-neuf-ans-d-engagement-militaire-francais-au-sahel-en-dix-dates-cles_4966341.html
[98]https://fr.africanews.com/2023/08/30/afrique-les-7-coups-detat-militaires-au-cours-des-3-dernieres-annees/
[99]https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/12/22/au-niger-les-derniers-soldats-francais-sur-le-depart_6207219_3212.html

I. Context

Counter-revolutionary or religious warfare is profoundly different from colonial warfare[100]. 'Revolutionary war' refers to the seizure of political power by the means of armed force."

Although Lyautey and Gallieni had potentates to subdue, they were not faced with an ideology such as jihadism. The theatres of counter-insurgency operations during colonisation or in the 1950s and 1960s (China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Greece, Algeria, Cuba, etc.) and those of today are infinitely different: the consistency of the enemy, the ideological factor, the religious factor, banditry or local conflicts, ethnic groups and clans, etc. In the BSS, Iraq or Afghanistan, everything is different. The French army intervenes with others (allies, UN, NATO...), as a framework nation or simply as a contributor, and the operation takes place in a foreign country with its own institutions, laws and customs, even if it is a failed state. For the French army, the aim is not to "pacify" in order to stay, but to ensure that local institutions regain strength and to provide the population with a secure framework.

In 2012, the coup in Bamako against President Amadou Toumani Touré and the takeover of two-thirds of Mali by terrorist movements led to a growing international awareness of the risk of an irreversible deterioration in the situation: conquest of northern Mali (Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu) by the MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad), instrumentalisation of local conflicts by the Mujao, return of Islamic Legion mercenaries from Libya originating in Mali and Niger.

Terrorists exploit ethnic rivalries: on the Niger border, Mujao exploits the conflict between Peul and Daoussak over access to water resources. In the Soum region of Burkina Faso, Ansaroul Islam has become a tool of protest for clearly identified populations (former Tuareg slaves, low-class Peul, Rimaibé).

The international players have understood that the spread of this situation and the destabilisation of the entire region must be prevented. Among these players, France wants to play a central role by mobilising its armed forces.

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[100] John Shy and Thomas W. Collier, "Re*volutionary War," in Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age,* ed. Peter Paret, Ed. Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 817.

On 11 January 2013, when Konna (central Mali) fell into the hands of terrorist groups and Mopti was on the verge of giving way, François Hollande announced the launch of Operation Serval at the request of the Malian authorities.

It follows that France's objectives, as announced by Hollande on January 11, were threefold: stop the terrorist aggression, secure a country in which there are many thousand French people and permit Mali to recover its territorial integrity.

There was also an unspoken fourth goal, according to a French Senate report, which was freeing five French and three other hostages (one Dutch, one Swedish, and one South African) in AQIM custody. One of the French hostages was executed after Serval began.[101]

"France, key diplomatic and military player in the region, justifies its status in West Africa as nowhere else in the world as a middle power with global influence".[102]

In the summer of 2014, to provide a more appropriate response to a threat that had become regionalised and now presented a greater risk of spreading to neighbouring countries, Operations Serval in Mali and Épervier in Chad were replaced by Operation Barkhane (named after the crescent-shaped sand dunes).

The aim of France's Sahel-Saharan strategy[103], of which Barkhane is the military component, is to help partner states acquire the capacity to ensure their own security. It is based on a global approach (political, security and development) and focuses on three objectives: the direct fight against the GATs (preventing their resurgence by eliminating refuge areas, cutting off their logistical flows, dismantling arms storage facilities and their means of communication), support for partner forces and support for international forces, and actions to help the population regain the authority of the State.

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[101] Rapport des sénateurs CHEVÈNEMENT et LARCHER, rapport n°513, Mali : comment gagner la guerre ?, 16 avril 2013, p.105, http://www.senat.fr/ rap/r12-513/r12-5131.pdf

[102] Elie Tenenbaum, AFP le 6 juillet 2022.

[103] Déclaration de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur les interventions militaires françaises en Afrique, à N'Djamena le 19 juillet 2014. - https://www.elysee.fr/francois-hollande/2014/07/19/declaration-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-sur-les-interventions-militaires-francaises-en-afrique-a-ndjamena-le-19-juillet-2014

Historical Context

When France decided to intervene, the Sahel region had already been the focus of particular attention since the early 2000s because of the risk of kidnappings. It is for this reason that Mali has benefited from French security and defence aid. In 2009, as part of a regional approach to security in the Sahel-Saharan zone, France took steps to strengthen the sovereignty of the Malian state in the fight against terrorism and organised crime. After 2010, following the hostage-taking of Michel Germaneau and in the face of the growing terrorist threat, this effort was continued and accompanied by the start of coordination with American forces.[104]

In the 2013 White Paper, the Sahel remains an area of priority interest for France: the crisis in Mali "*illustrates the importance of the region and the seriousness of the threats developing there. Internal tensions in northern Mali and between the north and south of the country have combined with the weakening of the Malian state to encourage the establishment of terrorist groups. These groups, having benefited from the trafficking that is rife in this part of the Sahara, have established rear bases there, before seeking to take over the whole of Mali, threatening to transform the whole sub-region into a hotbed of international terrorism ".*[105]

Françafrique

France's interest in Africa is based on historical ties that continued after decolonisation. Françafrique came into being after the decolonisations, in the 1960s.

It was then that a shadow diplomacy was organised, based on friendships between the elites of the former colonial power and those of the newly independent countries: traditional chiefs, notables from equatorial Africa or French West Africa, "evolués", it was a

Source: Jacques.Leclerc.fr

story of friendships and reciprocal interests, often to the detriment of the populations.

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[104] https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-info/i1288.asp
[105] https://www.vie-publique.fr/files/rapport/pdf/134000257.pdf

Thomas Deltombe defines Françafrique as "*a system of domination that is part of the long history of French imperialism, based on the alliance between a section of the French elite and a section of the African elite*". He adds that "*this system has two facets, one unofficial, often reduced to Jacques Foccart, and the other official, with cooperation and the CFA franc*".[106]

The aim of this system, which remained in place from 1960 to 1995, was to reconfigure the colonial empire into a system of influence based on a military network - a fundamental pillar in Central and West Africa - cooperation, the French-speaking world and development aid.

This strategy was effective and lucrative: after the 1973 oil crisis, France needed to secure its energy sources, so it became dependent on its former colonies, particularly for uranium supplies, and had to base its energy independence on Niger, Gabon and Madagascar. Major French companies were to have a determining role in the destiny of these countries.

From 1960 onwards, the "Françafrique" system was put in place, with French President De Gaulle at its heart. The Elysée Palace's Africa Unit, headed by Jacques Foccart, played a decisive role in France's African policy for more than fourteen years. The unit managed the President's personal relations with his African counterparts. It was a deceptive decolonisation based on informal strategies of influence, a low-cost way of developing economic, financial, military, cultural and diplomatic ties.

Foccart took up his official duties with Charles de Gaulle when he returned to power in 1958, and continued to do so until 1969. His image as "Mr Africa" to General de Gaulle, then to Georges Pompidou and finally to Jacques Chirac, gradually took hold.

In charge of "Affaires africaines et malgaches", Foccart's aim was to defend the "Pré Carré", a metaphor for the former French colonial domain. Foccart was answerable only to the General, and the Quai d'Orsay and the Ministry of Cooperation had to deal with him.

There are many reasons for setting up this cooperation system. The first is economic: France must guarantee outlets for French companies and the system must allow preferential access to public markets for the continent's strategic materials (oil, uranium, etc.).

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[106] https://journals.openedition.org/chrhc/20154?lang=fr

The other reason is diplomatic, as it aims to maintain the status of world power acquired by France after the war, in particular for votes within international institutions (seats at the UN), but also to contain "communist" expansion on the African continent or "resist" American influence by maintaining military bases guaranteeing the French army's international projection capabilities.

Finally, this system will make it possible to organise the hidden financing of French political parties by certain African regimes.

Officially, Jacques Foccart held the post of Secretary General for African Affairs at the Élysée Palace and controlled everything to do with Africa: official and unofficial travel, audiences, the appointment of ambassadors and the supervision of the activities in Africa of the foreign intelligence service, the SDECE. He knew how to stabilise the regimes in place (advice, directives), played a facilitating role and became the President's "eyes and ears". With direct daily access to the General, he became the privileged interlocutor of African heads of state, and this strategic position made him indispensable.

Foccart therefore brought together the SDECE, the SCTIP, the Quai d'Orsay, the Ministry of the Armed Forces, the ambassadors and his private correspondents. To do this, he set up a structure at the Hotel de Noirmoutier, made up of a dozen or so representatives who wrote reports for each country. It was an opaque system with no precise organisation chart, where orders were given orally, the only working tool was the telephone, and everything remained secret: there were no written records, and only two types of archive could be found: the telephone diaries and the notes of the chargés de mission. The telephone was his main tool for working with African governments, with whom he spoke every week. This structure of actors allowed him to obtain direct information.

As a "secret service technician", Pierre Viansson-Ponté considers him to be "*one of those who has done most to imbue the Compagnonnage with the atmosphere of a secret society, to give it that police-like quality, that taste for clandestinity, that 'barbouze' atmosphere* ".[107]

Foccart developed the doctrine of the three circles: the first is the circle of stable allies, the second is the circle of grey areas where coups are possible, and the third is the circle of hostile areas, where reversals and alliances are possible.

Thanks to his background in the Resistance and the intelligence services (Service Action) and his affiliation with the Bureau des Opérations Aériennes (Air Operations Bureau), he put Gaullism and army officers in touch with each other and was able to use unconventional means, to give "orange lights", to call up former members of the PCRA, the SOE (Special Operations Executive) like Bob Maloubier, the OAS (Secret Army Organisation) like Bob Denard or the Free French Forces like William Bechtel, men who thought they had the legitimacy to do things that the law condemned using expeditious methods.

These "barbouzes" use methods that neither the police, the army nor the secret services can officially employ. The archetype was Jean Mauricheau-Beaupré, a mercenary in Biafra and special adviser to Fulbert Youlou in the Congo.

The Service Action, a secret military unit under the operational command of the Direction des Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE, formerly SDECE), created in 1946, was responsible for clandestine operations: "arma" operations such as sabotage and destruction of equipment, or "homo" operations to neutralise or capture an individual. In 1960 alone, it killed 135 people, sank six boats and destroyed two aircraft. His job was to infiltrate or exfiltrate agents, public figures and hostages, and to obtain intelligence.

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[107] https://journals.openedition.org/ccrh/572?lang=en

Various cases such as the poisoning in Geneva in 1960 of Félix Roland Mounié, a leading figure in the fight for Cameroonian independence, or the plane crash in 1959 of Barthelemy Boganda, Prime Minister of the Central African Republic, implicated Foccart. Foccart would always do what De Gaulle decided, and was the guarantee that Gaullist thinking would be implemented. He remained in this position from 1960 to 1974.

Overseas operations and military presence in Africa

After independence, French influence in Africa was built on three pillars: 'fraternal' relations between elites and development aid, the CFA franc and a military presence. This presence will support friendly regimes and protect France's interests through a rapid military intervention capability (Force de projection). It will also enable France to be at the heart of conflict resolution and management mechanisms in French-speaking Africa, notably at the UN Security Council.[108]

At the time of independence in 1960, France signed cultural, technical and military cooperation and defence agreements with its former colonies. Military advisers were sent to Africa to work with the newly independent governments. Under these bilateral agreements, France stationed up to 10,000 soldiers in its former colonies, had military bases in Djibouti, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Gabon, Chad and Niger and undertook some twenty direct military operations (OPEX) on the continent between 1964 and 1990: six in Chad, three in Zaire and three in the Central African Republic. In February 1964, France intervened in Gabon to free President Léon Mba, the victim of a military putsch. In April 1969, soldiers carried out a counter-insurgency operation to protect President Tombalbaye in Chad. On 20 September 1979, with Operation Barracuda, France overthrew Jean-Bedel Bokassa and established the Central African Republic under the leadership of David Dacko. French operational assistance elements (EFAO) remained in the country until 1998, when France followed a policy of substitution rather than partnership with African military forces, and its defence of French interests in Africa, in its "pre-square", was supported by every president until Nicolas Sarkozy.

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[108] Bruno Charbonneau, https://www.cairn.info/revue-afrique-contemporaine1-2020-1-page-169.htm?ref=doi

Before him, President Mitterrand[109](Discours de La Baule 1990) changed the Franco-African doctrine by making public aid conditional on the democratisation of African countries.[110]

Bases in Africa

In the early days of independence, the French military presence in Africa was there to "perpetuate and safeguard the stability and durability of certain regimes" (Dr Bakary Sambe). Today, the soldiers' main mission is to "*complete the training of the partner countries' military personnel to prepare them for external operations*".[111]

Nearly 10,000 servicemen and women are deployed as part of pre-positioned forces overseas and abroad. These military personnel are involved in protecting French nationals and defending French interests; they contribute to crisis prevention and management and are ready to support operations.

Pre-positioned forces include presence forces (in Africa) and sovereignty forces responsible for protecting French territory in mainland France and overseas.

[109] https://www.herodote.net/19_21_juin_1990-evenement-19900620.php
[110] Tony Chafer, 18/09/2023 https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/cpdm7jg0yd2o
[111] https://www.info-militaire.fr/regiments/elements-francais-au-gabon

Today, the Djibouti base has the largest contingent of French troops in Africa, with almost 1,500 men. In 2015, the French forces in Côte d'Ivoire were created as one of the forward operating bases in Africa. These forces provide operational support in an area considered to be a strategic priority for France.

In Gabon, the 350-strong French forces have been deployed since independence and, along with Dakar in Senegal, form the second operational cooperation pole (POC).

With around 400 men, the French elements in Senegal (EFS) provide training for soldiers from countries in the region. They have an air stopover at Dakar airport and a high-frequency transmission station belonging to the DIRISI (Direction interarmées des réseaux d'infrastructure et des systèmes d'information).
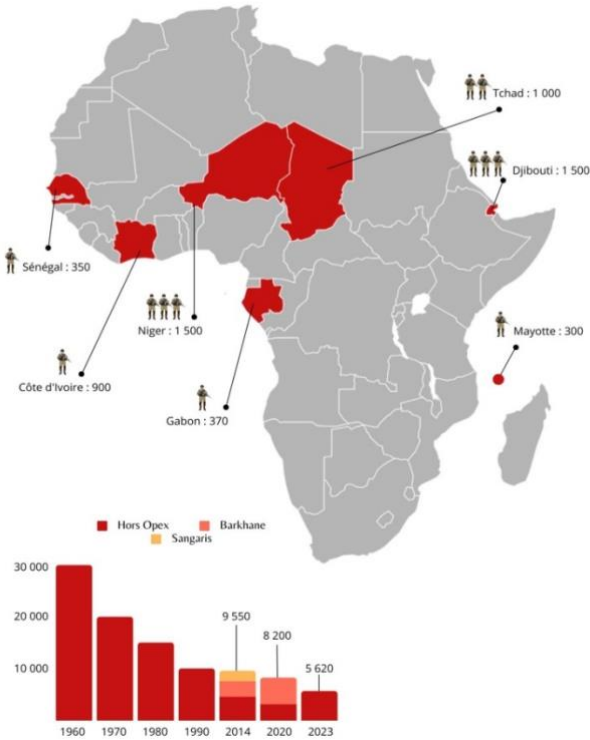
Source: The economist Intelligence Unit

The French elements in Chad (EFT) were responsible for protecting French interests and those of its nationals, providing logistical support and intelligence for the Chadian armed forces, and in 2013 the Epervier operation included around 950 soldiers posted to the Ndjamena air base and the Abeche base.

In Niger, France had between 1,300 and 1,500 soldiers, fighter planes and drones. Three bases in Niamey, Ouallam and Ayorou on the border with Mali. Niamey air base is a non-permanent base used as a base of departure for Reaper drones carrying out reconnaissance and intelligence missions as part of Operation Barkhane.[112]
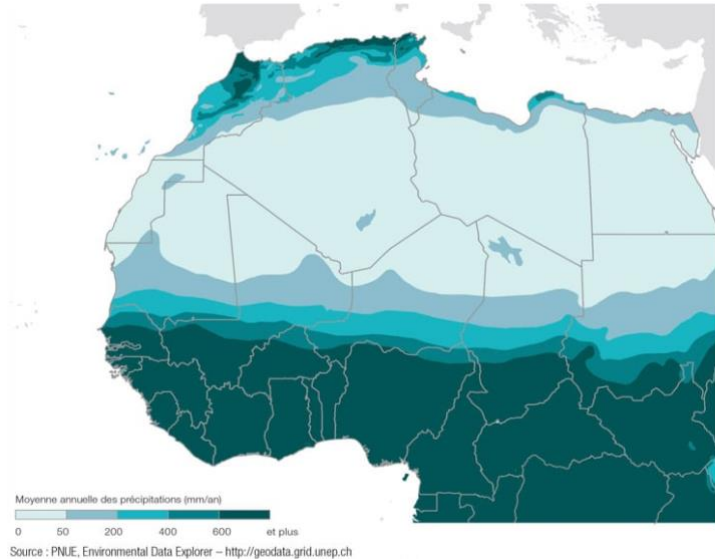
Thus, Africa has always been important for France in projecting its power abroad. However, the instruments at its disposal are not limited to military force. Bi and multilateral political

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[112] https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/cpdm7jg0yd2o

cooperation, development aid and major French companies are the instruments of diplomacy on the African continent.

Geographical Context

Barkhane is developing a zone-based crisis resolution strategy: unlike Operation Serval, it is no longer limited to Malian territory, but can intervene throughout the entire Sahel-Saharan Strip (BSS), although it is concentrating its efforts in the tri-border region. The theatre of operations therefore extends over several countries with no real borders, from west to east, covering almost 5,000 km.[113]

Moyenne annuelle des précipitations (mm/an)

0   50   200   400   600   et plus

Source : PNUE, Environmental Data Explorer – http://geodata.grid.unep.ch

The Saharan/Sahelian desert is a major area of interest for France.

In a desert environment, anticipating the vital needs of combatants and the technical constraints on equipment and the use of weapons is a fundamental factor.

Five aspects specific to the desert environment need to be considered: - the severity of the climate (extreme heat, drying sand winds, night/day temperature variations, sometimes torrential rain, etc.) the nature of the terrain and soil (mobility corridors, natural paths, even compulsory crossing points, depending on the quality of the road infrastructure); - the heterogeneous nature of the extensive manoeuvring areas, allowing large overflows and involving non-linear combat with gaps; - the vital nature of water for man (its volume determines logistical manoeuvring and therefore manoeuvring itself); - the key points constituted by populated areas and major communication routes.[114]

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[113] https://www.senat.fr/rap/r22-708/r22-7081.html
[114] https://www.c-dec.terre.defense.gouv.fr/images/documents/documents-fondateurs/FT_04.pdf

The vast expanses of land encourage joint manoeuvres, but the environment remains particularly hostile to the deployment of men and equipment. Considerable distances mean that logistical and medical support is particularly difficult to provide in depth and over time. Unlike the other three difficult environments, the desert does not produce an equalizer effect; but technology can provide real added value even if its performance is degraded by the extreme climatic conditions.

There are three factors of operational superiority in the desert: the possession of air supremacy, which is decisive because of the extreme openness of the environment and the vulnerability of ground units to being seen and hit, then the informational superiority needed to detect an enemy in the immensity of the environment and finally the mobility of units, which is essential for retaining the initiative and taking the enemy by surprise. Committing ground forces in desert areas therefore represents a twofold human and logistical challenge, but those who can see and shoot far away while retaining tactical mobility have the initiative and the surprise.[115]

Climate Conditions

Climate is another challenge: the Sahel strip marks the climatic transition between the Sudanian domain in the south and the Saharan domain in the north.[116]

It is characterised by a sub-desert, desert and tropical climate, with temperature peaks in excess of 60°C and absolute aridity.

The particularities of this climate have a strong impact on the air force, on the organisation of missions, and on the equipment and men. For example, soldiers wearing helmets and flak jackets, with their equipment and weapons, have to drink around ten litres of water a day, which poses a considerable logistical challenge. The high heat can even cause the glue on the soles of combat boots to melt, leading to a reorganisation of the troops.[117]

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[115] https://www.irsem.fr/data/files/irsem/documents/document/file/575/fantassin_31.pdf
[116] Francis A. Galgano, Eugene J. Palka, *Modern Military Geography, Routledge*, 2011, 437 pages, p.281
[117] Bernard Barrera, *Opération Serval : notes de guerre*, Mali 2013, Paris, Seuil, 2015, 433 p

In the air, the Intertropical Front (ITF), (a cloud front hundreds of kilometres long) forms an almost impenetrable barrier for aircraft (civil and military) and causes violent thunderstorms, hailstones or frost that can damage aircraft or perforate ammunition and equipment. It can have a direct impact on the organisation and progress of flights (additional fuel consumption, in-flight refuelling, flight time calculations, etc.) and the electrical phenomena of thunderstorms can affect certain electrical instruments (radar, inertial unit, flight controls).

During the dry season, sand winds (Harmattan) kick up dust that reduces visibility to 30 metres, and the fine particles of overheated sand can damage aircraft and vehicles.

The mission briefing therefore always includes a detailed weather section with the types of clouds encountered, their altitude, and the wind at low, medium and high altitudes, to enable aircraft to take advantage of the winds, save fuel and target bomb shots. Army logistics convoys and their routes are also programmed according to the weather forecast, as some roads are impassable during the rainy season.

Weather briefings are organised in the mornings and evenings at the PCIAT in N'Djamena, and the army's weather centre in Lyon is responsible for monitoring the weather in theatre.[118]

II.   Actors

The complexity of terrorism in Mali, with its multiplicity of protagonists, immediately made it difficult to identify the enemy in the political speeches of French President F. Hollande and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs (L. Fabius) and Defence (J.-Y. Le Drian).[119]

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[118] Rohée Thomas, *L'appui et le soutien aérien de l'Armée de l'air française dans l'opération Barkhane*
https://omeka.geopolitique.net/files/original/d86e278870bed75ed10fe198e4fccca6.pdf
[119] Mélanie Dubuy, *La spécificité de la menace terroriste au Mali : quelles conséquences internationales ? Civitas Europa* 2013/2, p.35 -57 CIVIT_031_0035.pdf

The enemy is described as terrorist in a global sense, to avoid the difficulty of understanding a multi-faceted enemy. The French authorities insist that force is being used against "terrorists" and not "radical Islamists" (F. Hollande, J.-Y. Le Drian).[120]

At the same time, the Security Council took care to distinguish between the various protagonists: it spoke of the presence of "*armed groups, including separatist movements and terrorist and criminal networks*" (Resolution 2085, S/RES/2012, 20 Dec. 2012), choosing not to include all the actors in the Malian violence under the same name.

However, three categories of armed groups can be identified in the central Sahel: firstly, jihadist groups with the same origins, the Algerian Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), which will split into several movements pledging allegiance to the two "multinationals" of armed jihad: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Aqmi), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mujao), Ansar Eddine, Katiba Macina, Jama at nusrat al-islam wal-muslimin (JNIM), Etat islamique du Grand Sahara (EIGS) and Ansarul Islam.

Then the armed groups that signed the Algiers peace agreement in 2015, originally separatists, then auxiliaries in the war against the jihadists, accomplices of the Malian and French authorities, these groups fought among themselves for control of territories and trafficking routes: Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad (MNLA), Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad (MAA), Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (HCUA), Groupe autodéfense touareg Imghad et alliés (Gatia), Coalition des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) and Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad (MSA).

The third group comprises self-defence militias, formed in response to jihadist attacks and the passivity of state security forces. A multitude of groups made up of traditional hunters, operating in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, over a limited territory. The two most influential groups are Dan na Ambassagou in Mali and the Koglweogo in Burkina.

For all these movements, it will be impossible to determine the number of fighters because they are constantly evolving and alliances between groups and hierarchies are constantly changing.[121]

GSPC : originated from GIA (Algerian Armed Islamic Group) 2003 =Salafi Group for

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[120] I. LASSERRE, T. OBERLE, *Notre guerre secrète au Mali : les nouvelles menaces contre la France*, Fayard, 2013, 248 p
[121] Carayol Rémi, *Le mirage sahélie*n, Editions La Découverte, 2023

Preaching and Combat / Embraces AQMI

GSPC+Al Qaida = AQMI (2005) /Leader: Abdelmalek Droukde

AQMI/AQIM: (2007) Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb : alliance to al Qaida in 2006

Al-Morabitun : formed in 2013 by merger of different groups /Leader : Mokhtar Belmokhtar/ joins JNIM

ISGS : Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (local branch of ISIS, outgrowth of a schism within MUJAO in 2015), Leaded by al Sahraoui, operated in western Niger and Menaka, north eastern Mali, attacks in Burkina Faso . Cooperation with JNIM.

JNIM: 2017 . Group for the support of Islam and Muslims. Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Mali and West Africa. Union of.: Ansar Dine + AQMI (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb)+ Al-Murabitoon+ Macina Liberation Front . Leader : (former Ansar Dine and Tuareg) Iyad Ag Galy ISWAP :Islamic State West Africa Province is a jihadist movement affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) active mainly in the Lake Chad area, with a cell born out of the spinoff of a component of the former Boko Haram group, whose link to central IS had already been recognized. Instead, the group that remained loyal to Abubakar Shekau continued to operate within JAS (Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad) headed by Shekau himself until his demise in 2021.

MUJAO: While the MUJAO was established in Gao, the EIGS, now EI-S, mainly operated in the three borders area. It is the EIGS, now EI-S, that is responsible for the most spectacular attacks perpetrated both against the armed forces of the Sahelian countries, e.g., the attack on Indelimane in Mali, the attack on Inates in Niger, the attack on Arbinda in Burkina Faso and the attack on Chinagoder in Niger, but especially of the bloodiest attacks against Sahelian civilian populations (as well as against Western civilians, as in the case of the Kouré massacre against ACTED humanitarian personnel, belatedly claimed by this group).

EUTM

The European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) was launched [122]in 2013 at the request of the Malian government and approved by the United Nations Security Council. EUTM comes under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). It reports directly to the ministers of the 27 Member States and to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell. Member States wishing to do so can send military specialists to advise and train the Malian armed forces.

"With Emmanuel Macron, impatience spread to the Élysée Palace. Between 2017 and 2018, the idea also emerged of using the Sahel as a showcase for what a Europe of Defence could be.."[123]

In June 2018, Paris launched the European Intervention Initiative (EII). There is no longer any need to go through the CSDP's procedures, which are considered too complicated, to set up a joint military operation: the agreement of volunteer states is all that is needed. The EII now includes Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, whose defence commitments are unaffected by Brexit.[124]

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[122] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013D0034
[123]https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_europe-mulls-forceful-presence-conflict-torn-sahel/6184291.html
[124] *Romain Mielcarek, https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2021/04/MIELCAREK/63002#nb1*

MINUSMA

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established by Security Council resolution 2100of 25 April 2013 to support political processes in that country and carry out a number of security-related tasks. The Mission was asked to support the transitional authorities of Mali in the stabilization of the country and implementation of the transitional roadmap. By unanimously adopting resolution 2164 of 25 June 2014, the Council further decided that the Mission should focus on duties, such as ensuring security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; and assisting the reestablishment of State authority, the rebuilding of the security sector, and the promotion and protection of human rights in that country.T he Security Council authorized 13,289 military personnel for MINUSMA.[125]

Sociologist Mohamed Amara believes that Minusma has failed to adapt to Mali's security and political context. "*Minusma has not been able to strike a balance between its missions, which are clearly defined, and the new Malian context of terrorism and military transition, which is different from the context of 2012, 2013 and 2014.*"[126]

Antoine Glaser blames the Minusma's failure on the plethora of international forces in Mali. This, he says, has marginalised the UN mission. "It's a failure, but it's not the responsibility of

[125] https://minusma.unmissions.org/en
[126] https://www.dw.com/fr/mali-amara-d%C3%A9part-minusma-bilan-10-ans-onu/audio-67707845

the Minusma. It has to do with the way the Minusma was positioned in a country where there was the G5 Sahel, the Takuba force and Barkhane. Minusma was marginalised from the outset."[127] The head of the Minusma, El Ghassim Wane, spoke of the difficulty of the task in a context of asymmetric violence, in a huge theatre of operations and with "high expectations" from the population. In the ten years of its presence, the UN mission has lost more than 180 members killed in attacks, mainly perpetrated by groups affiliated to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.[128] On June 30 2023, taking into consideration the letter from the Transitional Government of Mali to the President of the Security Council requesting the immediate withdrawal of MINUSMA, the Security Council decided to terminate MINUSMA's mandate under resolution 2640 (2022). The Council also adopted resolution 2690 (2023) requesting the Mission to begin immediately, the cessation of its operations, the transfer of its tasks, and the reduction and withdrawal of its personnel, with the aim of completing this process by December 31, 2023.[129]

TAKUBA

On 27 March 2020, the governments of Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Niger, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom issued a political statement expressing support for the creation of a task force, integrated to the command of French operation Barkhane. Under the name Takuba,

the task force wanted by Emmanuel Macron[130] will advise, assist and accompany Malian Armed Forces, in coordination with G5 Sahel partners and other international actors on the ground, including the mission MINUSMA, as well as the EU missions EUTM Mali, EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger. The Takuba project will last two years. For Emmanuel Macron, it is

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[127] https://www.africaradio.com/antoine-glaser-2
[128] https://www.dw.com/fr/fin-de-la-minusma-bilan-mitige/a-67706232
[129] https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/security-council-ends-minusma-mandate-adopts-withdrawal-resolution
[130]https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democratique

a symbol of European autonomous defence,[131] the task force arrived in the Sahel on 15 July 2020, but its "full operational capability" was not announced until 2 April 2021. The political rift between Bamako and the Europeans was to prove its undoing. At the beginning of the year, Bamako prevented the deployment of a Danish detachment, citing legal obstacles. Apart from the French, only the Estonians and the Czechs have contributed to the task groups that have accompanied the Fama in their training and in combat.

Sweden has provided a 150-strong task force, Estonia 90 soldiers, Romania around 50, Italy 200 men, 6 helicopters and medical evacuation capabilities. The EU is also involved in the EUTM mission to train the Malian army, led by an Austrian general. The other nations participated in the project in a more limited way, with liaison officers. In all, Takuba has brought together 800 soldiers based in Menaka and Gao.[132] The French troops represented "just under half of the total". The project was initially designed to take over from Barkhane and become "a laboratory for European defence". Takuba can claim to have carried out 75 operations, 85% of which were for the Fama.[133]

Source: https://lignesdedefense.blogs.ouest-france.fr
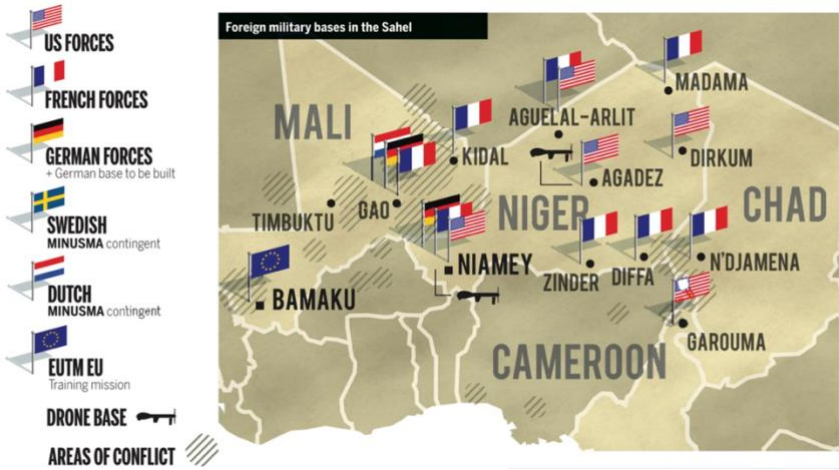
Its mission was to prepare Malian soldiers, particularly within the Light Reconnaissance and Intervention Units (ULRI), and to accompany them in combat. In the end, a Takuba soldier would supervise "two to three Malian soldiers", suggesting the possibility of autonomy. French

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[131] https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/01/09/defense-europeenne-le-systeme-communautaire-n-est-pas-une-menace-a-la-souverainete-mais-un-moyen-de-la-preserver_6108751_3232.html

[132] https://www.letemps.ch/monde/sahel-plaie-ouverte-defense-europeenne

[133] https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/au-sahel-l-operation-takuba-est-terminee-20220701

President Emmanuel Macron expressed the hope that "*the spirit of Takuba will endure. As such, however, the operation is over.* "[134]

III. Device

The specificity of Barkhane is its "regionalisation": until now, the principle adopted by the forces was one country, one crisis, one theatre of operations. With Barkhane, the theatre of operations will involve several countries. We are going to find that border areas are a source of conflict, because that is where terrorists benefit from the fact that they have no right of pursuit, and so set up grey zones. To facilitate manoeuvring, the zone of action is divided by an imaginary line

Source : www.defense.gov.fr

passing through the centre of Niger: with a Western zone whose main base is Gao and an Eastern zone whose main base, N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, hosts the permanent command post for the entire operation: the PCIAT (Poste de Commandement InterArmées de Théâtre).

It is the support point for the East Fuseau forces. It is the nerve centre for the operational cells.

Operations conducted by the Force are conceptualised, commanded and led from the PCIAT. It is made up of various specialised offices that contribute their expertise:

J2 is responsible for acquiring and managing intelligence,

J3 plans operations,

J4 is responsible for logistics,

J5 plans future manoeuvres for 3, 4 or 5 months,

J6 is in charge of transmissions and information flows: VHS radios are not enough for links over this vast territory, so the force relies on satellite links and IT resources to communicate 24

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[134] https://finabel.org/news-flash-task-force-takuba-an-illustration-of-european-solidarity/

hours a day via encrypted, secure, militarised chats to exchange information in complete security.

J7 is the office responsible for exploiting the RETEX (RETour d'EXpérience) and for liaison and military assistance with partners.

To achieve operational efficiency, we need to harness the expertise of each office.[135]

The CPCO (Centre de Planification et de Conduite des Opérations) is based in Paris and headed by the CEMA (Chef d'Etat Major des Armées). It is the link between political power and the military high command, concentrating command and advising the government.

In crisis management, it draws up the operational strategy, including monitoring, planning and conducting operations in order to launch the offensive phase. It drafts directives and orders for the theatre of operations.

In the Sahelian theatre, authority for operations is assigned to COMANFOR (COMmandant de la FORce Barkhane), assisted by his deputy, the GAO (Général Adjoint aux Opérations). In order to propose operations to the CPCO, he relies on the COIA (Centre Opérations Inter Armées) based in the theatre.[136]

The COIA is an essential part of the PCIAT. Its mission is to monitor land and air operations in the Sahel-Saharan strip in real time and manage crisis situations.

Within the COIA, operations are monitored live by the Operations Coordination and Management Unit, which operates 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, as does the intelligence/analysis section. Expert offices (weather, health service, etc.) communicate with each other and centralise their findings in the Control office.

The COIA's AOCC (Air Operation Command Centre) is attached to the Lyon-Verdun JFACC-AFCO (Joint Force Air Component Command), which is responsible for all French air operations. "Our presence on Operation BARKHANE, in the COIA, is very important because it gives us an immediate understanding of the needs of the deployed units ". The COIA's 'helicopter expert' is incharge of all aircombat operations. He coordinates the Force's components in the field, the desert aerocombat battle group and the PCIAT chiefs, and ensures

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[135] Video : Barkhane, au coeur de la coopération, Journal de la défense
[136] https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/command-centre-behind-scenes-cpco

that the helicopter medical evacuation (HME) resources are compatible with the regulating doctor.[137]
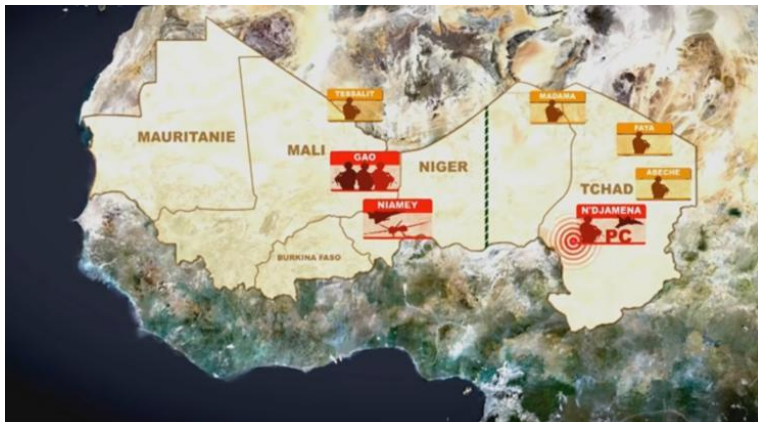
The military operation is based around three permanent support points: the planned Niamey air base in Niger, the planned N'Djamena air base in Chad and Gao in Mali. It is from these bases that ground troops are deployed in the areas to be controlled in order to set up Temporary Advance Bases (TABs) in northern Mali (Tessalit), Niger (Madama) and Chad (Faya and Abéché). Patrols alongside G5 Sahel forces are conducted from these TABs or relay desert platforms.

BOAT: Temporary Forward Bases are fortresses on a human scale. They are stationed to provide 360° protection for sleeping, eating and preparing for the mission. Their main purpose is to sweep the area, flush out terrorists or hideouts and neutralise weapons, motorbikes and communications equipment. Desert warfare is never waged from a fixed point, so the French army builds forward bases for a temporary period of one month, because beyond that time it is exposed to the enemy.

Joint action enables the actions of each arm to be unified under a centralised command; it results in the formation of a "battlegroup" (GTIA) drawn from several arms, capable of carrying out coordinated actions to achieve a tactical objective.[138]

The Groupement Tactique Interarmes (GTIA) is therefore the "basic tactical element". It may be predominantly infantry, armoured cavalry or airmobile, and has all the major capabilities. It is deployed as part of a brigade, or carries out autonomous actions. It is structured around four

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[137]https://archives.defense.gouv.fr/operations/afrique/bande-sahelo-saharienne/operation-barkhane/breves/barkhane-au-coeur-de-la-conduite-des-operations-3d.html
[138]https://ereverra.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/ere_copie_constitutiongtia_-dominante_infanterie.pdf

combat units, variable support resources and a command and logistics unit. The IAWG has a flexible structure, capable of carrying out in-depth or localised offensive, defensive or security actions in any environment.[139]

The SGTIA (Sous Groupement Tactique Interarmes) is a coherent basic unit for executing joint combat at the heart of contact manoeuvres.[140]

The ground component in Mali comprises two Desert Battle Groups (DBGs) of 1,500 soldiers based mainly in Gao and other detachments.

In Chad, the force is based in two locations: Camp Capitaine Michel Croci in Abéché, in the east of the country, and Camp Faya-Largeau, in the north.

The system can also rely on four maritime support points for supplies: Dakar, Abidjan, Douala and Cotonou.

As far as the air component is concerned, the air resources are spread over two planned air bases (Niamey and N'Djamena) and can quickly reach any point in the BSS. On these two plots, the force has 7 Mirage 2000 C or D, 5 to 8 tactical and strategic transport aircraft, and 3 REAPER drones that carry out

Source: www.defense.gov.fr

reconnaissance, surveillance and support missions (real-time images for units deployed on operations). In December 2019, the Reaper UAVs were armed with GBU-12 laser-guided bombs.

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[139] https://www.penseemiliterre.fr/fr/_594_3000457.html
[140] https://www.c-dec.terre.defense.gouv.fr/images/documents/documents-fondateurs/FT_04.pdf

Concentrating on two bases means that resources, men and equipment can be concentrated. In addition to these two air bases, cargo aircraft can use a number of summary airstrips such as Gao, Tessalit and Faya.

The air force is thus able to carry out "support" missions (enabling the mission) and "support" missions (participating in the mission) by air: these missions therefore concern transport (logistics and medical evacuation), intelligence (reconnaissance, surveillance, observation and identification), electronic warfare (to provide communication relays and intercept the enemy's communications), and finally fire support and Close Air Support.

The operation also includes 8 helicopters (4 Tigre and 4 Caïman) forming a DETALAT, 295 armoured vehicles and 360 logistics vehicles.

On the air side, coordination will be fundamental between the joint theatre command post (PCIAT) in N'Djamena and the Lyon-Verdun JFACC-AFCO (Joint Force Air Component Command), based in France. CAPCO (Centre Air de Planification et de conduite des Opérations) is now the Command and Control tool for all major air and space force operations. At the same time, the system of projected air bases at N'Djamena and Niamey will form the 'tip of the sword' of the air force's presence in the BSS.

Drones

Over the past two decades, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have progressively become a constant feature of modern conflicts and if current trends continue, they will likely become even moreimportant in future warfare.[141]

From an operational point of view, the intensive use of the armed Reaper drone will cover all missions: reconnaissance, preparation of fighter strikes, spotting IED sites,

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[141] Michael C. Horowitz., Joshua A. Schwartz and Matthew Fuhrmann, *"Who's Prone to Drone? A Global Time-Series Analysis of Armed Uninhabited Aerial Vehicle Proliferation,"* Conflict Management and Peace Science (online first view).

neutralisation, etc. Based in Niamey, the drones carry out 24-hour missions, with a useful time in the area of 18 hours, whereas the mission of a fighter plane is only 4 hours.

Thanks to UAVs, the force has a real-time surveillance capability that enables it to carry out all kinds of missions: on the one hand, UAVs can provide pre-action intelligence (to map adversaries and target them); on the other, UAVs can act in support of a force (for a convoy: illuminate the route, inform the convoy and the operations control centre simultaneously).[142]

Missions

Operation Barkhane will mobilise more than 3,000 troops (all arms), 200 armoured vehicles, 200 logistics vehicles, 20 helicopters as well as 8 transport aircraft, 8 fighter aircraft and 5 UAVs.

On the orders of the COIA and in liaison with the CPCO, 3 types of operation are being organised:

Large-scale missions, planned long in advance, are imposing in terms of manpower, logistics and geographical extension. They require lengthy preparation and benefit from everything the force has to offer.
These are joint missions: the presence of the G5Sahel partners is systematic and, in the 3-border zone, the 3 armies can be mobilised to restore the security of their territory. These operations last an average of 3 weeks.

Intermediate operations are characterised by greater adaptability, fewer resources but greater flexibility. They last around 1 week and involve around 200 people. Their main mission is to provide reassurance and intelligence in a smaller area.

Lastly, **opportunity operations**, which aim to neutralise the enemy once they have been revealed. Their aim is to disengage the enemy and disrupt groups in order to capture their

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[142] https://www.senat.fr/rap/r22-708/r22-708-syn.pdf

resources. They can consist of a reorientation of resources during a large-scale or intermediate operation.

The force will also carry out "hit and run" operations and continuous surveillance.

Regarding the air missions, the JFACC-AFCO will coordinate all air resources for joint land operations to meet the needs of the GTD (Groupement Tactique Désert) leading the actions. The JTACs (Joint Terminal Attack Controllers) are the ground specialists in close air support. They are part of the army and coordinate support from the air, authorise fire and determine the type of guidance.[143]

Extensions are the main difficulty in airborne missions: pilots fly long, dense missions and need physiological rest so as not to be endangered. Airborne resources must therefore be optimised to ensure that everyone is covered.

The men in the Force are prepared for wars with traditional modes of action (tanks, aircraft, etc.) against an enemy with the same capabilities. In the Sahel, we are faced with an asymmetrical operation in which the enemy forces the army to adapt the training of its men to different modes of action: the enemy is

Source: lignesdedefense.blogs.ouest-france.fr/

materially inferior but poses a permanent risk because of its indirect attacks with buried IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices). Out of uniform, blending in with the population, unpredictable and almost invisible, hiding and able to adapt to the environment, they follow and spy on the forces.

Soldiers must project themselves and apply the protection systems (drills) and 5/25 (inspection within a 5/25m perimeter). Each soldier controls his teammate.

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[143] https://archives.defense.gouv.fr/terre/actu-terre/jtac-les-specialistes-de-l-appui-aerien.html

The American think tank Rand Corporation has hailed France's Serval operation in Mali as "a model of expeditionary warfare" for "technologically sophisticated armies". According to the report, the French army was exemplary in " implementing the type of expeditionary operation that Odierno, the US Chief of Staff, envisaged in order to comply with the US army's projected budgets".[144] *"With Serval, the French proved that they know how to rapidly deploy limited but highly effective forces, tailored to specific needs and objectives"... "They pushed modularity below battalion level, enabling them to adapt each element of the brigades"*, explains the report, which had already been used in Afghanistan, organising them into joint battle groups (GTIA) and subdivisions (SGTIA). At the heart of this intelligent system, field officers *"have considerable autonomy" and "are trained for it",* notes the Rand Corporation. "*The French have also invested in technologies and vehicles that extend the capabilities of each unit*", such as the Scorpion programme, which aims to modernise equipment on a massive scale.[145]

Generally speaking, in French operations, "*light armoured vehicles are preferred to heavy armoured vehicles, which are more difficult to keep operational*". This implies "greater risk taking" that is "accepted" by the generals. But in the case of Serval, for example, it enabled the French army to operate "at the extreme limit of its projection capabilities", by sending its soldiers to a relatively distant field of operations in record time.

Ensuring the long-term viability of the mission

According to the army's general staff, several factors will come into play during the operation: firstly, the need for permanent physical and moral training of soldiers, and a capacity for maintenance and makeshift repair of equipment; secondly, the integration at the lowest tactical level (company of 150 men) of inter-army resources, such as the capacity to guide aircraft and gather intelligence; thirdly, the need to maintain a capacity to surprise an enemy operating on terrain that it controls perfectly.

To meet these requirements, three issues need to be addressed in particular: the first is the regeneration of men. After spending 4 or 6 months in a challenging theatre of operations,
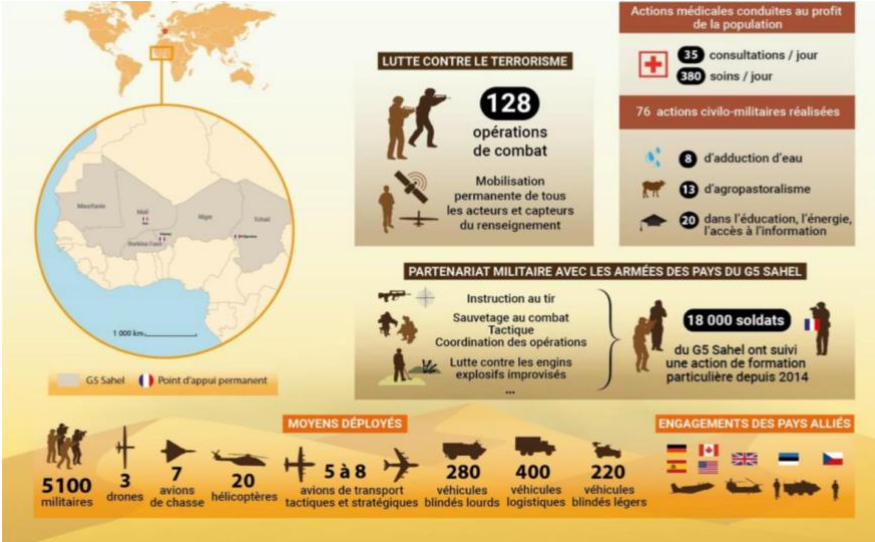
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[144] https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR700/RR770/RAND_RR770.pdf
[145] https://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/nos-materiels-nos-innovations/nos-innovations/dossier-programme-scorpion/programme-scorpion

soldiers should be able to benefit from a period of several days before returning to their base, following an experiment carried out in Afghanistan, with individual and group relaxation sessions and a possible identification of psychological difficulties;

The second is equipment maintenance: the aim is to preserve equipment over the long term, with three levels of intervention: breakdown repairs on contact, equipment maintenance by specialist maintenance units in secure areas, and finally industrial maintenance in France, sometimes at the factory, to regenerate the equipment. So, throughout the operation, the land equipment operational maintenance system had to concentrate its efforts in the field and in France.

The third challenge is the ongoing adaptation of equipment, with more modern and better protected vehicles: the 32-tonne armoured infantry fighting vehicle (VBCI) retrofitted (electrification of a thermal vehicle) in 2018, then the Griffon armoured multi-role vehicle (VBMR), to be deployed in 2021. Theatre requirements, particularly during the rainy season, have led to the deployment of tracked high mobility vehicles (HVMs).

A number of innovations will also be introduced during the operation, including a 3D printer in Gao, a projectable pneumatic maintenance workshop, and the fitting of 70 light armoured vehicles (LAVs) with mine protection.[146]

Source: https://www.prb.org/

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[146] https://www.senat.fr/rap/r22-708/r22-708-syn.pdf

IV. Logistics

"The desert is a tactician's paradise and a logistician's hell."

(Rommel)

The Sahel operational theatre imposed its configuration on Operation Barkhane: a total surface area greater than that of Europe (7 million km2), an immense elongation between the various bases, a very hot and "abrasive" climate for equipment, and extreme meteorological events. Because of these characteristics, transporting goods and personnel was a major challenge during the operation.

In the logistics field, the CPCO/J4 (Logistics Office of the Operations Planning and Control Centre) organises the manoeuvre, the CSOA (Operations Support and Routing Centre) manages it and the ASIA (Joint Support Assistant), in the theatre of operations, executes it.

This trio is the guarantor of overall coherence. From the outset of the intervention in Mali, in order to supplement French military resources, defence attachés and other organisations signed support or service contracts, and negotiated transit, support or base agreements with allied nations.

The logistical challenge facing the Barkhane force is to be able to carry out operations throughout its area of action at all times and simultaneously. This system relies on careful planning, to ensure that unit support is never interrupted and that the operational rhythm is never slowed down.

Barkhane's logistical support includes:

- Three permanent support points (BOAPs) in N'Djamena, Gao and Niamey; these are the most important bases in the operation in terms of command and size. Their defence systems are effective, and they are well supplied with communications and military equipment.

- Eight temporary forward operating bases (BOATs) in Kidal, Tessalit, Aguelal, Menaka, Timbuktu, Faya, Gossi and Abeche; these are support points that complement the permanent bases. They are not really temporary, as some of them have existed since Operation Serval. They are smaller than the permanent bases, and their development is essential at the outset, but they can become more flexible over time. Setting up forward bases is a practice that is being passed on to the African armed forces.[147]

- Three maritime hubs in Dakar, Abidjan and Douala;

- Two air support points and two logistics platforms in Niamey and N'Djamena, whose flows lead to the desert operational platform in Gao or to the temporary forward bases;

- Two logistics routes to support the front and rear areas of the BSS.

Due to their strategic location, the two planned air bases play a major role in Operation Barkhane. The presence of transport aircraft on these two platforms and the possibility of refuelling fighters in flight means that the theatre's elongations can be overcome and any point in the BSS can be quickly reached. In this context, Air Deliveries (LPA) are used to supply the most isolated bases.

The FOBs (Forward Operating Bases) are supply points for the men. Each man receives a ration and 12 litres of water a day. In addition, French forces pre-positioned in West Africa (Senegal) and Central Africa (Gabon) are involved in cooperation operations, mainly training, while maintaining a presence in Côte d'Ivoire, which was under threat for a time, provides strategic support for operations throughout West Africa. The Spanish MARFIL and MAMBA missions operating from Senegal and Gabon provide around 15% of intra-theatre transport (cargo and personnel).

The United States contributes in the areas of air-to-air refuelling (around 40% in 2019), strategic transport (12% of passengers and 9% of freight) and intelligence.[148] Despite the use of the A400

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[147]   https://www.lettrevigie.com/blog/2020/09/12/les-bases-operationnelles-avancees-temporaires-francaises-au-sahel-l-guignon/

[148] https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_def/l15b4089_rapport-information.pdf

M and A330 MRTT Phénix, the chartering of private aircraft remained essential for strategic transport from France. On the other hand, personnel were transported almost exclusively by military aircraft ("white" aircraft from the 3/60 Esterel transport squadron). Logistics on the ground were organised as an "archipelago" to ensure support was available despite the dispersion of the forces.

The Plateforme opérationnelle désert (PFOD) in Gao was the main base of the operation and represented a major logistical challenge for the Edat des armées (EdA). To ensure its day-to-day operation, the EdA organised the daily air, sea and land logistics movements that converged on the PFOD. Transporting large volumes of equipment and foodstuffs across the desert mobilised all the resources of the EdA, both locally and in France. By the end of 2021, at the peak of operations, the EdA was permanently deploying more than 20 people and had recourse to almost 180 temporary staff recruited locally.

Despite the difficulties associated with the desert environment, the security risks that weighed on the logistics convoys and unforeseen events such as the Covid-19 epidemic that led to the closure of the borders, the EdA provided the expected support. In addition to supplies, the scope of activity covered a wider range of tasks such as catering, multi-technical maintenance, cleaning of common areas and internet coverage for leisure activities.

At a strategic level, experience in the Sahel has shown that the cost of maintaining equipment has risen sharply, as intensive use in extreme physical conditions far exceeds expectations. As a result, maintenance cycles are significantly shortened and the need for spare parts is much greater than anticipated in the support contracts initially financed. This is particularly true for new-generation aircraft and helicopters.

Corrective measures have been taken through the intensification of reverse logistics flows (rapid return of defective components to the manufacturer for repair), the centralisation of fleets

and maintenance resources, and the outsourcing of regular logistics loops to relieve the pressure on legacy fleets.

Similarly, the use at all levels of the new Silria logistics information system for monitoring flows (Système d'information logistique de suivi de la ressource interarmées), interfaced with the systems of the joint directorates and services, guarantees greater visibility of stocks and flows, and helps to reduce spare parts delivery times.

At the operational level, the ASIA (Adjoint Soutien Interarmées - Joint Support Assistant) plays a crucial role: it is the single point of contact for the strategic level in the theatre of operations, ensuring the integration of the various civilian and military logistics service providers and guaranteeing the unity of the manoeuvre.

This organisation has enabled a smooth transition to regionalisation by coordinating the logistics directives of the CPCO/J4 (logistics office of the planning and conduct centre for operations). Its presence at Comanfor strengthens the coordination of a widely dispersed operation involving a large number of civilian and military players.

The ability to award local contracts is essential to support and compensate as quickly as possible for the failure of military resources. This means that the force's resources can be temporarily or permanently replaced by contracted resources in line with Comanfor's priorities.

Since 2014, Barkhane has been carrying out targeted operations using temporary reinforcements from mainland France. It is therefore necessary to anticipate the flow of reinforcements and plan for the capacity required to accommodate men and equipment. The ASIA must therefore be involved as early as possible in the design work carried out by the PCIAT. Sometimes described as " archipelago logistics ", operational support for Operation Barkhane is heavily dependent on air transport and airport infrastructures. These intra-theatre air links are limited by weather conditions, particularly temperatures, which affect the load of tactical aircraft. Until the A400Ms are deployed, the use of outsourced aircraft is essential.

In addition, the poor condition of airfields in the most remote areas and the impossibility of outsourcing due to the high level of insecurity mean that airborne engineering resources are needed.

At a tactical level, the increase in the logistical autonomy of outposts is confirmed in the Sahel due to ongoing insecurity, extreme distances and the limitations of the air route. It is therefore

necessary to increase the stocks of resources to be deployed, to maintain the equipment and infrastructure of these outposts in good condition and to provide an above-average ratio of logistics personnel, both for maintenance and for land convoys: for a modern, highly mechanised and digitalised army, this ratio is between 25% and 30% of the force's personnel. The logistics sub-group concept has been adopted: the Sahel has demonstrated the need for logistics modules adapted to the multifunctional support of operations conducted from a forward base.

In these climatic conditions, the logistical sub-functions relating to parking and living conditions must be given great attention. It is vital to ensure that people and equipment are fully available when conditions are out of the ordinary. In addition to accommodation, air-conditioned working facilities that are protected from sand and dust are put in place. Ammunition storage facilities are also planned to prevent the deterioration of shells, missiles and bombs caused by extreme weather conditions.

Finally, the insurgents' threat is aimed at road convoys, mainly by planting improvised explosive devices (IEDs), but also concerns logistical zones targeted by indirect fire. The use of escorted convoys with air support and the acquisition of highly mobile armoured vehicles provide effective responses. In response to threats to logistical bases, personnel must be operationally prepared to carry out all operational support functions.[149] The logistics system in the Sahel is constrained at all levels by a number of factors, but despite difficulties of a tactical, technical, capability or budgetary nature, logisticians manage to respond to all requests by maximising the resources at their disposal.[150] But at the same time, the political dimension did not work: on the one hand the initiatives of the international community failed: the integrated multidimensional mission of the United Nations proved incapable of fulfilling its main mission of protecting civilians, and the European mission EUTM for training Malian security forces

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[149] Philippe Gueguen, *Les enseignements logistiques après trois ans de présence dans le Sahel*, Revue Défense Nationale n.790 2016/5, pag.21-25
[150] https://www.cairn.info/revue-defense-nationale-2016-5-page-21.htm#no2

failed in monitoring soldiers, guilty in some cases of serious abuses. On the other hand, France, the EU and the United States have not been able to stop the excesses of the regime: corruption of the elites, inability to meet the expectations of the population, passivity in the face of the arrival of jihadists who came from Algeria and complicity with drug traffickers.

BOATs (Base Operation and Transit Sites)

The origins of BOATs lie in the establishment of French forts: from 1878, French colonisation of West Africa accelerated. The conquest of the Sahara was threatened by the nomads. To secure the conquered part of the desert, a line of forts was built between 1893 and 1894 at Niamey, Zinder and N'Guigmi. The purpose of these new fortifications was to prevent incursions, but opponents were able to cross the border. A new type of unit was created, capable of operating in a hostile environment: the méharistes.

To support them, new military bases were built. The Bilma post in Niger was built in 1906, Madama in 1930, Chirfa in 1933, Dao Timni in 1938 and Dirou in 1939.[151] These fortifications enabled the French to protect themselves from the enemy and the unpredictable weather. The bases were also shelters for the wounded and sick.

In the 1930s, motorised vehicles were assigned to the most important posts, allowing colonial doctors to intervene more quickly and provide supplies. Finally, the bases made it possible to use aircraft, with landing fields set up at Jraif and Atar in Mauritania, and Séguédine and Dada in Niger.

After decolonisation in 1960, the forts were taken over by the new political and military authorities. The practice of forward operating bases in the French army continued during external operations such as in Afghanistan. Cooperation with the American army at the heart

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[151] Emmanuel Garnier, *L'empire des sables. La France au Sahel 1860-1960*, Paris, Perrin, 2018, page 85.

of NATO led the French army to develop their model based on FOBs (forward operating bases): highly protected bases with extensive logistics (hospitals, airfields) and great comfort.

Setting up the base

Before a BOAT is installed, aerial and ground reconnaissance work is carried out. Installation can take several days or months (6 months for the Gossi BOAT). Earthen fortifications and metal fences are erected, and sentries at each end of the BOAT monitor the perimeter. This surveillance can be reinforced by drones or electro-magnetic sensors depending on the size of the area.

BOATs must be easily accessible, and are generally located close to major cities or state borders. They provide logistical support for the French military and are generally equipped with an airstrip to project air-land resources on permanent standby, repatriate the wounded and resupply with supplies, fuel and ammunition.

At Madama in 2014, the soldiers slept in tents without air conditioning, then with air conditioning, then in prefabricated buildings with toilets and showers. Housing conditions have gradually improved.

Water is essential to the functioning of operational bases. They are generally located close to sources of wells and oasis, such as the Faya-Largeau base. The water table must contain enough water to support the military presence without having an impact on the local populations who also use it. Refuelling is carried out by air or land, and no base operates completely autonomously.

At an operational level here is a base commander responsible for the logistical, administrative and protection aspects of the base, and an operational commander responsible for the tactics of operations. The head of operations will have authority over all the troops stationed on the base.

The command rotates every 4 months for each BOAT. The number of personnel varies constantly according to the tactical importance assigned to it. The Tessalit base, for example, was able to accommodate 1,700 personnel before stabilising at around 500. Each BOAT has an operational component responsible for protecting the base and operations, and a support component for logistics. The combat sections and support teams also carry out 4-month missions.

For external relations with local populations, each BOAT has a team responsible for setting up development aid projects. The aim is to maintain links with the local population and make it easier for them to accept the force through projects such as access to water, agricultural aid and access to education.

In addition, a policy of close cooperation with the French Development Agency (AFD) has been put in place and AFD staff can visit the base.

Bases also employ local cleaning and laundry staff. Base commanders also maintain relations with the local civil authorities (mayors, police, gendarmerie, etc.). Some bases are located in the middle of the desert, where contact with the local population is rare.

The French forces work with partner forces and the BOATs are generally placed close to their bases, but the armies do not mix. In Gao, each has its own base: there is the French side and the MINUSMA side. Before starting a joint operation, the African forces can enter the French base, but it is always checked who enters the BOATs, with what resources and weapons.

The objective of the proximity between the bases is to ensure the sustainability of the forces. MINUSMA bases operate in a similar way to French BOATs, with a protection system, a

support team and an operational team. The originality of MINUSMA bases lies in their multiple layers of identity: while French BOATs have a single command and defence organisation, MINUSMA bases are divided into sub-camps where each nationality lives separately.

Each base is located in a key area. The network enables operations to be carried out across an entire territory. The BOATs are spread out over the area without being too far apart so that they can interact with each other. The operations carried out from the bases are of various kinds: daily patrols to check out the territory, reconnaissance of trafficking zones, intelligence gathering, operations to secure a supply convoy.

Operations are generally carried out within a 100 km radius of the base for medical reasons: if someone is injured, he or she must be repatriated quickly. The turnaround time for surgical treatment of casualties must be less than two hours.[152]

Starting from the bases, operations can be conducted jointly with the local armies to extend the area of action of the partner armed forces. The contribution of Malian, Nigerian and Chadian soldiers is essential in terms of experience, advice and knowledge of the environment (terrain, population, enemy), which is why the BOATs are generally close to the partner forces' military bases. From an operating point of view the conditions are difficult because of the climate. The hot season is more favourable for manoeuvres, with forces able to travel at 100 km/h in the desert, whereas in the rainy season mobility is more limited. Convoys, for example, take almost 3 days to travel from Gao to Tessalit in the dry season, and up to 8 days in the rainy season.[153]

Activities generally stop between 11am and 3pm in the hot season because of the heat, which fluctuates between 40 and 45°. Another difficulty is the sand, which damages equipment and disrupts progress. In this difficult operational context, the BOATs provide a real comfort zone, serving as the starting and finishing points for operations.

The tactical advantage of a BOAT is its 'reactivity': being able to deploy rapidly to help manage a crisis and to receive reinforcements from mainland France or transferred. We need to act quickly in the most remote areas with the minimum of extension. The BOAT will be installed in an area where the enemy is present in order to have an effect on him. The Madama base is

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[152] Etat-major des Armées, *Barkhane: déploiement d'une antenne chirurgicale vitale sur la base avancée de Tessalit,* 13 septembre 2019

[153] Simon-Pierre Corcostegui, Pierre Rajoelison, François Jammes, Laurent Prieux, Alice Wojtecki, Sophie Novel, *Onze mois d'activité du Role 1 de Tessalit (Nord-Mali), poste isolé de l'opération Barkhane* , Médecine et armées, 24 novembre 2016

located a few dozen kilometres from the Libyan border, making it an excellent base from which to fight the flow of terrorists in the region.[154]

Another important security hub is Tessalit, in the far north-east of Mali, 60 kilometres from the Algerian border. Controlling Tessalit means controlling the flows between Algeria and Mali to prevent jihadist groups from descending or fleeing northwards: "Whoever controls Tessalit controls the Sahara".[155] Each BOAT must be equipped with defence facilities. At the Tessalit base, for example, there are several rocket launchers that enhance the fire support capabilities of the Desert Battle Group West (GTD-O). With a maximum range of 84 km, the guided explosive rockets (GMLRS-U known as M-31) can strike deep into predefined targets.[156]

The establishment of a BOAT responds to a strategic issue: it indicates the next zone of effort. This decision depends on the force commander (COMANFOR) and also on the General Staff: the PCIAT in N'Djamena and the CPCO can propose directions and an area of influence where operations should be concentrated. The duration of a BOAT varies according to the strategic objectives and therefore the political will. In November 2017, Operation Barkhane concentrated its efforts in the Liptako region with the creation of the Menaka base. Ménaka also represented a symbol, that of making this town the symbol of Barkhane's success and the return of the Malian authorities.

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[154] Jordan Frédéric,*Témoignage : objectif Madama, un partenariat africain tripartite réussi*, Revue Défense Nationale,vol792, no. 7, 2016, pages 70-73

[155] Jérôme Delay,Tessalit *assumes vital importance in Mali's struggle against Islamist rebels,*The Guardian, 5 février 2013.

[156] Laurent Lagneau, *Mali/Barkhane : Premier déploiement opérationnel du Lance-roquettes unitaire*,18 février 2016.

However, BOATs have limits: these bases require constant maintenance because of the extreme weather conditions. Operations from these bases cannot exceed a certain duration, but the absence of military personnel makes the base vulnerable.

So, there is a workforce problem: opening a base means needing more staff for maintenance and protection, and therefore having fewer staff for operations, so the number of soldiers on operations as a proportion of the overall workforce is very small.

Another problem is the lack of mobility: the fact that soldiers remain sedentary on bases presents a problem from a tactical point of view. By remaining static, soldiers lose the element of surprise, they become targets and are more vulnerable.

Finally, one of the major risks of BOATs is losing contact with the population. "*The ultimate success is achieved by protecting the population, not its own forces. If the military forces remain stuck in their bases, they lose contact with the population and concede the initiative to the insurgents*".[157] By isolating themselves in the bases, the soldiers break off contact and risk becoming an army of occupation. As a result, anti-French sentiment has continued to grow in the Sahel and the discontent of local populations has called into question the French presence within the BOATs. The aim is to make the troops less sedentary and to adopt the same form as the enemy, exerting permanent psychological pressure on him and tracking him down.

New forms of operations are being devised to increase mobility: from 23 January to 23 March 2020, a new experiment was tested: 225 soldiers from the 2eREP armed a Desert Battle Group (DBG) to carry out a two-month operation in the Liptako region of Mali and Niger without being dependent on a base.

The combat actions were carried out with the Niger armed forces (FAN). In order to be more mobile and autonomous over the long term, maintenance personnel were integrated into the teams, with the dual role of technicians and combatants.

This experience proves that BOAT support is not essential: it can be provided right at the heart of operations. The GTD also had available mobile medical teams. Supplies were provided by air and road. Water consumption was restricted to 7.5 litres per man per day instead of the standard 15 litres. The bottled water usually used for hygiene was replaced by hygiene kits.

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[157] James Amos, *The US Army/Marines Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 15 décembre 2006.

This type of operation calls for hardiness on the part of the fighters, but also allows for gains in terms of manoeuvrability. Continuous engagement has enabled the GTD to improve its knowledge of the terrain, the population and the enemy.

On the other hand, the GTD benefited from great tactical freedom of action, made possible by the PCIAT but also by the large size of the area of operation.

Finally, the GTD operated with the same Nigerien battalion, and this military partnership proved highly effective. This operation restored the confidence of the FAN.

This experience, without being backed by a platform and in virtual logistical autonomy, opens the way to a new model of operation. It proves that going through a BOAT is not always necessary. Going beyond the BOAT framework could lead to greater mobility and tactical effectiveness.[158]

The reorganisation of the Barkhane operation outside Mali

The departure of the last French soldiers from Mali, after 9 years of operation, is going as planned. This major logistical challenge is being met safely and in coordination with partners, while continuing combat missions. In short, the re-articulation of the Barkhane force outside Mali required the evacuation of around 1,100 bungalows, 2,200 tonnes of goods and 1,250 vehicles. 90% of this was transported by road, in convoys between the Gao base and Niger. The remaining 10% was transported by air bridges set up by the French Air Force to send the equipment directly to France, as well as by convoys to the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, which were then shipped to France. The Gao base was handed over to the FAMa on the night of 14th to 15th August 2022, in order to hand over a fully operational facility. Some 500 bungalows, 10,000 m² of buildings and 4 water wells were maintained until the very last

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[158]https://www.lettrevigie.com/blog/2020/09/12/les-bases-operationnelles-avancees-temporaires-francaises-au-sahel-l-guignon/

minute. Most of the vehicles and goods sent to Niger will not be used and will have to be repatriated.

V.   Influence

The agreements established since independence, the personal links between French and African political elites and the existence of official and unofficial networks have guaranteed French expertise on the African continent for decades. One of the strengths of French diplomacy was its African expertise: with 42 embassies in 49 sub-Saharan states, 6,000 military personnel deployed and a historical presence that had survived decolonisation, successive French governments prided themselves on "knowing Africa", in reality French-speaking Africa.

"*The essential contribution of intelligence during the operation was built up well in advance, over decades, in cooperation with the General Directorate of External Security* (DGSE)" (General Cyril Carcy).[159]

When Operation Serval, then Barkhane, was launched, the DRM (Military Intelligence Directorate) set up the "Sahel Plateau" from France to help draw up strategic options for the CEMA (Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces), plan and conduct operations and guide manoeuvres at tactical level.

In the Sahelian theatre and under the command of COMANFOR, the intelligence resources will be:

-Image-based intelligence (ROIM) from UAVs (Harfang then Reaper), fighters, light surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft (ALSR), other airborne vehicles such as the C160G or the Atlantique 2, as well as space-based observation resources. The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) has provided essential assistance in the ROIM field;

-signals intelligence, mainly from tactical sensors deployed by the armed forces' intelligence units (FIR - Fonction Interarmées du Renseignement);

-human intelligence (ROHUM), mainly developed by the Groupe de Recherche Multicapteurs (GRM). This group deals with sources located in the Sahel and carries out digital investigation operations;

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[159] https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_def/l15b2696_rapport-information

-biometric intelligence (fingerprints, images).

To improve Barkhane's effectiveness and make progress in high-intensity operations, surveillance drones are still being used to support operations; the production of intelligence from multi-sensors has become systematic, and thanks to the Plateau Afrique, responsible for bringing together research and operations, the production of intelligence has become more efficient. A digital tool aggregating numerous databases has been developed, exchanges with partners have enabled mutual trust to be built up, and the operation has led to an awareness of the importance of the field of perceptions and the field of information.[160]

Communication

Strategic communication (Stratcom), or influence communication, consists of optimizing a discourse common to the various players (interministerial, interarmy, etc.) with messages adapted to the different targets. It is increasingly adopted by players in conflicts in which France is involved. Stratcom is not only an instrumental modus operandi but is a complex holistic approach to integrate communication capabilities and information staff functions with other military activities in order to shape the information environments, in support of strategic aims and objectives.[161]

Within the armed forces, strategic communication is a process that helps to "frame" the messages concerning the actions carried out by the forces. During the 2000s, the military gradually developed an influence doctrine focusing on four main areas of action: operational communication, military influence operations, civil-military actions and indirect actions:
-Operational communication (Comops): these are the activities carried out to communicate public information about a military operation or exercise. It is coordinated by the Délégation à l'information et à la communication de la défense (Dicod). Each army communicates on its own activities (land, air, navy, army health service, DGSE, etc.).

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[160] https://www.senat.fr/rap/r22-708/r22-7081.html
[161] Understanding Strategic Communications, *NATO strategic communications centre of excellence*, Terminology working group publication N°3, 2023

- Military Influence Operations (MIO): more commonly known as "psyops", or "psychological operations" within NATO, OMIs target non-French audiences: local populations (friendly, neutral, enemy), local notables, allies, enemies. The aim is to influence the behaviour of individuals, groups or organisations in order to achieve political and military objectives. Since 2012, MIO activities have been grouped together at the Joint Environmental Action Centre (CIAE).

- Civil-military actions (Cimic): this refers to all the resources deployed to provide services or rebuild infrastructure in order to win the support of local populations. It is not really a communication tool, but the priority targets are taken into account in the forces' communication plans. The CIMIC specialists are within the CIAE. CIMIC actions will form an important part of Operation Barkhane, since they are the army's way of "winning hearts and minds".

- Indirect actions (IA): Indirect actions are a specific component of OMI, carried out by special forces. Reporting to the Special Operations Command (COS), they target the enemy more specifically and may use black propaganda methods (identity theft).

These four components can be supplemented, depending on the context: cyber defence to combat disinformation, electronic warfare to prevent an adversary from disseminating propaganda, the adoption of specific attitudes towards the population, etc. In addition, strategic communication must be coordinated at the highest level and requires constant dialogue and effort between the players involved.

The importance of communication is now recognized by military leaders. It is still difficult to achieve coordination and coherence in influence communication, and the armed forces are still finding it difficult to have comprehensive influence communication systems in theatre. There are still few specialists in military influence operations in the field. This prevents France from building up solid experience in this field, leaving the allies to take the initiative in developing discourse and messages.[162]

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[162] Romain Mielcarek, *La défense française, en retard dans le domaine de la communication stratégique*, Les champs de Mars 2018/1, ppag, 37-45

Fighting in the information field - war of influence

In the Sahel, recent years have seen an increase in the number of internet and social network users. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, there were 2 million internet users in 2014, rising to 16 million by 2022. The number of social network users has risen from 7,000 to around 5 million over the same period. The western part of the African continent has 48% internet penetration, benefiting 208.7 million people. This corresponds to 13.3% of its population.[163]

In this context, the internet has become a forum for expressing positions, but also an arena in which players with different interests fight it out. Armed terrorist groups are increasingly intervening in this field, in order to undermine the credibility of the action of international forces and win the support of populations.

The removal in December 2020 of 150 fake Facebook accounts, 84 of which were linked to the French army and the others to Russia, has revealed a veritable war of influence between France and Russia in French-speaking Africa. From 2020 onwards, the Sahel countries' information systems are being manipulated on social networks. Several influence campaigns have been identified on Facebook.

Through these fake accounts, pro-French and pro-Russian people are trying to harm each other in the eyes of the local population, hiding behind false identities: false information, caricatures, smear campaigns and disinformation such as the viral video showing the discovery of a mass grave after the departure of French soldiers from the Gossi base:[164]

Russian accounts denounce the neo-colonial behaviour of the French, who are compared to hybrids. For their part, the French trolls replied with messages or drawings, such as this diamond-stealing bear.

Russian techniques identified in this "content war" include[165]:
- producing and distributing high-profile videos via fake accounts or using highly-followed political influencers
- micro-targeting or the use of Facebook advertising to spread anti-war messages to audiences

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[163] https://www.agenceecofin.com/
[164] Peter Mwai (3 mai 2022), *«Charnier de Gossi : quelles sont les accusations de la France concernant le charnier découvert au Mali ?»,* BBC
[165] https://alleyesonwagner.org/2023/02/01/le-burkina-faso-sous-influence/

- calls for demonstrations relayed via adverts, copy-and-paste messages, relay via groups by recently created fake accounts.
- the creation of networks of fake news pages to relay anti-Western messages, favourable to Russia and in favour of the transitional government.

This digital war of influence is revealing a geopolitical evolution. With a view to conquering the French-speaking part of the African continent, the Russians are trying to extend their influence through digital channels. "Russia is in a power rivalry and wants to emerge as a global player. To achieve this, it relies on the use of mercenaries, in particular those from the private company Wagner, run by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close associate of Vladimir Putin who also runs a troll farm in St Petersburg. Mercenaries offer protection to local African leaders, allowing Russia to present itself as a security provider".[166]

Officially, however, it is not known who is behind these avatars. Facebook mentions accounts linked to the French army. The army has not confirmed this, but neither has it denied it.

"The armed forces are waging information warfare in external theatres". In July 2020, General Lecointre, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, assumes France's participation in information warfare.[167]

But for these operations, France has two operational hubs. Since 2019, Rennes has been home to the Cyber Command, the French army's digital attack centre, responsible for hacking or paralysing the enemy. In Lyon, the CIAE (Centre interarmées des actions sur l'environnement) sends technicians into the field for counter-propaganda purposes. They use messages over loudspeakers, leaflets and posters, as well as publications on social networks.

These military information operations were previously known as "psychological operations" or "influence operations". Their aim is to condition populations in order to "prepare minds". "*These specialists ensure that military operations - air strikes, taking prisoners, etc. - go smoothly. These specialists ensure that military operations - air strikes, taking prisoners, etc. -*

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[166]Céline Marangé, *Les guerres de l'information à l'ère numérique*, PUF 2021,pag.115-136, https://www.cairn.info/les-guerres-de-l-information-a-l-ere-numerique--9782130822431.htm
[167]https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/07/14/le-general-francois-lecointre-une-armee-n-est-pas-faite-que-pour-la-gestion-de-crise_6046116_3210.html

go smoothly. They organise humanitarian operations to ensure that the force is accepted in the country, in the villages that the French army will pass through, on the theme 'what we're doing is good for you'". (Nathalie Guibert)
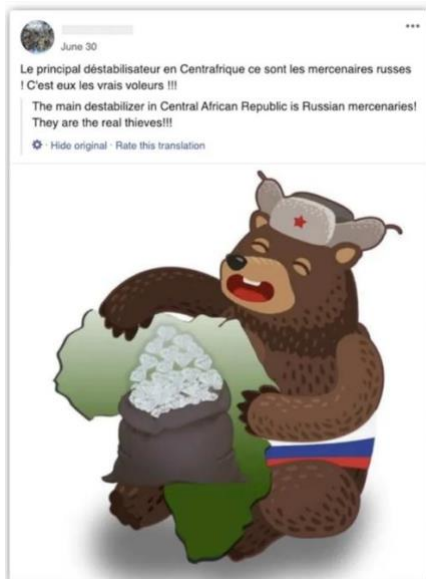
The French army also sends messages to jihadist groups by dropping leaflets from the air, showing, for example, a drone observing a man, and bearing the words 'Barkhane is watching you' in various languages.[168]

The fake French accounts are "*a French reaction to the destabilising actions of the Russians*". "*I got the feeling that we were testing tools to see what we were capable of doing. And we were also trying to counter the Russians who thought they were on conquered ground. We were learning how to use social networks in an operation against someone who is attacking us,"* says General François Chauvancy, a specialist in information warfare.

The fake French Facebook accounts, however, seem to have been created without very elaborate logistics, or even on an amateur basis, using profile photos taken from news agencies or Instagram. One of these fake accounts even used the real photo of the young boxing champion Mohamed Ali. "To be influential, you have to be professional and think in terms of content, and be able to convey messages with meaning. I think it's a tactical mistake, if not a strategic one, to make rookie

mistakes like that, when you know that the people in front of you are no more stupid than you are and that they'll soon find out.[169]

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[168]https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/les-faux-comptes-facebook-de-l-armee-francaise-au-mali-au-coeur-d-une-guerre-d-influence-entre-france-et-russie-6468065

[169]Général Francois Chauvancy https://theatrum-belli.com/defense/, Https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/secrets-d-info/guerre-informationnelle-comment-l-armee-francaise-utilise-internet-pour-accompagner-ses-interventions-8870741

But "*to say that Russian influence is only exerted by the Wagner group is wrong". The Wagner group served as a gateway to Africa. Today, Russian influence is exercised through partnerships between Russian media, such as Sputnik and Russia Today, and a number of local media, and this constitutes an immense volume of pro-Russian and anti-Western influence and information, much stronger than what Wagner can do*!".

"So far, Russia has been very good at using countries' vulnerabilities for its own ends, whether they be security vulnerabilities, social vulnerabilities or vulnerabilities linked to its relationship with France"[170].

At local level, "videoman", bloggers and/or local "directors" spread information thanks to their popularity. There is growing talk of "cyber-warriors" or "blogger armies", who are also very active during election periods.[171]

Kemi Seba, founder of the NGO Urgence panafricaniste and anti-colonialist activist, is making an increasing number of statements on social networks in support of the Kremlin's anti-French views. Nathalie Yamb, a Swiss woman of Cameroonian origin with links to the Afric network and Prigojine, is one of the most closely followed critics of France and its allies on social networks.[172]

Members of armed groups are also spreading false news. Since the start of the conflict in Mali, violent extremist groups have published false information to discredit the Malian government and its international partners: the Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) has developed a communications network to share messages with the populations it controls, the JNIM is engaged in a disinformation campaign accusing France of perpetrating genocide against the Peuhl ethnic group, or the Malian security forces of being apostates. These messages are then transferred to discussion groups in the form of voice messages.[173]

In response to these influence operations, the army has stepped up the fight in the information field and increased its actions on social networks. Barkhane was an opportunity to understand

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[170] Lou Osborn, https://www.rtbf.be/article/avec-ou-sans-lheritage-de-wagner-comment-la-russie-cherche-a-exercer-son-influence-sur-le-continent-africain-11258441
[171] https://dandurand.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-12-Bulletin.pdf
[172] https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1335015/politique/russie-afrique-de-kemi-seba-a-nathalie-yamb-les-influenceurs-pro-poutine-du-continent/
[173] Lassane Ouedraogo (février 2022), *«Mali's fake news ecosystem: an overview»,* Africa Portal

the extent to which traditional military action needs to be complemented by action in the field of cyber and information warfare. To counter these threats, it is necessary to act in two ways: on the one hand, explaining its action and promoting it through communication and enhancement campaigns; on the other, being more agile and quicker, preventive and reactive on social networks.

Since 2017, Russia has been increasing its influence by signing agreements with African countries: a military technical assistance agreement with Burkina Faso, a military cooperation agreement with Mali, a military infrastructure agreement with Chad and a resource exploitation agreement with Niger. Russia's growing presence represents a strategic competitor for France and its allies, as has already been demonstrated by Russia's growing influence in the Central African Republic.[174]

Anti – French Sentiment

A distinction must be made between anti-French sentiment and anti-French military presence. "*We are witnessing a political instrumentalisation of hostile sentiment against certain aspects of the colonial heritage: for example, the CFA franc and military cooperation. This is fertile ground for authorities who have no legal legitimacy and who need to find popular legitimacy.*"[175]

The slogan "*France, dégage"* ("France, get out") has become a new way of legitimising political and military power in French-speaking Africa.

"*The problem is that when the putschists stir up anti-French sentiment, they prevent us from thinking about France's real mistakes, but also from seeing how Africans have also sinned*". Indeed, the governments have failed to set up an institutional framework capable of cooperating on an equal footing with France,

[174] https://africa24tv.com/afrique-92-accords-signes-avec-la-russie-dont-40-dans-le-volet-militaire
[175]Amadou Sadjo Barry https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/08/03/coup-d-etat-au-niger-lorsque-les-putschistes-agitent-le-sentiment-antifrancais-au-sahel-ils-empechent-de-penser-les-vraies-erreurs-de-la-france_6184335_3212.html

but also with countries such as the United States, China and others. Basically, anti-French sentiment is the result of the inability of African leaders to think through their relations with the international system since independence.

There are three main grievances that crop up regularly: France's military interventionism, its aid policy, which is deemed to be ineffective and to support regimes rather than populations, and the CFA franc. On social networks, this turns into: "*The CFA Franc is the symbol of France's enslavement of African countries*".[176]

The colonial past is not necessarily the period that is most often evoked. We talk more often about the post-decolonisation period, when France strongly supported anti-communist regimes that may not have been democratic. It's all the talk about Françafrique.

Operation Assessment

The French army intervened in Mali on the 11th of January 2013. Operation Serval was launched. The last French soldiers in Operation Barkhane would not leave Mali until almost ten years later, in August 2022. "The French intervention was seen as a form of reparation for what France had done in Libya in 2011. The fall of Gaddafi strengthened the jihadist groups in the north of the Sahel by releasing stocks of weapons. "[177]

France's Serval operation had a clear mandate: "Serval was to stop the jihadist advance and liberate the towns of northern Mali. This was achieved. Overall, the operation was a military and political success at the end of 2013. It was then essentially confined to Mali" (Seidik Abba). The turning point came in 2014. The French government under President François Hollande decided to keep French troops in Mali. Operation Serval became Operation Barkhane on 1 August 2014. According to Seidik Abba, the nature of Barkhane has changed the French military presence.

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[176] Alain Antil   https://www.ifri.org/fr/espace-media/lifri-medias/niger-sahel-y-une-jeunesse-militante-tres-anti-francaise

[177] Antoine Glaser et Pascal Airault, *Le piège africain de Macron*, Paris, Fayard, 2021

France therefore decided to maintain a military force in the heart of the area in order to "*contain the activity of armed terrorist groups (GATs) at a low threat level until local armed forces can carry out this mission themselves within the framework of restored state authority*". This was the aspect of the fight against opposing fighting forces. The other part, which involved tackling the political, ideological, social or economic causes, complemented the first.

But after 10 years of presence in the Sahel and a war against terrorism lasting 20 years, France's strategy is about to change: it is to withdraw, marking the end of a parenthesis opened on 11/9/2001. The causes are varied: the first is fatigue, frustration and the inability to translate tactical results into political effects; the second is the EU's rebalancing of its strategic priorities towards Ukraine, and a reallocation of US resources towards the Pacific. The fight against terrorism is no longer as central as it once was.

"Mission Impossible?"

What is already difficult to achieve in a counter-insurgency war waged by a government on its own territory becomes infinitely more complex when the operation has to be conducted in coalition with reduced forces and in a foreign country whose institutions have collapsed or lack credibility. This raises the question of the real objectives of Western armed forces in external operations. If peacemaking is out of its reach, what is the point of the action and what are the intermediate goals it can achieve? Depending on the case, we might think, for example, of the achievement of the purely military phase at the start of the process, or then of the containment of opposing capabilities. But what should also be the duration of the force's intervention, the terms of its withdrawal and the acceptability of the risks involved?

"*It was unthinkable to be able to control 5 million square kilometres with 5,000 men. The Americans failed in Afghanistan with 100,000 men over 600,000 square kilometres*".[178]

On the 10th of June 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron admitted that it was impossible to take the role of substitute for failing states: "We cannot secure areas that fall back into

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[178] Antoine Glaser, https://politique-etrangere.com/2022/01/14/le-piege-africain-de-macron/

disorder because states decide not to assume their responsibilities, or it will be a never-ending task".[179]

> "*This French military intervention was totally anachronistic. French politicians failed to realise that this war was above all an asymmetrical conflict, a long way from previous interventions in Libya or Côte d'Ivoire*", notes Antoine Glaser.

After independence, France saw itself as Africa's policeman against the Soviets. It also saw itself as the gendarme against the jihadists. France felt it was still at home after independence by supporting Francophile presidents at the head of these African states. France wanted to retain its political influence. European countries listened to France on African affairs. Paris was in charge of the United Nations Secretariat-General for peacekeeping operations. "*French political decision-makers did not understand that times had changed. You could even call it blindness*", says Antoine Glaser.

No other country, apart from the United States, has carried out as many external operations as France over the last half century[180] but the failure in Mali today shows the limits of this strategy.

The counterinsurgency

The strategy behind the launch of Operation Serval was coherent, but it was no longer so when it was extended by Operation Barkhane. Serval was conceived as an assembly of elite units combining several weapons (aviation, naval aviation and maritime transport) with a clear offensive aim. "*It was a high-intensity operation that ended with the dissolution of the brigade*".[181]

> "*We had to imagine brutal operations whose objective and area of action were clearly defined in advance to force the enemy to confront us on terrain that we had chosen...*". Colonel Denis, Serval Brigade, in Rémy Scarpa, op.cit.

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[179] https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/06/10/conference-de-presse-en-amont-des-sommets-du-g7-et-de-lotan

[180] Michel Goya, *Le temps des guépards, La guerre mondiale de la France de 1961 à nos jours*, Tallandier, Paris, 2022

[181] Rémy Scarpa, *Offensive Éclair au Mali*, Éditions Pierre de Taillac, 2015

This operation was hailed by the Rand Corporation as an example of French cavalry manoeuvre. Michael Shurkin quotes Colonel Michel Goya's analysis: "*'Audacity' ... is still highly valued in French combat arms as an operational ideal. French desert warfare doctrine also stresses the importance of mobility and of moving quickly and aggressively to preserve 'tactical initiative' while discouraging static positions. We must move as quickly as vehicles and the need for discretion allow"*.[182]

In the case of Serval and Barkhane, the capacities are varied: the cavalry of the 1st Parachute Hussars Regiment is the centrepiece; mobility and speed are the hallmarks of this light armoured cavalry unit. The Guépard units are another component of Serval. The forces also include the 2nd Foreign Parachute Regiment (REP), whose preferred mode of action is airborne intervention, the 2nd Company specialising in mountain and rugged terrain combat, the 3rd Amphibious Company and the 4th Company, which brings together specialists in precision shooting, snipers and experts in handling explosives. It develops expertise in tracking and ambushes.

Despite these capabilities, there is a gap between the air capacity of the French forces and the shortage of soldiers on the ground. The towns of northern Mali, like the villages of the Macina, have not really been taken over by counter-insurgents, and the French forces are finding it difficult to hold the urban nodes, the loss of which changes the front line.[183]

In 2020, Michael Shurkin reviewed his positive assessments of the French counter-insurgency system in the Sahel, and in Mali in particular. Despite Lyautey and Gallieni, and the entire school of thought that emerged from the battles of Indochina and Algeria, post-colonial French counter-insurgency comes up against tactical limitations that restrict the effectiveness of combat operations.

The surprising effect is reduced because the take-offs of the Reapers are observed by the OEV contacts, and the noise of the Tigers informs the enemy soldiers. But above all, the last eight years have shown that it is impossible to consolidate victories after neutralising the leaders of

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[182] Doctrine d'emploi des forces terrestres en zones désertique et semi-désertique (Edition provisoire), pp. 29, 33.
[183] https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2021/06/26/la-guerre-apres-barkhane/

armed rebel groups, and the civil-military relationship has never been established, either in Mali or in Niger.[184]

The lack of know-how and the tendency to protect themselves, in the same way as the Americans did in Afghanistan, have diminished France's achievements in the area of relations with the population.[185]

Shurkin highlights the fact that the model for the presence of French troops has been inverted, with short rotations, in contradiction with the classic counter-insurgency models from Lyautey to Galula, and Barkhane's very weak relationship with local 'partner' armies, whereas colonial wars were won with auxiliary troops.

This overview of some military aspects shows that the counterinsurgency model has not been applied in full or has not worked for Operation Barkhane. "*Faced with this multifaceted conflictual situation, the mechanisms for managing conflicts, both military and civilian, some of which were developed in the context of the counter-insurgency wars of the last century, others in the context of the UN doctrine for peace operations or the intervention frameworks defined more recently by African regional organisations, are now proving to be largely outdated. The Sahel crisis is increasingly revealing the obsolescence of most of the instruments traditionally used by international players, whether bilateral or multilateral.*" [186](Niagalé Bagayoko)

Forces

Behind the Barkhane "shield", the " replacement " of local forces has never happened. The Malian Armed Forces (FAMa), despite the European Union Training Mission (EUTM-Mali), have evolved very little because their structural weakness and the corruption of their administrative infrastructure have remained the same.

The Sahel was a laboratory for cooperation between Europeans. France wanted to unite European countries in a common learning process, and put a lot of energy into engaging the other European countries, but the results were disappointing. Operation Takuba was an attempt

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[184] Rémi Carayol, "*Au Mali, les soldats français commencent à «fatiguer» les civils,*" Mediapart, March 7, 2020, https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-marc-b/blog/070320/au-mali-les-soldats-francais-commencent-fatiguer-les-civils.
[185] https://tnsr.org/2020/11/frances-war-in-the-sahel-and-the-evolution-of-counter-insurgency-doctrine/
[186]https://chairestrategique.pantheonsorbonne.fr/sites/default/files/2022-01/14._bagayoko_niagale_
_les_instruments_internationaux_de_gestion_des_conflits_au_defi_de_la_crise_sahelienne.pdf

to establish "burden sharing" and develop "European strategic autonomy" (Macron), but each country imposed its own restrictions, reducing the room for manoeuvre of the French command. London, for example, refuses to allow its heavy helicopters to take part directly in the fighting so as not to put their men and equipment at risk. The Danish were allowed to approach the front... but only during the day, as they did not have sufficient expertise in night manoeuvres.

"France and its European partners have excellent technical expertise. But we're at an impasse because they don't understand the local realities and the sociological environment in which the intervention takes place. This will continue as long as the focus remains on traditional instruments, namely combat training, without questioning the governing doctrines".[187]

However, Operation Barkhane has enabled France to be presented as a "bulwark against jihadist barbarity" and against the "migratory pressure" on Europe, thereby consolidating its status as a middle power and justifying its permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Despite considerable resources, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has had little impact on the situation, due to its inability to carry out military operations. (For many African armies, this type of mission is an opportunity, because the United Nations finances the equipment of the units and grants very substantial bonuses to the soldiers who are part of it).

The G5-Sahel Joint Force, which was supposed to coordinate the action of local armies around the borders with a common headquarters, is above all a coalition of weaknesses and very quickly the difficulty of financing the resources needed for it to function properly became clear. Supranational structures involving as many partners as possible were multiplied, even though the problem lay above all in the fact that local soldiers were not properly paid, equipped, trained, managed or commanded.

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[187]Niagalé Bagayoko https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/cultures-monde/du-sahel-au-mozambique-le-piege-africain-6137495

Under these conditions, and given the inability of States to ensure their mission of administration and justice through effective and legitimate security forces, it has not been possible to halt the deterioration of the situation since 2015.

Faced with this, France's general strategy has changed little, other than in the direction of greater military pressure. By the end of 2018, the monthly enemy loss rate had risen to almost 20 without changing the situation. 2019 has seen a doubling of the violence. Local armies suffered blows and found themselves on the verge of collapse. The image of France, accused of impotence, of protecting the separatists of Azawad, of supporting corrupt governments and of being associated with self-defence groups guilty of abuses, deteriorated.[188]

Barkhane's inadequate resources provided arguments for a nationalist discourse. The small victories were too few to have any real operational effect. "*It is not by eliminating 10 enemy combatants a month until 2018 that we can hope to win*." [189](Michel Goya)

Relations with Mali

The very poor relations between France and Mali also underline France's failure to achieve its objectives in Mali: restoring constitutional order in Mali and re-establishing Mali's sovereignty over the north of the country.

For the people of Mali[190], the enemy in the north are the Tuareg separatists, not the jihadists. Right from the start of operations in 2013, a grievance with France arose: the Kidal affair. Bamako wanted to take advantage of France's intervention to resolve the Tuareg problem, but Paris prohibited the Malian army from retaking Kidal to avoid the massacre of the Tuaregs, and the management of Kidal was handed over to a separatist group. The Malians have never forgiven the French for this infringement of their sovereignty. So from the outset, there has been a problem with the Malian army and its auxiliaries, who are killing more civilians than the jihadist groups.

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[188]https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/barkhane-une-analyse-de-lengagement-militaire-francais-au-sahel
[189]https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/barkhane-une-analyse-de-lengagement-militaire-francais-au-sahel
[190] Carayol Rémi, *Le Mirage Sahélien*, Ed. La Découverte, 2023

The strong feeling of hostility towards France stems from two structural reasons: firstly, the humiliation for the people of the Sahel of having to call on the former colonial power 60 years after independence, and secondly, the powerlessness of this army: The people of the region are at a loss to understand how such an array of forces - 5,500 French soldiers, 13,000 blue helmets from the Minusma, special forces from the European Takuba alliance, 5,000 soldiers from the G5 Sahel, European missions (EUTM Mali, EUCAP Mali and EUCAP Niger), and the national armies of the Sahelian countries themselves - have not been able to control a few thousand fighters scattered across the desert? So there is a "*hidden agenda to take over our resources*". (Maria Malagardis)

Lastly, the feeling of gratitude towards France in 2013 will deteriorate as Paris shows arrogance and makes mistakes that Africans no longer want to accept: at the Pau conference on 13th of January 2020, Macron gives the impression of requesting, rather than inviting, the Sahelian heads of state to "clarify" the situation, and falls into the caricature of a relationship of imposed domination. From the Sahel to Central Africa, African Internet users will castigate this attitude as "arrogant". The possible negotiations with the jihadists proposed by the Sahelian heads of state were rejected out of hand by Macron who said: "*If you want to negotiate, we're leaving*!".
It will take more than one "clarification" to correct the effects of this blunder. [191](Maria Malagardis)

Likewise, the expulsions of French ambassadors will follow extremely violent and undiplomatic statements by Jean Yves Le Drian. "The junta in power in Bamako has decided to expel the French ambassador. Joël Meyer has 72 hours to leave the country, and the Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs has called him to inform him of the terms of the ultimatum. The Malian military have not taken kindly to Jean-Yve Le Drian's latest statements on the Russian presence in Mali.[192]

Beyond the verbal escalation, the French felt they were getting stuck, and wanted to avoid a hasty withdrawal like the Americans in Afghanistan. The arrival of Wagner's Russian mercenaries was almost positive as it provided an excuse for the French withdrawal.

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[191]https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/12/05/sahel-avec-sa-convocation-macron-nourrit-le-sentiment-anti-francais_1767546/
[192] https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/journal-de-22h/journal-de-22h00-stanislas-vasak-du-lundi-31-janvier-2022-4602708

Dialogue / Negotiations

Mauritania is the only country to have seen a decline in jihadist-related insecurity. The army was genuinely restructured by two successive presidents who were former soldiers, and the government opened negotiations with the jihadists. Finally, there was no French military base in Mauritania, which encouraged dialogue.

Paris has always been categorically opposed to any form of dialogue, using the same line: "*We don't negotiate with terrorists*", a phrase that puts international terrorists and local insurgents on the same level. This strategic divergence had become a point of tension between Paris and Bamako even before the arrival of the junta. Paris's obstinacy in avoiding dialogue contrasted with the evolution of its allies, or of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr António Guterres, who called for political dialogue.

"*Sahel: dialogue possible with certain extremist groups*", says Guterres[193]

Since the departure of the French army, Bamako has opted for dialogue. The 2017 national unity conference, which brought together all the country's communities, had already called for dialogue. Talks had been held at local level, and the central government had maintained channels for discussion, notably on the release of prisoners. Mali will now be able to negotiate without obstacles.

Les Coups d'Etat / Assessment

The results of the fight against armed jihadist groups since the departure of Barkhane are mixed. The jihadist presence is stronger in 2023 than in 2013. "Before Operation Serval, jihadism was made up of Touaregs, Algerians and Sarahouis. It is now an endogenous phenomenon. We have witnessed a jihadist indigenisation. Amadou Koufa, leader of the Macina Katiba, is a Malian, a Fulani. And the armed groups are increasingly powerful, grouped around Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. The jihadist threat now affects a country like Burkina Faso".[194]

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[193] Agence France-Presse, 19 octobre 2020.
[194] Seidik Abba https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/dix-ans-de-loperation-serval-ou-comment-la-france-perdu-le-sahel-1618797,

Since 2020, there has been one coup d'état after another in West Africa. After Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, the military seized power in Niger on July 26 2023, and Emmanuel Macron is set to announce the withdrawal of a thousand French soldiers by the end of 2023. In Gabon, the military deposed Ali Bongo, who had been in power since 2009, on 30 August 2023.

In Mali and Burkina Faso, the military coup leaders cited the security crisis to justify the coup and the fact that they did not have the means to fight the jihadist groups. In Niger too, the security factor is cited, although this argument is questionable because the situation is relatively more contained than in the other two countries.

France's military role has been an excellent way of mobilising crowds and supporting coups d'état. In Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, criticising the French military presence was enough to win over public opinion. In Mali, the French presence bothered some of the army. In Niger too, since the redeployment of operation Barkhane, the French army has been poorly tolerated.

Today, civil societies find it difficult to exist in contexts where the military holds power. Critical voices are suppressed, and all the achievements linked to freedom of expression, public freedoms and democratic debate are in danger. However, it seems that the normality of the constitutional order and the return to elected governments are not the priority for the people: previously, the regimes that had been elected in Burkina Faso and Mali did not enjoy much credibility or legitimacy in the eyes of the population. The people's resentment is linked not only to the military failure but also to the perception of an illegible and archaic policy.

France also has a double standard when it comes to coups or illegitimate governments: it accepts in N'Djamena what it refuses in Bamako. There was also a real legal problem: how could the French army accompany a Malian army in the field in the service of an unelected coup government that was itself subject to economic sanctions by ECOWAS? The very legality of the operation had become a real problem.

The end of French domination. New competitors?

When the colonial empire collapsed, independence was not well prepared and France settled into a paternalistic and unhealthy relationship with African countries. At the same time, globalisation began, France lost ground economically, rivalry between the great powers grew

and led to competition with China, Turkey, Russia and the Gulf States, with these countries offering to secure regimes in exchange for predation. A new logic of predation and destabilisation of the continent has emerged. Democracies and civilian populations are suffering the effects. Françafrique ended a long time ago: "African leaders have the whole world in their waiting room" (Antoine Glaser). In this context, France is one partner among many. However, it is an illusion to think that a private security group like Wagner can replace the French army in terms of firepower, capacity for action and manpower. The objectives are not the same: Wagner wants to make money by getting its hands on the gold mines in Mali (the 3rd largest gold producer in Africa) and to act as a Praetorian Guard for the Goita regime, which is rightly sceptical of its own army, since he himself defeated another military junta before him. So Wagner's role is to provide security for Goita, not to fight jihadism.

The Demography

For Gomart, the starting point for the situation in the Sahel is the demographic evolution of Africa, which has grown from 250 million inhabitants at the time of independence in 1960 to 1.4 billion in 2023, with an average age of 18[195]. These young people are connected to the world: the increase in the number of mobile subscribers in Africa represents the biggest growth in telephone use in the world: but "*technology is opening up new markets, crossing borders, creating jobs, enriching the range of choices, speeding up the buying and selling process, bringing transparency, breaking down traditional pricing policies and shortening waiting times*"[196], we also see that the Internet is the site of a war of influence and that conspiracy rhetoric about France has taken root in people's minds. This rhetoric affects the urban classes, but is promoted by those in power, who find in it an easy explanation for their inability to respond to security and socio-economic challenges, and by influencers who use manipulation and defamation on social networks.

If we look at the population, we can define 3 layers: the first is the suffering population, linked by complex ties to the jihadists who, in the absence of governance, are the only ones providing aid to the locals. The second is the population that has already entered the world of

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[195] https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/
[196] Duval, Jean-Philippe, *« Les GAFAM en Afrique : aide au développement ou prédation ? »*, PWC France, https://www.pwc.fr/fr/decryptages/transformation/g

globalisation: students, for example, have a global relationship with the world, but the perception of living on the periphery gives rise to feelings of humiliation and resentment. "*Among the Malian population, there is a distrust of French policy in Africa, which is seen as imperialist and neo-colonialist. A French intervention on the ground therefore ran the risk of being badly received*" (Rémi Carayol).

Finally, there is the third section of the population, the leaders, for whom the empowerment of France is their "business": the oligarchy nurtures a populism directed against France and its "imperialism".

France remains a prisoner of this logic of focus and rejection: it is always the scapegoat of the juntas and the oligarchs. In Niger, after its coup d'état, the junta justified France's responsibility in order to explain the deterioration in the security situation and legitimise its putsch.[197]

Has the 3D approach worked?

The Integrated Approach, this combination of economic, diplomatic and military elements, seems to have failed and the problem remains the same: how to act on these grounds?

The "3D" approach (Defence Diplomacy Development) has shown its limitations:

the link between defence and development only came into play from 2017-2018, and the strategy was not coordinated.

The superimposition of military actions ("quick impact projects" such as water management and sanitation) and NGO development actions called into question their neutrality towards local populations. A prior agreement on the division of responsibilities would have been necessary to avoid any confusion.

In addition, the G5 Sahel's priority investment programme (PIP), the Sahel's emergency development programme (PDU) and AFD's efforts on the ground have not been sufficient in crisis zones. French humanitarian aid has also been insufficient, even though the amounts of this aid have increased over the years.

More generally, development actions have remained focused too much on economic aspects and not on the demand for justice or public services such as access to education for nomads.

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[197] https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/niger-pour-la-france-un-couteux-echec-20230925

Furthermore, in the absence of a legitimate authority, it is very difficult to choose the beneficiaries of a development project.

Lastly, emphasis should have been placed on restoring civilian security forces. Too often, the "security-development nexus" remained a "defence-development nexus", with police missions often being carried out by the military.

As a result, the integrated diplomacy-defence-development approach has not fully worked.[198]

For some analysts, Operation Barkhane has been a triple military, political and diplomatic failure. France has lost its credibility by getting stuck in the sand in the Sahel and then being driven out of the area. Internationally, it has lost the confidence of its European partners that it is in the best position to intervene in its former colonies. The "all-security" option and the refusal to consider the slightest negotiation with insurgents labelled as jihadists have made France appear to be an obstacle to peace. We can also question the decision-making process that led Presidents Hollande and then Macron to overestimate their capacity for action in French-speaking Africa. Errors of analysis, assumptions about the influence of the former colonial power, over-estimates of the results of military cooperation and development programmes. [199](Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos)

Tactically, France has achieved victories and temporarily reduced the terrorist threat, but the problem of governance, the lack of authority to implement development aid, has not been resolved. The military tool was there to buy time for local partners while respecting the sovereignty of states and reducing the security threat while waiting for the political situation to change. But the military pressure only prolonged and postponed the inevitable, which resulted in a series of putsches and the advance of terrorist groups. The announcement of France's withdrawal on 17th of February 2022 by the Head of State, Emmanuel Macron, is the end of a cycle, the death of a political, diplomatic and military utopia.

What does the army need to change? What have we learned in terms of strategy? What are the lessons learned that can be applied elsewhere?

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[198] https://www.senat.fr/rap/r22-708/r22-708_mono.html#toc103
[199] https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1478247/politique/operation-barkhane-au-sahel-a-quand-un-vrai-bilan/

In contrast to Ukraine, which is the scene of high-intensity fighting (many deaths, rapid combat, high technical resources, organised forces), the Sahel has been the scene of asymmetrical fighting with smaller terrorist groups, unconventional methods and the need for the army to hold its ground. The army has had to adapt. The soldiers of Operation Barkhane never had the financial and political resources to fill the power gap in the remote areas where the jihadist groups were operating. On the contrary, they have come up against numerous technical problems that have often highlighted the obsolescence of their equipment and, at times, the shortcomings of personnel who are poorly adapted to the cultural realities on the ground.

The military-industrial lobby also pushed for confrontation, as the spectre of the spread of Wahhabi terrorism legitimised the maintenance of the defence budget and permanent bases south of the Sahara... while "*Paris continued to offer military training and equipment to Saudi Arabia, as the Sahel made it possible to test French weapons under real conditions and to boast of their effectiveness*".[200]

Another lesson from Operation Barkhane is the importance of fighting in the information environment. The Military Programming Law (LPM) for the years 2024 to 2030, promulgated on 1st August 2023, has doubled the budget linked to France's defence policy objectives: the budget has risen from 295 billion for 2019-2024 to 413 billion for 2024-2030.

One of the objectives of this law is to consolidate the technology of the armed forces: the first robotic units, drone groups, quantum computers and artificial intelligence. With a budget of 10 billion euros dedicated to innovation, the LPM reinforces the efforts of the armed forces in the field of innovative technologies to respond to the emergence of hybrid threats in common spaces: space, the seabed, the information field, cyber: mastering these new areas of conflict is one of the priorities of the LPM.[201]

The Paradox

Since 1960, France has carried out 55 military interventions in Africa, in an area that accounts for less than 5% of its foreign trade, including less than 1% for the CFA franc zone[202].

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[200] Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, Le Monde diplomatique, septembre 2021
https://alter.quebec/apres-la-debacle-afghane-le-sahel-sur-la-breche/
[201] https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000047914986
[202] Thomas Gomart, https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/l-esprit-public/la-france-est-elle-encore-la-bienvenue-en-afrique-5676122

Moreover, France has only 150,000 nationals in Africa, compared with over 1.8 million in the Indo-Pacific region. Finally, anti-French sentiment in the Sahel, overly visible militarisation and a lack of security are making it difficult to invest in the zone, and will lead to a shift towards the Pacific.

New challenges

The role of the French army in the field will be reduced in order to focus on other missions on the eastern flank of the EU or in the Indo-Pacific: ongoing deterrence missions, protection of national territory, knowledge and anticipation through intelligence, strategic solidarity actions with partners/allies.

The terrorist threat still exists for the EU and for France, and the question of securing a very vast neighbouring area, similar to the Roman wars for the defence of the "Limes", is still topical. The question of Europe's "southern edge" has been overshadowed by the strategic emergency in Ukraine. For the moment, the EU is trying to externalise and pre-position its borders.

The former colonial power has long been under the illusion that its presence in the Sahel is indispensable. The end of Operation Barkhane may provide an opportunity to question France's interventionist assumptions in its "pré carré".

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