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French military interventions in MENAP countries during the 2010s

Francouzské vojenské intervence v zemích MENAP v letech 2011–2022

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Abstrakt: Článek pojednává o šesti francouzských speciálních vojenských operacích (SMO) vedených v islámských zemích severní Afriky v letech 2011–2022. Vysvětluje jejich historický, geopolitický, vojensko doktrinální a mezinárodněprávní kontext.. Přináší inovativní pojmy Hollandova doktrína a Macronova doktrína, hodnotí úspěchy, ale i neúspěchy těchto doktrín. Ukazuje, že intervence byly úspěšné z hlediska vojenského, ale neúspěšné z hlediska politického.

Abstract: The article is about six French Special Military Operations (SMOs) that were conducted in Islamic countries in the MENA region between 2011 and 2022. It provides an explanation of their historical, geopolitical, and military contexts while also assessing their compliance with international law. The text introduces two innovative concepts, the Holland doctrine and the Macron doctrine, and analyses both their successes and failures. Ultimately, the article concludes by addressing the question of why these SMOs achieved military success but failed to meet political objectives, resulting in a significant disillusionment among French political and military elites, as well as the participating soldiers.

Klíčová slova: Speciální vojenské operace; Hollandova a Macronova doktrína; mezinárodní právo; rozčarování.

Key words: Special Military Operations; Holland and Macron Doctrine; International Law; Disenchantment.

INTRODUCTION

This article will analyse six important French military interventions in the Islamic states after the end of the Cold War. These interventions have been waged by the three last presidents: Nicolas Sarkozy, Francois Hollande (2012 – 2017) and Emmanuel Macron (2017 – today). Since the end of the Cold War, the operations in the Islamic world represent one of the most important instruments of the foreign policy of France. The term “presidentialization of the political power”¹ (Leroy, 2022: 118) is often used to describe the fact that big competencies are reserved to the President of republic as the Commander in Chief of all French armed forces. All interventions have been waged by the Commandment of the Special Operations (COS), which is often called the 4th Pillar of the FAF, together with the other three being the Army, the Air Force and the Navy. Each of the French interventions will be analysed in light of the following criteria: international context, doctrinal context (presentation of the security threat, formation of concrete military units, and the forms of military actions), and international law (legality and legitimacy of each operation).

1 HARMATTAN 2011: AN OVERTHROW OF A DANGEROUS DICTATOR WHICH RESULTED INTO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

In 2011, the then French president Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–2012) initiated, in cooperation with the British Prime Minister David Cameron (2010–2016), a large military attack against Libya with the aim of stopping the immense human suffering caused by the civil war there and by the atrocities of the brutal dictator M. Qaddafi. For Nicolas Sarkozy, this operation was an irresistible opportunity to present himself as a no hesitant and determined statesman who is able to assume the role of a war president.

The Harmattan operation was prepared by the admiral Édouard Guillaud, the *Joint Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces*, as a French contribution to the military campaign of NATO in Libya.² Its aim was to obtain a regime change in this important North African country.³ The Harmattan is a season in West Africa that occurs between the end of November and the middle of March; it is almost the same as the Western winter season. However, this operation was waged between 19 March 2011 and 31 October 2011 during three seasons, including summer. It was conceived as a part of an intervention

¹ Leroy, Aude (2021): *L'armée dans la politique étrangère*. In: Badie, Bertrand – Vidal, Dominique (eds.): *La France, une puissance contrariée*. Paris: Éditions La Découverte.

² Gros-Verheyde, N.: *L'atout français: sa chaîne de commandement, rapide...*[archive]. *Bruxelles 2*, 22 November 2011

³ Libya: point de situation opération Harmattan no 11 [archive], 28 March 2011. Available at: www.defense.gouv.fr.

of an international coalition that consisted of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Qatar, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. France mobilized and engaged the most modern arms systems of its Air Force and Navy. All French politicians and generals fully respected the general principle of the US president Barack Obama articulated by the words “no boots on the ground”, which excluded the invasion of the Army and the subsequent military occupation, as these activities became a nightmare after Afghanistan and Iraq.⁴

The French Air Force was represented by a dozen Rafale planes, by the same quantity of Mirage 2000 planes and by a demi dozen C135 aerial refuelling planes. Moreover, helicopters Aérospatiale Gazelle, Eurocopter Tiger, and Eurocopter Puma were engaged. The French Navy sent to the borders of Libya its Task Force 473 with the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* as the central system, which was used as the platform of 10 Rafale M fighters, 6 Super-Etendard *fighters*, from Flottille 17F, 2 E-2C airborne early warning aircraft and 2 Dauphin multipurpose helicopters. The French helicopters won the air supremacy, they eliminated the Libyan air defense systems⁵ and they destroyed many pick-ups of the Libyan soldiers. President Nicolas Sarkozy declared that the helicopters won this operation⁶. Moreover, the general Charles Bouchard (Canada), the NATO commander of the operations Unified Protector in Libya,⁷ former pilot of helicopter, recognized an outstanding and significant French contribution to the Operation Unified Protector⁸.

The overthrow of the dictator was a positive act; nevertheless, the operation Harmattan opened the way to a general disarray in the entire affected area. It put the wind in the sails of anti-Western jihadists, giving them arguments in favour of future punitive terrorist attacks. It resulted in the division of Libya into two states, and in 2015, their territory became the main departure point of hundreds of thousands of migrants fleeing their countries from wars and poverty.⁹ This operation confirmed that every FIRC is very problematic because it opens the way to instability and chaos.¹⁰

⁴ Lert, Frédéric (2012): « RETEX Harmattan ». *Air Fan*, No 400, mars 2012. MacKenzie, Lewis (1994): *Peacekeeper: The Road to Sarajevo*. Harper Collins.

⁵ Merchet, Jean-Dominique (2011): Opération Harmattan, le nom de code militaire pour la Libye. *Secret défense*. 19 March 2011

⁶ Sarkozy, Nicolas (2012): Propos tenus par le Président de la République dans l'avion qui le ramène de son voyage en Libye à des journalistes de France Inter et du Parisien.

⁷ NATO's Libya mission to be led by Canadian » [archive], sur CBCNews, 25 mars 2011.

⁸ Tanguy, Jean-Marc (2012): For UOP tankers only » [archive], sur *Le Mamouth*, 29 mars 2012.

⁹ Libya coast guard rescues 290 migrants off eastern ... Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com › article › l...23. 5. 2019>.

¹⁰ Stejskalová, Kristýna (2018): *Změna režimu v Libyi a její dopad na evropský bezpečnostní prostor*. Praha: VŠE.

2 OPERATIONAL SERVAL AS INTERVENTION AGAINST GANGSTER JIHADISM IN MALI

Mali is a large African state (1,240,000 km²) with more than 20 million inhabitants. It is an important part of the Sahel represented by Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. This country is completely francophone, but it has strong anti-colonialist feelings, which are abused by contemporary jihadists. Its Northern Sahel part is the homeland of the nomadic Tuaregs who profess a radical conception of Islam, including Sharia law.

After the fall of Qaddafi, the Tuaregs retreated to northern Mali with weapons and started the transformation of this large territory into their “safe havens.” They returned from Libya with weapons and cars back to northern Mali, mainly with personal weapons, pistols, Italian-made automatic rifles and Russian- and Chinese-made submachine guns. Furthermore, they also had machine guns, mortars, grenade launchers, and off-road vehicles to move pick-up cars with 23 mm cannons, with a range of one kilometre, as well as several infantry fighting vehicles that they seized in Libya. The Tuaregs returned with their anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles seized from the mercenary operation in Libya shots, especially shots fired from the shooter’s shoulder (Manpads), which can attack even airplanes, especially when landing or taking off what was a serious security threat to all troops moving into Mali by air.

The armed Tuaregs massacred dozens of Malian soldiers who looted several warehouses of ammunition or fuel, thereby further strengthening their weaponry. They have become a very dangerous and aggressive force and a great and acute threat for an increasing number of villages and towns in northern Mali. As a result, 130,000 refugees fled mainly to Niger, Nigeria and Burkina-Faso. The subsequent connection of the MNLA (MNLA Mouvement national pour la libération de l’Azawad (Azawad National Liberation Movement) with the AQMI (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb)¹¹ resulted in additional enormously brutal violence (Balencie, 2005). These exactions and violence posed an imminent security threat not only for Mali but also for all areas of the Sahel.

Resolution 2100 (2013), adopted by the Security Council at its 6952nd meeting on 25 April 2013, strongly condemned all abuses and violations of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, including extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, sexual and gender-based violence, forced amputations, killing, maiming, recruitment and use of children, attacks against schools and hospitals, forced displacements, and destruction of cultural and historical heritage, committed in Mali by any group or individuals.

The UNCS decided to establish the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the following articulation of its mandate: namely, the stabilization of key population centres and support for the reestablishment of state authority throughout the country. Moreover, France was solicited by the president

¹¹ Chatelot, C. (2013): Les Trois plaies du Mali. *Le Monde*, February 3–4, 2013, pp. 4–5.

of Mali to intervene there, and it acted against the transformation of this state into a base of jihadist terrorism.¹²

French political élites condemned the above-mentioned violence as a “gangster jihadism”¹³, particularly after the MNLA’s enormously violent jihadi punishment of the town of Timbuktu for its “impiety.”¹⁴ The French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian decided to actively fight against the threat of “Sahelistan.”¹⁵ After many negotiations with competent ministers, the president made the decision that France would actively intervene.¹⁶

The engagement of French soldiers in Mali was unavoidable even from the military point of view because it was impossible to rely on the Malian armed forces in this respect. President Hollande underlined the determination of France to fight against the brutality and atrocities of the local fanatical terrorists in Mali.¹⁷ On January 15, 2013, he defined the military aims of this intervention: to stop the advance towards Bamako of jihadist forces, to secure the capital of Mali and to allow the country to recover its territorial integrity. During this operation, France engaged its Army, especially some units of its Légion étrangère, namely, the units from the 1st Foreign Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Foreign Parachute Regiment, plus the companies of the 3rd Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment, and 2nd Marine Infantry Regiment. The Air Force engaged its units based at N’Djamena International Airport on alert as part of the Épervier system and decided to reinforce them. This force included aircraft (3 Mirage 2000D, 2 Mirage F1 CR, six Mirage 2000D, trois C-135FR, un C-130 Hercules et un C-160 Transall, six fighters *Rafale* à N’Djaména, 2 drones MALE Harfang), support personnel, in particular, their mechanics, and special forces, in particular, Air Paratrooper Commando No. 10 and Air Paratrooper Commando No. 2022. The French Navy was represented by Atlantique 2 maritime patrol aircraft from naval aviation, which have been used for observation and intelligence missions. Moreover, Le Dixmude (L9015) is an amphibious helicopter carrier of the French Navy of the Mistral class (Landing Helicopter Dock - LHD).

12 Sallon, H. (2013): Il y avait un risque d’implosion du Mali. *Le Monde*, January 15, 2013. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/01/15/il-y-avait-unrisque-d-implosion-du-mali_1817336_3212.html.

13 Plagnol, H. –Loncle, F.: La situation sécuritaire dans les pays de la zone sahélienne. *Rapport d’Information* No. 4431, Assemblée nationale, March 6, 2012. Available at: www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/rap-info/i4431.asp.

14 Kepel, G. (2013): L’ intenable solitude française au Mali. *Le Monde*, January 17, 2013. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2013/01/17/l-intenable-solitude-francaise-au-mali_1818193_3232.html.

15 Bejot, J.-P. (2013): Mali: Jean-Yves Le Drian, le ministre de la Défense qui jugeait la guerre. *Lefaso.net*, January 14, 2013. Available at: <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article52244>.

16 Laurent, S. (2013): *Sahelistan*. Paris: Seuil, pages 51–88.

17 Hollande, F. (2013): Mali: l’intégralité du discours de François Hollande. *Le Soir*, January 12, 2013. Available at: <https://www.lesoir.be/art/159960/article/actualite/france/2013-01-12/mali-l%E2%80%99int%C3%A9gralit%C3%A9-du-discours-fran%C3%A7ois-hollande>.

The Operation Serval has been crowned by a long range of military victories¹⁸ against the principal enemy called Jama'at Nusratul Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), the country's largest jihadist grouping. French soldiers managed to the air strikes against the bases of the JNIM, the control of the Diabaly Konna line, and secured the Niger loop, Capture of Gao (25 January 2013), Capture of Timbuktu (27 January 2013), Capture of Kidal (30 January 2013), and Capture of Tessalit (February 8, 2013). In summer 2014, this operation was transformed into a large international operation, Barkhane.

3 OPERATION SANGARIS - DIRECT MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

Since March 2013, the Central African Republic (CAR) has witnessed a new typical "clash of civilizations"¹⁹ between Muslim and African civilizations.²⁰ After the overthrow of the Christian president Francois Bozize, the Muslim fighters of Séléka rebel groups massacred civilians, including women, children, and old people. Soldiers from Chad protected the Muslims of the CAR, while soldiers from the Congo defended the Christians.²¹ A simplistic emotional reasoning becomes typical, e.g., a member of Séléka = a Muslim = a man from Chad = a killer.²²

President Hollande declared his determination to stop the mutual murders²³ and immense human suffering²⁴ and to fight against the creation of new safe havens in Africa.²⁵ By this, he added a strong military dimension to the strategy called "Françafrique",²⁶

¹⁸ Galy, Michel (2013) : *La guerre au Mali : Comprendre la crise au Sahel et au Sahara. Enjeux et zones d'ombre*, Éditions La Découverte, juin 2013.

¹⁹ Huntington, Samuel P. (1993). "The Clash of Civilizations?". *Foreign Affairs*. 72 (3): 22–49.

²⁰ Ourdan, R. (2013): En Centrafrique, les forces musulmanes de l'ex Séléka s'en prennent à la France. *Le Monde*, December 23, 2013.

²¹ Amselle, J.-L. (2013): Un continent frappé par l'effondrement de l'Etat. *Le Monde*, December 4, 2013. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2013/12/04/uncontinent-frappe-par-l-effondrement-del-etat_3525451_3232.html.

²² Bensimon, C. –Guibert, N. (2013): Centrafrique, le risque d'un conflit confessionnel. *Le Monde*, December 21, 2013. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/12/21/centrafrique-le-risque-d-unconflit-confessionnel_4338507_3212.html.

²³ Guibert, N. (2013): Les coulisses des guerres au Mali et en Centrafrique. *Le Monde*, December 7, 2013. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2013/12/07/les-coulisses-des-guerres-au-mali-et-en-centrafrique_3527296_3210.html.

²⁴ Bensimon, C. (2013): Francois Hollande a Bangui 'Il était temps d'agir. Bientôt il aurait été trop tard'. *Le Monde*, December 11, 2013. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/12/11/francois-hollande-a-bangui-il-etait-temps-d-agir-bientot-il-auroit-ete-trop-tard_3529140_3212.html.

²⁵ Hollande, F. (2016): *Déclaration de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur la situation en République centrafricaine et l'opération militaire française Sangaris*, Bangui, May 13, 2016. Available at: discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/167001453.html.

²⁶ Verschave, F.-X. (1998): *La Françafrique, le plus long scandale de la République*. Paris: Stock.

which had been based on long-term French political interference. Thus, the French armed forces intervened in the CAR in the context of Operation Sangaris. In December 2013, President Hollande sent 1600 men to help the African Union soldiers keep the growing chaos at bay.²⁷ His aim was to stop the genocidal violence in the CAR.²⁸

The UNSC Resolution No. 2127 of December 5, 2013 clearly defined the “necessary measures”: protection of the civilian population and restoration of security and public order, the overall stabilization of the country and the restoration of the state’s authority over the entire territory of the SAR, the creation of conditions for the distribution of humanitarian aid to the population that needs it, the decisive support for the process of disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and repopulation of the country affected by the civil war (DDRRR), and the ensuring of national and international efforts in the reform and restructuring of the defense and security sectors.

In 2013, the military strength of AQMI as the military threat in this area was estimated at 2,000–5,000 men in arms. They were known by their avoidance of direct confrontations with troops of the French army and by their determination to conduct a typical asymmetric war. Their armament consisted of AK-47 assault rifles, both light and heavy machine guns (calibre 7.62 mm vs. 12.7 mm and 14.5 mm), pick-up cars with cannons 23 mm and with additional armament.

During the first phase of Operation Sangaris, the command and landing vessel *Dixmude* was used.²⁹ At the same time, the French Air Force engaged 6 Dassault Rafale from the French Air Force, 2 Eurocopter AS550 Fennec helicopters, 2 Gazelle helicopters from French Army Light Aviation and 4 Aérospatiale SA330Ba Puma helicopters from French Army Light Aviation. The French Army engaged 8th Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment, 21st Marine Infantry Regiment, 3rd Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment, 6th Marine Infantry Battalion, 1st Parachute Hussar Regiment, and 1st Parachute Chasseur Regiment.

The former MFA and Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin underlined that France had a duty to act but an interdiction to act alone. French have been told as nauseam that if France does not intervene, nobody will do anything. The opposite is true. If France intervenes, nobody will move. Comfort will be maximal for the great powers (America, China, Russia, and Europe) as much as for regional powers.³⁰

Third, the ambassador of France in this country, Charles Malinas, underlined the positive outcome, the restoration of normal life and the fact that “everything is restarting in Bangui”. Thanks to this operation, the violence was “more and more limited and circumscribed to a few areas”³¹. Moreover, Volker Türk, Director of International Protection

²⁷ de Saint, Victor (2013): 45 ans d’opérations militaires françaises en République Centrafricaine, op. cit.

²⁸ Guibert, N. (2013): Les coulisses des guerres au Mali et en Centrafrique. *Le Monde*, December 7, 2013.

²⁹ Record d’emport pour le *Dixmude*, lemmamouth.blogspot.fr, janvier 2013.

³⁰ De Villepin, Dominique (2013): Paris ne doit pas agir seul, mais mobiliser le Conseil de sécurité et l’Europe. *Le Monde*, 4. 12. 2013.

³¹ Malinas, Charles (2013): L’ambassadeur de France en Centrafrique: «Tout redémarre à Bangui». *Le Parisien*, 5. 2. 2014.

at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC), stated that without Sangaris, the Muslim community would no longer exist.³²

4 CHAMMAL AS THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL FRENCH MILITARY INTERVENTION

Operation Chammal was started September 20, 2014, after the request of the Iraqi government. The French armed forces were mobilized with the aim of providing air support to the local armed forces in their fight against the terrorist group Islamic State. From September 2015, it was extended to the Syrian territory with the aim of neutralizing Islamic State training camps in this area. The US armed forces waged their Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) as the international military intervention against ISIL³³, including both a campaign in Iraq and a campaign in Syria, with a closely related campaign in Libya. The CJTF-OIR and its partner forces had liberated nearly 110,000 square kilometres of land and 7.7 million people from ISIL, the vast majority of the self-proclaimed caliphate's territory and subjects.³⁴ By October 2017, around the time of ISIL's territorial defeat in Iraq, approximately 80,000 ISIL militants had been killed by it and its allies.³⁵ By the end of August 2019, it had conducted 34,573 strikes.

Before this operation, the French president Francois Hollande organized an important international conference about peace and security in Iraq in Paris.³⁶ During this conference, the then president of Iraq, Fouad Massoum, clearly identified the security threat with the massacres, ethnic and religious cleansing, and many crimes of genocidal character perpetrated by the IS.³⁷ At the same time, he clearly articulated his desire that France together with other Western democratic states make interventions against ISIL.³⁸ The Operation Chammal was a typical example of military engagement by invitation, if not by solicitation.³⁹

³² Turk, Volker (2014): Centrafrique: Sangaris, seul rempart de protection pour les musulmans. *Le Point*, 28. 3. 2014.

³³ "Pentagon Briefing on Operation Inherent Resolve against Daesh". Archived 3 January 2020.

³⁴ "CJTFOIR Strike Releases March 26 2019" (PDF).

³⁵ Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve Monthly Civilian Casualty Report. *Operation Inherent Resolve*, 26 September 2019.

³⁶ La conférence de Paris s'engage à soutenir l'Irak, « par tous les moyens ». Available at: <https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/la...le-15-septembre>.

³⁷ N° 2884 – Proposition de résolution de M. Jean-Jacques. Available at: <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/...>

³⁸ Washington wins diplomatic support for campaign in Iraq. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/14.9.2014-Iraqi-President-Fouad-Massoum-told-Monday-s-conference-he-hoped-the-Paris-meeting-would-bring-a-quick-response>.

³⁹ Opération Chammal: nouvelles missions d'appui aérien en Irak. *Ministère de la Défense*, September 24, 2014. Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/chammal/actualites/operation-chammal-nouvelles-missions-d-appui-aerien-en-irak>.

Hollande's decision resulted from his conviction that Daesh represented an imminent threat not only for the local civil population but also for international security.⁴⁰ His MFA condemned the cutthroats of Daesh and underlined the necessity to stop their exactions.⁴¹ President Hollande declared that there was no time to lose against the threat of Daesh (ISIL) jihadists who controlled large parts of Iraqi and Syrian territories, committing increasingly more extortions.⁴² He stated that France had to take responsibility and provide support for aerial operations; nevertheless, he declared no troops on the ground.⁴³ This doctrinal approach was fully shared and supported by the MFA Laurent Fabius⁴⁴ as well as by the minister of Defence Jean – Yves Le Drian, who declared that the pseudo-Islamic State⁴⁵ represented a security threat not only for Syria and Iraq but also for France.

Resolution 2170 (2014) of the UNSC expressed the gravest concern that territory in parts of Iraq and Syria was under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al Nusrah Front (ANF). It strongly condemned incidents of kidnapping and hostage-taking committed by ISIL, ANF and all other individuals, groups, the indiscriminate killing and deliberate targeting of civilians, numerous atrocities, mass executions and extrajudicial killings. It called upon all states to take all measures as may be necessary and appropriate and in accordance with their obligations under international law.

France engaged its Aircraft Carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, which came to the Persian Gulf 23. February 2015⁴⁶ accompanied by 1 attack nuclear submarine, 2 frigates of the Navy, 1 frigate of the Air Defense, 12 planes Rafale, 9 Super – Étendard and 4 helicopters. The Air Force engaged 20 Dassault Rafale Fighters⁴⁷ 6 Mirage, 2000D Fighter-bombers, 9 Super-Étendard Strike fighters, 1 E3F AWACS, 4 CAESAR self-propelled howitzer, and 3,200 troops (special forces operators included).⁴⁸

40 Arefi, A. (2014): Irak: François Hollande tente de redorer son blason. *Le Point*, September 15, 2014. Available at: https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/irak-francois-hollande-tente-deredorer-son-blason-15-09-2014-1863405_24.php.

41 Rollins, S. (2014): France Says the Name 'ISIS' Is Offensive, Will Call It Daesh Instead. *The Week*, September 17, 2014. Available at: <https://theweek.com/speedreads/446139/france-says-name-isis-offensive-call-daesh-instead>.

42 Mimaout, Cécile: « *Daesh ou Etat islamique? Questions sur un vocable* ». *franceinfo.fr* (in French), 15 September 2014.

43 « Irak: la France n'enverra pas de troupes au sol, annonce François Hollande » (there will be no French troops on the Iraqi ground, says Hollande). *RTL.fr*, 18 September 2014.

44 « Déclarations officielles de politique étrangère du 10 septembre 2014 » (in French). *France diplomatie*, 10 September 2014.

45 « *Opérations: Irak* » [archive], sur Ministère français de la défense, 2014 (consulté le 20 septembre 2014).

46 Ministère de la Défense: *Rencontre des CEMA français et américain sur le porte-avions Charles de Gaulle* [archive].

47 « *Etat islamique : la France «renforce son dispositif militaire» en Irak* » [archive], sur *leparisien.fr*, 1^{er} octobre 2014.

48 « *Etat islamique : la France "renforce son dispositif militaire" en Irak* ». *Le Parisien*, 28. 7. 2016.

The main attacks of the French Air Force were concentrated in the areas of Faloujah, Kirkouk and Mossoul. French planes destroyed the training camps, shooting stances, and logistics of the units of ISIL, factories of the production of explosive materials. In total, French pilots made more than 1,000 missions, and they managed to “neutralize” 1,500 objectives of the ISIL.⁴⁹ During their missions, more than 1,000 jihadists were killed.⁵⁰

5 OPERATION BARKHANE AS A MERCILESS TEST OF THE HOLLANDE DOCTRINE

During 2013–2016, President Francois Hollande, the 7th French president of the V. th French republic, presented some speeches with his arguments in favour of a permanent use of French military forces against terrorist organizations in Islamic countries. This text labels them with the term “the Hollande doctrine.” First, Francois Hollande was particularly shocked by the human suffering, murders, brutality, and atrocities caused by the terrorist attacks. Second, he shared intense security fears that resulted from the possibility of the creation of a so-called “Sahelistan.” Third, he refused to be passive and decided to wage a determined fight against the imminent security threat posed by the Global Terror. His strategy included even pre-emptive strategy military attacks.

Table 1: Presents key slogans, geopolitical meanings, and doctrinal meanings of the anti-terrorist doctrine of Francois Hollande, the 7th President of the French V. République.

Key slogans	Geopolitical meanings	Doctrinal meanings
The necessity to stop the immense human suffering, murders, brutality, and atrocities.	France looks good when waging military operations against terrorist organizations.	The key emphasis is put on the human suffering, which opens the way for a preemptive use of force.
The necessity to actively fight against the threat of the creation of “Sahelistan”.	The determination to not allow the creation of dangerous safe havens for terrorists near France.	The key emphasis is put on prevention; nevertheless, it can open the way for a preemptive use of force.
The determination to fight the local fanatical terrorists if necessary.	Francophone Africa represents the key area of French military engagement in the foreseeable future.	The key emphasis is put on prevention and on a military deterrent against the terrorist organizations.
French military operations are necessary when France is faced with an enemy who wants to strike it.	The long-term French strategy called «Françafrique» receives a strong military dimension.	The key emphasis is put on pre-emptive operations.

The first test of the Hollande doctrine came with the operation that was started in August 2014 as the continuation of the operations Serval and Épervier with the aim of

⁴⁹ « *Chamall : point de situation au 7 janvier 2016* » [archive]. Available at: [sur www.defense.gouv.fr](http://www.defense.gouv.fr).

⁵⁰ 22,000 jihadistes tués par la coalition anti-État islamique, depuis 2014, selon Le Drian [archive], *France tv info avec AFP*, 21 janvier 2016.

stopping the military activities of the jihadist armed groups in the Sahel and the Sahara. It was framed by the partnership between France and the so-called “zone sahélo-saharienne” (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad).⁵¹ This operation included not only France but also Estonia, Sweden, and the Czech Republic, plus the support of Great Britain (three FAF Chinook helicopters). It was prepared and waged as the French pillar of counterterrorism in the Sahel region.⁵² The then MOD Jean – Yves Le Drian he spoke about the strategic aim of the jihadists to create their safe havens in the area from the Horn of Africa to Guinea – Bissau.⁵³

France engaged its 3,000 soldiers, 200 logistic vehicles, 200 armoured vehicles, 4 drones, 6 combat planes, a dozen transport planes and approximately twenty helicopters.⁵⁴ Four years later, the number of French soldiers was heightened to 4,500,⁵⁵ and in February 2020, it increased to 5,100 soldiers⁵⁶ organized in independent units that use the French military bases in every state of the G5. The most important battles of this operation have been concentrated in the “area of three frontiers” between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. In February 2020, the new French Defense Minister Florence Parly underwent the decision to send an additional 600 troops to the Sahel region, which bolstered the force of the Operation Barkhane to 5,100 troops.

The Chief of the French General Staff, General François Lecointre, declared that solving the problem of Mali would take at least ten years and that France was in a situation of entrapment in regard to Mali.⁵⁷ He was supported by Michel Goya, a military historian, who underlined that this operation faced chaos that strongly limited its possibilities of changing the situation in Mali.⁵⁸ In this light, France is currently witnessing a rise of doubts about the preference for military approaches to Mali to the detriment of political solutions⁵⁹, particularly in connection with the clear incapability of the Malian political elites.⁶⁰

⁵¹ Fin de Serval au Mali, lancement de l'opération “Barkhane” au Sahel. *France 24*, 14 July 2014.

⁵² François Hollande's African adventures: The French are reorganizing security in an increasingly troubled region. *Economist*, 21 July 2014.

⁵³ Les forces spéciales françaises ont tué et enterré le chef d'AQMI dans le désert du nord du Mali. *Le Monde.fr*, 11 June 2020.

⁵⁴ Lagneau, L. (2014): Une page se tourne: les opérations Serval et Épervier sont désormais terminées [archive]. *Zone Militaire*, 1 August 2014.

⁵⁵ Barluet, A. (2018): Va-t-on vers la fin de l'opération «Barkhane» au Sahel ? [archive]. *Le Figaro*, 11 February 2018.

⁵⁶ Communiqué de Florence Parly, ministre des Armées [archive]. *Ministère des Armées*, 2 February 2020.

⁵⁷ Sombres perspectives militaires pour la France au Sahel [archive]. *AFP*, 2 July 2018.

⁵⁸ Sugy, P. (2019): Treize soldats morts au Mali: «Sans Barkhane ce serait le chaos [archive]. *Le Figaro*, 26 November 2019.

⁵⁹ Gouëset, C. (2017): Au Mali, “la France prête trop d'attention au militaire, pas assez au terreau du djihadisme” [archive]. *L'Express*, 19 May 2017.

⁶⁰ Carayol, R. (2019): Sahel, les militaires évincent le Quai d'Orsay [archive]. *Monde-diplomatique.fr*, July 2019.

The first manifestation against France's military presence in Mali took place in November 2013 in Bamako, and it continued in other towns,⁶¹ being organized by the «Groupe des patriotes du Mali» (GPM).⁶² Operation Barkhane has been (mis)interpreted as a camouflage of the long-term aims of France in North Africa. Moreover, France continues to be criticized for its active role in the military deposition of Colonel Qaddafi, the subsequent destabilization of the Sahel, and its policy.

6 THE TAKUBA TASK FORCE: FROM BIG OPTIMISM TO DISILLUSION

In response to the request of the governments of Niger and Mali, an international task force was established with the aim of advising, assisting and accompanying Malian Armed Forces in coordination with G5-Sahel partners and other international actors on the ground. Since the beginning, it has been placed under French command. It is a symbol of European defence dear to the newly elected French President Emmanuel Macron.⁶³

Announced in late 2019, Takuba at its peak brought together nearly 900 elite troops from nine of France's allies: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden. They were responsible for helping the Malian forces gain autonomy and allowing them to regain a foothold in the territories abandoned by the state in the face of jihadist groups linked to Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (IS) group.⁶⁴

Resolution 2100 (2013) established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and mandated it for the following activities: stabilization of key population centres and support for the reestablishment of state authority throughout the country, support for the implementation of the transitional road map, including the national political dialogue and the electoral process, protection of civilians and United Nations personnel, promotion and protection of human rights, support for humanitarian assistance, support for cultural preservation, and support for national and international justice.

Since the beginning, the soldiers of this TF operated from the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) bases located in Gao, Ansongo, Menaka and N'Djamena in Chad.⁶⁵ The soldiers of all participating countries were integrated into the command of French operation Barkhane, which aimed to tackle the terrorist groups in the Liptako region, a historic region falling in eastern Burkina Faso, southwestern Niger and a small portion of

⁶¹ Lorgerie, P. (2020): Au Mali, le sentiment antifrçais gagne du terrain [archive]. *Le Monde*, 10 January 2020.

⁶² Macé, C. (2010): Au Mali, le refus du «néocolonialisme [archive]. *Libération*, 19 December 2019.

⁶³ Macron, Emmanuel (2022): «l'Afrique est le meilleur laboratoire pour les attaques contre la France». *Afrique Media*, 1. 9. 2022.

⁶⁴ France announces the end of Takuba in Mali. *Atalayar*. Available at: <https://atalayar.com › content › fran...1. 7. 2022>.

⁶⁵ "Task Force Takuba: European Special Forces in the Sahel", November 25, 2021.

southeast central Mali. This TF was based on two task groups: TG1, a Franco-Estonian unit, and Franco-Czech TG2. Each of the task groups supported a light unit from the Malian forces operating with rifles such as the AK-47 and the AK-74M. These units used motorbikes and Toyotas as their primary vehicles.

At the beginning of 2023, we know that Takuba witnessed two coups d'état in Mali in August 2020 and May 2021 and, more dramatically, a brutal deterioration of Franco-Malian relations that culminated after the declarations of the Malian Prime Minister Choguel Maïga, who gave the soldiers of the Takuba TF a highly pejorative name "mercenaries."⁶⁶ By breaking with Paris, the Bamako junta also broke with all its allies, which was reflected in the declaration of General Pascal Ianni, the spokesperson of the French CEMA.⁶⁷ Moreover, the Malian junta provoked suspicions to have called on the private Russian mercenary company Wagner, accused of multiple human rights violations and other trafficking in the Middle East and Africa. This decision became the symbol of a major geopolitical reorientation of Mali, which intensified French downgrading in the region and raised questions and doubts about the future of the commitment of Europeans in the anti-jihadist fight in the Sahel.

At the end of January 2022, Mali's junta government called on Denmark to withdraw its 100 troops, which were deployed in the south of this African country as part of the European special task force⁶⁸ Takuba, to withdraw "immediately" from the country's Sahel region.⁶⁹ French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian clearly condemned the "irresponsible measures" of an "illegitimate" junta in power in Bamako.⁷⁰ He imputed to this junta a full responsibility for the withdrawal of Danish forces and is further isolating itself from its international partners.⁷¹ In addition, the minister of defense, Florence Parly, reproached the junta in Bamako its political provocations and declared, at the end of January 2022⁷² that her country would discuss the best path forward with other European allies that are also present in the country to combat terrorism by Islamic militants. Her critical tone graduated from the declaration that France could not remain in Mali regardless of the price and that France and its allies needed to determine the new conditions on their mission in Mali, which all are united in wanting to maintain.⁷³

⁶⁶ Morgane Le Cam: Mali: le premier ministre s'en prend aux soldats de l'opération « Barkhane », qualifiés de « mercenaires ». *Le Monde*, 8. 2. 2022.

⁶⁷ EU's Takuba force quits junta-controlled Mali. *France 24*. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/africa>, 1. 7. 2022.

⁶⁸ Mali: le Danemark va rapatrier ses soldats face. *Le Monde*. Available at: <https://www.lemonde.fr/africa>, 27. 1. 2022.

⁶⁹ Mali orders Denmark to withdraw troops 'immediately' from... Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/mali-o-25>, 1. 2022.

⁷⁰ France condemns Mali's 'irresponsible' expulsion of Danish. Available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/africa/20220127>, 27. 1. 2022.

⁷¹ Après le retrait danois du Mali, Paris et Bamako au bord de la rupture. *Le Monde*, 29. 1. 2022.

⁷² Parly, Florence (2022): France can't stay in Mali at any price. Defense Minister Parly. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/fr-29-1-2022>.

⁷³ Dos au mur, la France et ses alliés confirment un «retrait coordonné» du Mali. Available at: <https://www.letemps.ch/monde>, 16. 2. 2022.

CONCLUSION

During the 2010s, French Armed Forces passed through the fire of direct combats in Islamic countries. In their first engagement (Harmattan 2011), they managed to participate in an overthrow of a dangerous dictator Qaddafi, but this SMO resulted in some unintended negative consequences. As in the case of the Harmattan, good intentions and aims were typical for the second SMO that was conceived as intervention against gangster jihadism in Mali. The third French SMO (Sangaris 2013- 2016) resulted in a direct military involvement of France in a clash of civilizations in the contemporary Afrika. The fourth French operation (Chammal 2014) entered contemporary history as the most controversial French military intervention, and it has been followed by the so-called *annus horribilis* 2015, marked by terrorist attacks in France, which have been conceived as jihadist revenge, namely as the transfer of war from Islamic countries to the territory of France. As a result, France witnessed the beginning of a typical vicious circle of violence. In addition, this highly negative circle graduated by the Operation Barkhane which entered in the contemporary as a merciless test of the Hollande doctrine. The culmination of this circle came with the Takuba Task Force (2019).

The above - analysed French SMOs have been waged with a clear mandate of the UNSC. Their aim was to support existing secular and tolerant regimes against the aggressiveness of radical jihadists and against their determination to impose a radical Islamisation of all the areas of the Sahel. The failure of the Barkhane mission in Mali was enormously bitter not only for French soldiers but also for all its partners within the framework of the EUTM mission (Bernard, 2021). As a result, these SMOs provoked an incontestable disillusion and disenchantment of French soldiers. They showed them that anti-terrorism has become a veritable financial and diplomatic asset for corrupt regimes in the area.⁷⁴

At the same time, they showed the insufficiencies and pitfalls of the preference for so-called warfare at a distance. A respected French strategist concludes that it is a decoy: it produces a military effect but no political effect. It destroys without mastering the reconstruction and creates chaos. There is a real illusion of aerial efficiency (Desportes, 2018.) Today, it is generally known that so-called Sahelistan⁷⁵ or Africanistan represents a security threat not only for France but also for the entire Western world⁷⁶ (Michailof, 2015).

French SMOs in Muslim countries and their interplay with repressive terrorist attacks in France fully confirmed the logic of a vicious circle. The brusque failure of the operation Takuba has shown that this type of intervention is, despite all good intentions, enormously vulnerable to unpredictable caprices of self-proclaimed juntas,⁷⁷ which represent a traditional form of political governance in African Muslim countries.

⁷⁴ Perouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine (2020): *Une guerre perdue: La France au Sahel*. Paris: JC Lattes.

⁷⁵ Laurent, S. (2013): *Sahelistan*. Paris: Seuil.

⁷⁶ Michailof, Serge (2015): *Africanistan: L'Afrique en crise va-t-elle se retrouver dans nos banlieues?* Paris: Fayard.

⁷⁷ Morgane Le Cam et Elise Vincent (2022): Mali : la force « Takuba » victime collatérale de la défiance de la junte envers la France. *Le Monde*, 26 janvier 2022.

After a decade of endless fights in Sahel, the contemporary president openly articulated the disillusion provoked by the SMO in the so-called Black continent. During his speech delivered to the ambassadors of his country, he said that Africa is the laboratory for attacks against France.⁷⁸ Moreover, all the above-mentioned operations turned into drastic asymmetrical wars in which the West was the losing actor⁷⁹. It is no wonder that SMOs are currently perceived as a major problem for contemporary France and its armed forces.⁸⁰

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⁷⁸ Macron, Emmanuel (2022): «l'Afrique est le meilleur laboratoire pour les attaques contre la France». Afrique Media, 1. 9. 2022.

⁷⁹ Chaliand, Gérard (2016): *Pourquoi perd on la guerre?* Paris: Odile Jacob, Paris.

Laurent, S. (2013): *Sahelistan*. Paris: Seuil

⁸⁰ Gomar, Thomas (2020): *Soldat de l'ombre. Au cœur des forces spéciales*. Paris: Tallandier