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To cite this article: Marina E. Henke (2020): A tale of three French interventions: Intervention entrepreneurs and institutional intervention choices, Journal of Strategic Studies, DOI: [10.1080/01402390.2020.1733988](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2020.1733988)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2020.1733988>



Published online: 11 Mar 2020.



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ARTICLE



A tale of three French interventions: Intervention entrepreneurs and institutional intervention choices

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ABSTRACT

What factors explain the institutional shape of military interventions spearheaded by France? This article suggests that *Intervention Entrepreneurs* are the deciding agents. To secure the viability of their intervention proposal, they select an intervention venue based on pragmatic grounds. Most importantly, they carefully study possible domestic and international opposition to their intervention plans and conceive institutional intervention choices accordingly. The result is an ad hoc selection of intervention venues with little impact of political ideology, norms, organisational interests, or historical learning. Moreover, on many occasions, little attention is paid to which intervention format would most benefit the peace and prosperity in the conflict theatre in the medium to long term. The article illustrates this argument by tracing French institutional decision-making for interventions in Chad/CAR, Mali, and Libya.

KEYWORDS Military intervention; France; Libya; Mali; Chad; Central African Republic

Since the early 2000's, France has spearheaded an important number of multilateral military interventions. The most prominent include operations in Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Libya, Mali, and the Central African Republic (CAR).¹ On each of these occasions, France served as the *pivotal state*.² The French government held the strongest preference intensity within the international community with regard to launching a military intervention. Consequently, French officials initiated and orchestrated the bulk of the political and military processes that allowed the operations to proceed. Interestingly, however, these interventions have varied quite dramatically in terms of institutional

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¹The attacks of 9/11 are generally viewed as a game-changing moment in international security affairs. As a result, it is appropriate to distinguish French intervention policy pre- and post-9/11. This article focuses on the latter time period. France also played a role in other security crises notably in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mauritania, though its involvement was arguably much smaller in military terms than in the operational theatres mentioned above. See e. g., Gegout, *Why Europe Intervenes in Africa: Security Prestige and the Legacy of Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 148–153.

²On the concept of pivotal state, please refer to Henke, *Constructing Allied Cooperation: Diplomacy, Payments, and Power in Multilateral Military Coalitions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

design – that is, the approach France adopted to work through formal multilateral institutions. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, France first intervened unilaterally, launching *Operation Licorne* in 2002, and then secured UN approval and orchestrated the deployment of a large UN force: the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).³ In Chad, France turned to the European Union (EU) to deploy a multilateral force, EUFOR Chad-CAR, over the course of 2008–2009.⁴ In Libya, French calls for military intervention resulted in a NATO operation. In Mali, France launched an ad hoc intervention in 2013, *Operation Serval*, receiving aid from a variety of countries but without formally channeling the intervention through multilateral institutions.⁵ Finally, in the Central African Republic, France first resorted to operational unilateralism in *Operation Sangaris* (albeit under a UN mandate) and then organised follow-on forces first by the African Union and then the UN.

These different institutional intervention choices present an empirical and theoretical puzzle. What factors explain the institutional shape of military interventions spearheaded by France? Do these decisions follow a systematic pattern? Who holds agency in these decisions? What type of political and bureaucratic processes impact these assessments? Theories on institutional intervention design have thus far largely focused on the United States. A vivid debate exists centring on the influence of norms versus pragmatic concerns and the preponderance of civilian versus military power.⁶ Thus far, however, we know very little on how these processes unfold in the French context. Do these theories also apply to French institutional intervention decisions? Finding an answer to this question matters for both theory and policy; it will allow better predicting the form and shape of future French interventions and thus maximise their utility for the international community writ large.

This article aims to take a first stab at this question. It thereby focuses, in particular, on agency: *Who decides what type of intervention venue is chosen?* The article argues that *Intervention Entrepreneurs* are the deciding agents. Following Henke, I define intervention entrepreneurs as individuals or groups that promote the launch of a specific military intervention because

³On the Côte d'Ivoire intervention, see Stefano Recchia, 'A more legitimate sphere of influence: Explaining France's turn to multilateralism in Africa', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, this special issue.

⁴EUFOR Chad-CAR was conceived as a bridging mission. A UN mission, MINURCAT, deployed to Chad-CAR from 2009 to 2010.

⁵France did, however, secure a political endorsement from ECOWAS before intervening. See Dominik Erforth, 'Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the Sahel', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, this special issue.

⁶See e.g., Stefano Recchia, *Reassuring the Reluctant Warriors: US Civil-Military Relations and Multilateral Intervention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2015). Sarah Kreps, *Coalitions of Convenience: United States Military Interventions after the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011). Katharina Coleman, 'The Legitimacy Audience Shapes the Coalition: Lessons from Afghanistan, 2001', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11/3 (July 2017), 339–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2017.1353752>. Michael Tierney, 'Multilateralism: America's Insurance Policy against Loss', *European Journal of International Relations* 17/4 (December 2011), 655–678. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1471354066110372433>.

they anticipate benefitting disproportionately from the intervention decision and/or aftermath.⁷ We find intervention entrepreneurs across a wide spectrum of social fields. They can be elected government officials (e.g., presidents, members of national legislatures, local government officials), non-elected government employees (e.g., ministers, military officials, or other types of non-elected bureaucrats), and non-government related actors such as individuals working for human-rights NGOs, the media, academia, churches and other religious associations, business lobbies, and ethnic lobbies.⁸ To further their intervention proposal, these entrepreneurs employ similar techniques, including the creation of a narrative for intervention; the act of spreading and 'selling' such a narrative to the media, think tanks, and other thought leaders; and the formation of a domestic/international political coalition in favour of the intervention proposal.⁹ In this process of lobbying for intervention, intervention entrepreneurs are required to address the question of intervention design to secure the viability of their intervention proposal. In selecting an adequate venue, pragmatic concerns drive intervention entrepreneurs – especially a desire to overcome political hurdles to the intervention endeavour. In other words, intervention entrepreneurs carefully study possible domestic and international opposition to their intervention plans and conceive institutional intervention choices accordingly. The result is an ad hoc selection of intervention venues with little impact of political ideology, norms, organisational interests, or historical learning. Moreover, on many occasions, little attention is paid to the following question: Which intervention format would most benefit the peace and prosperity in the conflict theatre in the medium to long term?

This article illustrates this argument by means of three case illustrations: institutional intervention design for Chad-CAR in 2008, Libya in 2011, and Mali in 2013. The limitations of the study are clear; because of the space constraints of this article, all findings are preliminary and further testing will be necessary to prove the validity of the claims. Nevertheless, this article can serve as a first stepping-stone, a pilot project to understand how institutional intervention choices occur in the French context. Much of the evidence presented in this study comes from semi-structured elite interviews with

⁷Marina Henke, 'Why Did France Intervene in Mali in 2013? Examining the Role of Intervention Entrepreneurs', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23/3 (July 2017), 307–323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2017.1352004>.

⁸See e.g., Martin Austvoll Nome, 'Transnational Ethnic Ties and Military Intervention: Taking Sides in Civil Conflicts in Europe, Asia and North Africa, 1944–99', *European Journal of International Relations* 19/4 (February 2012), 747–771. doi: 10.1177/1354066111425260. Maria Koinova, 'Four Types of Diaspora Mobilization: Albanian Diaspora Activism for Kosovo Independence in the US and the UK', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9/4 (October 2013). doi: 10.1111/j.1743-8594.2012.00194.x. Dana M. Moss, 'Transnational Repression, Diaspora Mobilization, and the Case of the Arab Spring', *Social Problems* 63/4 (November 2016). doi: 10.1093/socpro/spw019.

⁹Henke, 'Why Did France Intervene in Mali in 2013? Examining the Role of Intervention Entrepreneurs'.

French, British, and U.S. diplomats, civil servants, and military officers, which I conducted between 2011 and 2018.¹⁰ In addition, I consulted French primary and secondary documents, many of them translated into English for the first time.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: I first review the existing literature on institutional intervention design. I then lay out my argument on how intervention entrepreneurs play a critical role in the latter process and advance a set of hypotheses to test the key premises of the theory. The third section illuminates this set of theoretical propositions by means of three case illustrations. The fourth section concludes and highlights the theoretical and policy implications of this work.

What do we know about institutional intervention choices?

Most military interventions today take on an either coalition-based or institution-based multilateral format. The former involves cooperation through improvised ad hoc coalitions. The latter is more demanding and involves at least partial out-sourcing of political and/or military processes to an international organisation (IO). Today an array of IOs can chaperone military interventions (e.g., the United Nations, NATO, the European Union, the African Union, and ECOWAS). Scholars differ on how they explain such institutional intervention choice. Two principal sets of explanations have been advanced thus far.

The preferences of the chief civilian executive (i.e., the president or prime minister) determine institutional intervention choices

A first group points to the top civilian executive as the decisive decision-maker determining institutional intervention choices.¹¹ Scholars differ on what factors determine these decisions. Some argue that normative considerations dominate.¹² In particular, civilian executives often choose multilateral frameworks not because they 'work' but because it is what they perceive

¹⁰Because of the delicate information exchanged, many of these interviews were conducted 'on background,' i.e., my interview partners granted me permission to use the information, but they asked not to be identified by name in this article.

¹¹E.g., Tierney, 'Multilateralism: America's Insurance Policy against Loss'. Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2003). Kenneth Schultz, 'Tying Hands and Washing Hands: US Congress and Multilateral Humanitarian Interventions', in Dan Drezner (ed.), *Locating the Proper Authorities: The Interaction of Domestic and International Institutions* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press 2003). Kreps, *Coalitions of Convenience*.

¹²E.g., Martha Finnemore, 'The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force.' Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000). doi: 10.7591/9780801467073-002.

as the right thing to do.¹³ Others suggest in contrast that a set of pragmatic concerns motivates institutional intervention design. A multilateral buy-in boosts the legitimacy of the operation and hence domestic public approval of a planned military intervention.¹⁴ It can also facilitate inter-agency bargaining and can even influence foreign audiences.¹⁵ In addition, it can have a deterrent effect on the target state of the operation.¹⁶ Finally, multilateral coalition building is said to reduce costs. Military interventions are pricy, and recruiting allies offers a way to split these costs, a practice commonly referred to as burden sharing.¹⁷

In this context, some institutional frameworks are deemed better at providing particular benefits than others. As a result, chief executives decide which institutional forum to select based on pre-identified political and/or military needs. Coleman, for instance, suggests that the more inclusive an international organisation's membership, the more credible its claim to represent the international community as a whole – and thus the greater the legitimacy it can provide to the multinational operation.¹⁸ Accordingly, civilian executives that desire added legitimacy for their intervention are likely to opt for a UN umbrella. The UN also maintains a peacekeeping budget to which each member must contribute. As a result, UN operations provide certain financial advantages, i.e., the UN provides set monetary reimbursements for troops, observers, and police forces and for the usage of equipment in the field. It also covers

¹³David Armstrong, Theo Farrell, and Bice Manguerra, *Force and Legitimacy in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005), 71. doi: 10.1017/cbo9780511622021.

¹⁴e.g., Richard C. Eichenberg, 'Victory Has Many Friends: US Public Opinion and the Use of Military Force, 1981–2005', *International Security* 30/1 (July 2005), 140–177. doi:10.1162/0162288054894616. Bruce W. Jentleson, 'The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force', *International Studies Quarterly* 36/1 (March 1992), 49. doi: 10.2307/2600916. Bruce W. Jentleson and Rebecca L. Britton, 'Still Pretty Prudent Post-Cold War American Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42/4 (August 1998), 395–417. doi: 10.1177/0022002798042004001. Grieco et al., 'Let's Get a Second Opinion: International Institutions and American Public Support for War', *International Studies Quarterly* 55/2 (June 2011), 563–583. doi: 10.1111/j.1468–2478.2011.00660.x.

¹⁵E.g., James A. Baker, and Thomas M. Defrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York, NY: Putnam, 1995), 332. Schultz, 'Tying Hands and Washing Hands', 105–109. doi:10.3998/mpub.16945. Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf 2014), 375 & 477. doi: 10.5787/44-2-1197. Stefano Recchia, 'Soldiers, Civilians, and Multilateral Humanitarian Intervention', *Security Studies* 24/2 (2015), 255. doi: 10.1080/09636412.2015.1036626.

¹⁶E.g., William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1995), 56. doi: 10.1515/9781400821785. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York, NY: Putnam 1995), 279.

¹⁷Kenneth W. Abbot and Duncan Snidal, 'Why States Act through Formal International Institutions', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41/1 (February 1998). doi: 10.1177/0022002798042001001. Kreps, *Coalitions of Convenience*, 33–35. doi: j.1538-165x.2012.tb02252.x. Marina Henke, 'Buying Allies: Payment Practices in Multilateral Military Coalition-Building', *International Security* 43/4 (April 2019). doi:10.1162/isec_a_00345.

¹⁸Katharina P. Coleman, *International Organizations and Peace Enforcement: The Politics of International Legitimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007). doi:10.1017/cbo9780511491290. See also Alexander Thompson, *Channels of Power: The UN Security Council and US Statecraft in Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2009). doi:10.7591/9780801459375.

international transport to and from the conflict theatre.¹⁹ For operations that do not occur in the UN context (e.g., ad hoc operations and operations under the umbrella of the AU, EU, ECOWAS, or NATO), financing needs to be found elsewhere. Nevertheless, the UN is not always the best-placed organisation to conduct an operation. Scholars suggest, for instance, that issues of control and power might explain why chief civilian executives do not opt for a UN framework.²⁰ Within the UN, the 15-member Security Council bears primary responsibility for deciding whether to launch a UN operation. Among those 15, the Permanent five members (P-5) yield a veto power over any decision. As a result, gaining UN approval can turn into a politically very costly process.²¹ Also, given its large bureaucracy, the UN moves rather slowly. Regional organisations such as the AU, ECOWAS, NATO, and the EU can be mobilised on shorter time frames, and access and power relations are arguably often less complex and hierarchal. Overall, however, under this proposed lens of analysis, institutional intervention decisions are non-conflictual. Decisions are made at the top government level based on executive preferences.

Civil-military relations determine institutional intervention choices

The second explanation points to civil-military relations as critical determinants of institutional intervention design. Applied to the U.S. context, Recchia suggests that America's senior military officials are reluctant interventionists. Using their professional expertise, control of military planning, and high standing in American society, they often intend to prevent U.S. military deployments when they perceive that no vital U.S. interests are at stake.²² As a result, pro-intervention civilian policymakers often revert to multilateral approval of the operation in an attempt to reassure these reluctant military leaders about the prospect of sustained international burden sharing and congressional support.²³ In short, civil-military relations shape institutional intervention choices. Decisions are the result of (often conflictual) interactions between hawkish civilian leaders and dovish military officials.²⁴

¹⁹Katharina P. Coleman, *The Political Economy of UN Peacekeeping: Incentivizing Effective Participation* (New York, NY: International Peace Institute 2014).

²⁰E.g., Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment Revisited', *The National Interest*, 70 (2002).

²¹E.g. Barry R. Posen, 'Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of US Hegemony', *International Security* 28/1 (2003). doi:10.1162/016228803322427965. William C. Wohlforth, 'The Stability of a Unipolar World', *ibid.* 24 (1999). doi:10.1162/016228899560031.

²²Recchia, *Reassuring the Reluctant Warriors*, 6.

²³*Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴On the military as a force for multilateralism in the context of French interventions, see Tony Chafer, Gordon Cumming, Roel van der Velde, 'France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutional Perspective' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, this special issue.

What is missing?

Between the end of the Cold War, France has launched more than 20 military interventions abroad under a great variety of institutional umbrellas.²⁵ Thus far, we know very little on how these institutional intervention designs are selected in the French context. Does the French president decide largely on his own – as the first explanation suggests – or rather are civil-military relations critical in understating these institutional intervention choices? In the following, I develop a set of propositions that tries to solve this puzzle.

Intervention entrepreneurs and institutional intervention decisions

I propose that intervention entrepreneurs select institutional intervention venues. By staging elaborate lobbying campaigns, these actors are able to influence the political processes culminating in a military intervention including the institutional intervention design. As mentioned in the introduction, intervention entrepreneurs hail from a variety of social fields (i.e., they are elected government officials, non-elected government employees, and/or non-government related actors). What they have in common across time and space is a desire to launch a military intervention. As a result, they often employ a similar lobbying strategy to promote their intervention proposal, which includes (1) creating a narrative for intervention; (2) spreading and ‘selling’ such a narrative to the media, think tanks, and other thought leaders; and (3) building a domestic/international political coalition in favour of intervention.²⁶ In this lobbying process, intervention entrepreneurs face questions from critical decision makers and the interested public with regard to the institutional format of the intervention. I argue that in this context their venue selection results from an analysis that focuses primarily on *how to overcome existing or anticipated political hurdles to their intervention endeavour*. In other words, intervention entrepreneurs carefully study the possible opposition to their intervention plans and conceive institutional intervention choices accordingly. For example, if opponents of the intervention proposal attack the costs of the operation, intervention entrepreneurs will conceive or modify their intervention plan by addressing these concerns, e.g., by trying to use UN funds to lower the costs of the operation. If, in contrast, intervention opponents decry the political and institutional disadvantages of

²⁵Gegout, *Why Europe Intervenes in Africa*, 43–44.

²⁶For similar lobbying techniques outside of the defence realms see e.g., Baumgartner, Frank et al., *Lobbying and policy change: Who wins, who loses, and why* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2009). David A. Snow et al. ‘Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation’, *American Sociological Review* (1986), 464–81. doi: 10.2307/2095581; Goffman, Erving, and Adams, E. M., *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1979) doi: 10.2307/2106908; William H. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1986).

multilateralism, intervention entrepreneurs will minimise exposure to international actors and institutions. Often these demands are cumulative; intervention entrepreneurs need to address opposition from various angles. As a result, the choices of institutional design are quite narrow. The result of these dynamics is an ad hoc selection of intervention venues; institutional intervention design is not a product of political ideology, engrained multilateral norms, organisational interests, or historical learning. It is also not the result of a thorough reading of what type of design would be most beneficial with regard to the medium- or long-term objectives of the intervention. Rather, such decisions are deeply infused with political concerns of the moment that intervention entrepreneurs estimate might affect the viability of their intervention idea.

How are intervention entrepreneurs able to impose their intervention venue choice on the chief executive, who is in most circumstances the ultimate intervention decision maker? I argue three dynamics are at play, which often work in tandem. First, using various information provision strategies, intervention entrepreneurs create a political and public climate that makes it difficult for the chief executive to say no to the intervention proposal.²⁷ Moreover, as first movers on the issue, intervention entrepreneurs are able to claim that the intervention route they propose is better than any alternative.²⁸ Second, intervention entrepreneurs pressure the chief executive. They implicitly or explicitly threaten to withdraw their political or financial support for him/her if the intervention does not go ahead as they have planned – a move which might put the government at risk. Third, intervention entrepreneurs exploit personal relationships. They use normative suasion to attain their objectives.

Testable hypotheses

What should we observe if my argument centred on intervention entrepreneurs is correct? I propose to analyse the empirical evidence along three different dimensions. These dimensions serve as 'diagnostic pieces of evidence that yield insight into causal connections and mechanisms, providing leverage for adjudicating among hypotheses.'²⁹

²⁷For details on these dynamics see e.g., Kevin M. Esterling, 'Buying expertise: Campaign contributions and attention to policy analysis in congressional committees', *American Political Science Review* 101/1 (2007), 93–109, DOI: 10.1017/s0003055407070116; Lucig H. Danielian, and Benjamin Page, 'The heavenly chorus: Interest group voices on TV news', *American Journal of Political Science* 38/4 (1994), 1056–78. doi: 10.2307/2111732.

²⁸Intervention entrepreneurs have thus a monopoly when it comes to 'issue-framing.' Cf. Baumgartner et al. 2009, *Lobbying and policy change*.

²⁹Collier, Brady, and Seawright, 'Outdated Views of Qualitative Methods: Time to Move On', *Political Analysis* (2010), 506. doi:10.1093/pan/mpq022.

Agency

I expect that intervention entrepreneurs drive institutional intervention choices; they come first in presenting an argument for why a specific intervention format should be taken and then spread and 'sell' this argument to other actors involved.

Preference formation

If the intervention entrepreneur account is correct, we should see that institutional intervention choices are pragmatic decisions; intervention entrepreneurs carefully assess possible political hurdles to their intervention plans and conceive institutional intervention choices accordingly.

Decision-making process

The intervention entrepreneur model expects that the ultimate decision of how to intervene resides with the chief civilian executive. Nevertheless, this decision is highly circumscribed by intervention entrepreneurs, who create a political and public climate and use implicit and explicit pressure to get their way.

If the theory on intervention entrepreneurs above is false, what would the empirical record show? [Table 1](#) below summarises my expectations. Most importantly, intervention entrepreneurs should take on a much smaller role. These actors should not conduct an explicit and systematic campaign to promote a specific intervention and thus are unable to influence institutional intervention choices. Rather, I expect the chief executive to be decisive on the latter question. S/he may rely on political ideology, norms, or historical learning to inform the decision-making process.

Alternatively, intervention decision-making might result from a compromise between civilian and military interests.

The next section conducts a preliminary test of the hypotheses described above using three case illustrations: institutional intervention decision-making with regard to Chad-CAR, Mali, and Libya.

EUFOR Chad-CAR: A French-led EU operation

The official objective of EUFOR Chad-CAR was to protect civilians living in refugee camps in Chad and CAR (situated mostly on the Sudanese border), to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, and to ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel operating in the conflict area.³⁰ The EU Council

³⁰United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1778 (2007). Available at www.undemocracy.com/S-RES-1778%282007%29/page_2 (last accessed 10 February 2010).

Table 1. Summary of observable implications.

Dimensions	Chief Executive's Preferences	Civil-Military Relations	Intervention Entrepreneurs
Agency	The French president dominates discussions on institutional intervention choices.	Institutional intervention choices are compromises to mollify the military leadership.	Intervention entrepreneurs control discussions on institutional intervention choices.
Preference Formation	Presidential intervention preferences dominate. These preferences can be driven by normative or pragmatic concerns (or a combination of both).	Preferences differ among civilian and military leadership.	Intervention entrepreneurs assess possible political hurdles to their intervention plans, and institutional intervention preferences are formed accordingly.
Decision-making Process	Non-conflictual, hierarchical decision-making process.	Decision-making processes focus on reconciling civilian and military preferences.	Intervention entrepreneurs create constraints and pressure French presidents to accept their intervention plans.

approved the force on 15 October 2007 and the first EU troops reached Chad-CAR in early February 2008. France initiated and politically orchestrated the deployment of EUFOR Chad-CAR. France worked relentlessly at the UN to pass a resolution that would authorise the EU force.³¹ France introduced the issue at the EU Council and lobbied EU member states to support the proposal.³²

Initial French attempts to launch a military mission to Chad had started under the government of Jacques Chirac. In 2006, Chadian President Idriss Déby had come under repeated attacks from rebels eager to overthrow him.³³ Many of these rebels had supply-lines on the Sudanese side of the Chadian-Sudanese border. They were using the instability ensuing from the Darfur crisis to organise their rebellion against Déby. Under Jacques Chirac, French diplomats thus intended to convince the UN to create a *buffer zone* between Sudan and Chad preventing these rebel groups from overrunning N'Djamena.³⁴ One French diplomat summed up the country's position as follows: 'What [France] want[s] in Chad is stability. The rebels aren't any better than Déby, we simply wish to avoid a situation of continuous warfare

³¹France single-handedly wrote all UN draft resolutions pertaining to Chad-CAR and prodded numerous Security Council members to support the resolutions. France also planned for the EU-UN transition, see Henke, *Constructing Allied Cooperation*.

³²Mattelaer, *The Strategic Planning of EU Military Operations – the Case of Eufor Tchad/RCA* (Brussels: IES 2008), 14.

³³For geopolitical reasons, key French government officials deemed it necessary to keep Chadian president Déby in power. See Marchal, 'Understanding French Policy towards Chad/Sudan? A Difficult Task Part 1–3.' Available at <http://africanarguments.org/2009/06/06/understanding-french-policy-towards-chadsudan-a-difficult-task-3/> (last accessed 8 August 2018).

³⁴Guillaume Etienne, 'L'opération EUFOR Tchad/RCA: Succès Et Limites D'une Initiative Européenne' (Paris: Terra Nova 2009), 9–10.

affecting the broader region.³⁵ French initial efforts, however, yielded little results. Under French pressure, the UN Peacekeeping Department (UNDPKO) sent a fact-finding mission to Chad in February 2007. However, no further steps were undertaken. Indeed, many UNDPKO officials were highly skeptical of the French plan and tried to stall a UN operation to Chad to the best of their abilities.³⁶

The situation changed with the election of Nicolas Sarkozy as president of France in May 2007. Sarkozy himself did not care much about the issue. In contrast to his predecessors, Sarkozy did not relish the Franco-Chadian relationship, nor did he share their conception of la 'France-Afrique,' i.e., that France and Africa had a special and mutually indispensable relationship.³⁷ However, his foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, quickly picked up the topic.³⁸ Indeed, Kouchner turned into the intervention entrepreneur for EUFOR Chad-CAR. What explains his intense interest in the operation? Prior to becoming French foreign minister, Kouchner had founded the international humanitarian organisation Doctors without Borders. He had also been a key architect of the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) doctrine.³⁹ Over the course of 2006 and 2007, Kouchner had been intensively involved in the French branch of the *Save Darfur* movement. As newly appointed French foreign minister, he vowed to use his power to do something about the crisis. Indeed, the very first meeting Kouchner called for at the Quai d'Orsay centred on the question of how to alleviate the humanitarian suffering in Darfur. During this meeting, Kouchner suggested that the West establish 'humanitarian corridors' – as it had in Bosnia – to deliver supplies to refugees inside Sudan.⁴⁰ However, opposition from within the Quai d'Orsay and the French military to this idea quickly arose. These corridors had not been very effective in Bosnia, so many questioned why they should work now. Kouchner and his team then reconsidered their plan.⁴¹ What type of operation could be mounted that would address the Darfur crisis in some fashion and be acceptable to critical French actors?

³⁵As quoted in Mattelaer, 'The Strategic Planning of EU Military Operations – the Case of Eufor Tchad/RCA', *The Strategic Planning of EU Military Operations* (March 2010), 15. doi: 10.2139/ssrn.1577775.

³⁶These officials reckoned that the operation had a taste of France using the UN to advance its own political agenda in Chad. See e.g., Bjoern H. Seibert, *African Adventure? Assessing the European Union's Military Intervention in Chad and the Central African Republic* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Security Studies Working Paper 2010), 10. Alexandra Novosselof, and Richard Gowan, *Security Council Working Methods and UN Peace Operations: The Case of Chad and the Central African Republic, 2006–2010* (New York, NY: New York University Center on International Cooperation 2012), 11. Author's interview with Victor da Silva, UN Special Representative for MINURCAT, Brussels, February 2011.

³⁷In essence, Sarkozy considered the numerous French military bases and operations in Africa a waste of money.

³⁸James Traub, 'A Statesman without Borders', *New York Times*, 3 February 2008.

³⁹Eglantine Staunton, *France, Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2020).

⁴⁰Novosselof and Gowan, *Security Council Working Methods and UN Peace Operations*, 40.

⁴¹James Traub, 'A Statesman without Borders.'

In this process, Kouchner came up with the idea of deploying an EU operation to Chad and the CAR. Such an operation would hit several birds with one stone. First, an operation in Chad-CAR would alleviate the refugee crisis at the Sudanese-Chadian border and thus ease humanitarian pressure on Darfur – at least to some degree.⁴² Second, such an operation would please French diplomats and the military that had been working on a UN deployment to Chad under Jacques Chirac (see above) but never succeeded in realising the mission. Third, by channelling the operation via the EU, Kouchner could cut out UNDPKO, which was still highly critical of such a mission. Moreover, Kouchner wanted action fast. The EU was the only institution to deliver. Kouchner was convinced that France possessed enough leverage to push the Chad dossier through the necessary European political processes. Finally, working through the EU would enable France to split some of the costs of the mission with other EU members, though these cost savings would be small.⁴³ For Kouchner, a unilateral intervention in Chad was out of the question. He feared domestic and international voices would accuse the French government of neo-colonialism.⁴⁴ Indeed, the final plan Kouchner developed looked as follows: The EU would stay in Chad-CAR for about a year. During that time, French diplomats would organise a UN takeover. The EU was thus supposed to act as a ‘bridging’ operation; it would stabilise the situation in the region before the UN would move in.

How did Kouchner sell this plan to President Sarkozy, who held the ultimate decision-making power on French interventions? Kouchner, himself, argues that two factors played in his favour. First, Sarkozy saw the geostrategic benefits of the intervention. Second, and maybe more importantly, Sarkozy wanted to accommodate Kouchner, who was lobbying hard for the deployment. To soften his reputation as a fierce right-wing conservative, Sarkozy had put together a cabinet of ministers representing not only his own conservative right-wing party but also the French socialist and centre parties.⁴⁵ Kouchner was the most prominent addition to this cabinet. Thus, he held considerable bargaining power. Without Kouchner, Sarkozy’s ‘gouvernement d’ouverture’ would fall apart – which would have been a politically costly development that Sarkozy did not want to risk in the first year of his administration.⁴⁶

⁴²Since the refugee camps were also on the North-Eastern CAR side of the border, France included CAR in the operational plans.

⁴³Novosselof and Gowan, *Security Council Working Methods and UN Peace Operations*, 40. Seibert, ‘African Adventure?’, 48–49. In 2004, the EU had set up the Athena Mechanism – a permanent mechanism to administer the financing of common costs of EU military operations.

⁴⁴Author’s interview with Bernard Thorette, Chief of Staff of the French Army, Paris, February 2011.

⁴⁵Sarkozy wanted to demonstrate to the French citizens that whatever their political orientation, they would be able to identify with his new administration. See e.g., Marchal, ‘Understanding French Policy towards Chad/Sudan? A Difficult Task Part 1-3.

⁴⁶Author’s interview with Bernard Kouchner, French Foreign Minister, Paris, February 2011.

Libya: A British-imposed NATO intervention

France served as *pivotal state* for NATO's intervention in Libya. Without French leadership, the operation would not have occurred. French motivations to politically orchestrate the launch of this intervention are complex and still poorly understood. Certainly, there were sincere concerns that a genocide could be committed against the people of Benghazi. French political elites also wanted to be on the 'right side' of history. Successive French governments had been protecting dictators in the Middle East for too long. Officials hoped that a campaign against Gaddafi would change this image at least somewhat. However, while widespread, these reasons do not tell the entire story. French President Sarkozy and his inner circle indeed had a very special relationship with Libya. French investigative journalists discovered that Gaddafi appears to have provided up to €50 million to Sarkozy's election campaign in 2006. The French judiciary is currently investigating these claims.⁴⁷ Gaddafi intended to influence French policy via this 'donation'; while unclear what his exact demands were, it can be assumed that he was eager to receive sanctions relief as well as full re-integration into the international community.⁴⁸ Once Sarkozy was elected as president of France, he invited Gaddafi to Paris on a state visit. On this occasion, bilateral contracts worth over €10 million were signed (e.g., on civil nuclear cooperation, Airbus planes, and French Rafale fighter jets).⁴⁹ From then onwards, however, it appears that bilateral relations soured.⁵⁰ On numerous occasions, Gaddafi allegedly threatened Sarkozy to make his (illegal) campaign contributions public. Sarkozy thus felt increasingly blackmailed and humiliated. A desire grew to put Gaddafi 'back into his box.'⁵¹ As a result, the French intelligence services jumped on the occasion to help Gaddafi's chief of protocol, Nouri Mesmari, defect to France in October 2010.⁵² Was there an intent to topple Gaddafi? France arguably would

⁴⁷Arfi, Fabrice and Laske, Karl, *Avec Les Compliments Du Guide* (Paris: Fayard, 2017). The brokers of the deal from the French side appear to have been Brice Hortefeux, Claude Gueant, and a Lebanese intermediary called Ziad Takieddine.

⁴⁸As Mofthah Missouri, Gaddafi's translator, testified. See <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180323-info-rfi-affaire-libyenne-interprete-kadhafi-mofthah-missouri-sarkozy>. See also Karl Laske, Fabrice Arfi, 'Les juges percent les secrets de la fuite du bras droit de Kadhafi', *Médiapart*, 23 juillet 2015, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/230715/les-juges-percent-les-secrets-de-la-fuite-du-bras-droit-de-kadhafi>.

⁴⁹Piel, Tilouine, and Goar, 'Financement Libyen: Le Spectre D'une Affaire D'etat,' *Le Monde*, 23 March 2018.

⁵⁰Arfi and Laske, *Avec Les Compliments Du Guide*, 231.

⁵¹Jean-Christophe Notin, *La Vérité Sur Notre Guerre En Libye* (Paris: Fayard 2012), 53. Author's interview with French intelligence official, Paris, June 2018. See also Weighill, Rob and Gaub, Florence, *The Cauldron: Nato's Campaign in Libya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 49. doi: 10.1093/oso/9780190916220.001.0001.

⁵²Vincent Huguéaux, 'Les vérités de l'ancien chef du protocole de Kadhafi', *L'Express.fr*, 2 Mar. 2011.

not have been able to pull off such coup on its own. Nevertheless, a policy to weaken the Gaddafi regime certainly existed.⁵³

The situation in Libya, of course, radically shifted with the beginning of the Arab Spring in January 2011. It was then when President Sarkozy took on the role of intervention entrepreneur for Libya. On the military front, he ordered the French military to gather intelligence on Libya, especially signal intelligence: Where did Libya station its radars and anti-air defence systems? What surface to air missiles (SAMs) existed? What other anti-aircraft systems did Libya possess? By the end of February 2011, the French military dedicated its Transall C-160 plane 'Gabriel' to this endeavour as well as the Frigate 'Tourville' and two nuclear submarines.⁵⁴ On the political front, Sarkozy managed critical processes necessary to launch the intervention. From the get-go, Sarkozy was clear that France needed international buy-in. When meeting for the first time with the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC), the 'political face of the revolution,' in Paris in early March 2011, Sarkozy explained:

We need some people with us. I do not speak of France: the great political forces [here] will follow me. But there are our European partners ... And then, beyond Europe, the support of the international community would also be very valuable. ... France has the technical means [to conduct such an operation] ... but especially for the aftermath of the operation [international buy-in] will be critical. Others, that tried to do without it, well, we saw how that ended.⁵⁵

Sarkozy then laid out what, in his view, the ideal set-up would be:

First I will work hand in hand with my friend, Cameron, the British Prime Minister. We will try to get a UN resolution ... It might not work, in this case, we will skip it. We will find, with our British friends, other means ... to provide legitimacy to the operation. For example, the Arab League. ... or we will create an ad hoc coalition with a number of European and African countries and the Arab League ...⁵⁶

The UK government, indeed, quickly joined Sarkozy's project. In December 2010, France and the UK had finalised the Lancaster House treaty. The aim of the treaty was to strengthen UK-French military cooperation. Since 2010, contacts between French and UK actors had grown at a fast speed. Deep interpersonal relations had developed over coffee or dinner.⁵⁷ Sarkozy and

⁵³ Author's interview with French intelligence official, Paris, June 2018.

⁵⁴ Notin, *La Vérité Sur Notre Guerre En Libye*, 76 & 81.

⁵⁵ Bernard Henri Lévy, *La Guerre Sans L'aimer: Journal D'un Écrivain Au Coeur Du Printemps Libyen* (Paris: Grasset 2011), 106.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁷ Alice Pannier, 'Understanding the Workings of Interstate Cooperation in Defence: An Exploration into Franco-British Cooperation after the Signing of the Lancaster House Treaty', *European Security* 22/4 (December 2013), 549–550. doi: 10.1080/09662839.2013.833908. Interview with British military officer, London, June 2018.

his advisers now used these relationships to bring the UK behind a possible strike against Libya. Elected only in May 2010, Cameron was still inexperienced in foreign policy.⁵⁸ Sarkozy portrayed Libya as a unique opportunity for Cameron to demonstrate leadership on global security issues. Cameron took the bait. Nevertheless, high-ranking British generals soon derailed the rest of Sarkozy's institutional intervention plan. They insisted that a Franco-British command was incapable of planning and executing this operation alone.⁵⁹ The threat from Gaddafi's surface-to-air missiles and integrated air defence systems (IADS) was too great. U.S. help was needed to destroy these assets from the air.⁶⁰ To make this point crystal clear, the British military presented their French counterparts with a *fait accompli*. When the French chief of defence staff, Admiral Guillaud, arrived in Northwood to talk strategy with the British high command, nobody was there to receive him.⁶¹ His British interlocutors had left to the U.S. base in Ramstein (Germany) to talk strategy with the Americans.

Sarkozy initially refused to accept these British demands. French diplomats argued that Arab public opinion would not look favourably at NATO; NATO was not the right organisation to do this.⁶² And yet, in the end Sarkozy had to relent. He was running out of alternatives as time was pressing; any other option but the NATO option was not acceptable to the UK.⁶³ Without accepting NATO, no intervention would occur.

Mali: A French reversal to quasi unilateralism

Operation Serval, as French officials call the Malian operation, was launched on 11 January 2013 and lasted until 15 July 2014, when the operation changed and was renamed *Operation Barkhane*. At the height of its deployment, 5,100 French troops participated in the operation – the largest French foreign deployment since France's war in Algeria.⁶⁴ French intervention plans for Mali were highly contested among various branches of the French government. The Quai d'Orsay was opposed to a French-led intervention until the very last minute. It had lobbied for a different, African-led solution to the

⁵⁸Michael A. Ashcroft, *Call Me Dave: The Unauthorised Biography of David Cameron* (London: Biteback Publishing 2015), 428.

⁵⁹Notin, *La Vérité Sur Notre Guerre En Libye*, 191. David Richards, *Taking Command* (London: Hachette UK 2014), 336.

⁶⁰Weighill and Gaub, *The Cauldron*, 57–58.

⁶¹Notin, *La Vérité Sur Notre Guerre En Libye*, 191–192; Nougayrede, 'Comment La France a-T-Elle Decide D'intervenir En Libye?', *Le Monde*, 9 April 2011.

⁶²Weighill and Gaub, *The Cauldron*, 45.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁴Isabelle Lasserre, and Thierry Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrete Au Mali. Les Nouvelles Menaces Contre La France* (Paris: Fayard 2013), 53.

Malian crisis.⁶⁵ The director of the French secret service (DGSE), Érarid Corbin de Mangoux, also expressed scepticism with regard to a full-scale French military intervention in Mali.⁶⁶ President Hollande, in turn, had publicly insisted on French television on 11 October 2012 that ‘no French boots would be on the ground in Mali.’⁶⁷ He also issued a statement that France would never again conduct a war ‘alone.’⁶⁸ His priority at the beginning of his presidency was bringing French troops home from Afghanistan – not starting a new war.⁶⁹ Finally, the Elysée’s chief military adviser, General Benoît Puga, also did not push for the Mali intervention.⁷⁰ He reportedly only agreed to support the mission on 11 January 2013, the day Hollande gave the green light.⁷¹

So what then explains the French intervention in Mali? The driving force behind the operation was Defence Minister Le Drian. As soon as he started his position as French defence minister on 17 May 2012, he asked to be briefed on existing French military plans to intervene in Mali.⁷² Many officials working at the French Defence Ministry realised then and there that Mali would become the new minister’s policy priority.⁷³ Le Drian’s interest in Mali was arguably based on two factors. First, Le Drian thought that the collapse of the Malian state posed a serious risk to the entire Sahel region.⁷⁴ Mali could turn into a terrorist safe heaven with grave economic and security consequences for France.⁷⁵ Second, Le Drian desired to re-establish the standing of the French Defence Ministry.⁷⁶ He wanted the Ministry to be at the heart of French political action. Intricately intertwined with this plan was also a wish to create a new equilibrium between the various French government actors that were involved in French defence

⁶⁵Ibid., 191. Lénaïg Bredoux, Clément Fayol, ‘L’Afrique de Hollande donne le premier rôle aux militaires’, *Médiapart*, 11 janvier 2016.

⁶⁶Jean-Christophe Notin, *La Guerre De La France Au Mali* (Paris: Tallandier 2014), 179–180. doi:10.14375/np.9791021004566.

⁶⁷Philippe Chappleau, ‘Mali: On peut donner un appui matériel, on peut former, mais la France n’interviendra pas’. (François Hollande) [archive], *Ouest-France*, 11 October 2012. See also Chivvis, Christopher S., *The French War on Al Qa’ida in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2015), 36. doi:10.1017/cbo9781316343388.

⁶⁸Lasserre and Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrete Au Mali*, 15.

⁶⁹Ibid., 27. Mathias, Grégor, *Les Guerres Africaines De François Hollande* (Paris: Editions de l’Aube 2014).

⁷⁰General Benoît Puga, whose official title is the Chief of the Military Staff of the President of the Republic, reportedly had been pushing President Sarkozy to intervene in Mali. But Sarkozy refused. Puga and Sarkozy had a remarkably close relationship. Hollande kept Puga as his chief military adviser, but the relationship was decidedly less close. See e.g., David Revault d’Allonnes and Nathalie Guibert, ‘Enquête sur Benoît Puga, le général des présidents français’, *Le Monde*, 6 July 2016.

⁷¹Lasserre and Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrete Au Mali*, 23. Revault d’Allonnes and Guibert, ‘Enquête sur Benoît Puga, le général des présidents français’.

⁷²Ibid., 28.

⁷³Notin, *La Guerre De La France Au Mali*, 84.

⁷⁴Author’s interview with Admiral Edouard Guillaud, Chief of the French Defence Staff, St Cloud, August 2016.

⁷⁵Lasserre and Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrete Au Mali*, 21–22, 27 & 48–49. Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa’ida in Africa*, 76. Elischer, ‘After Mali Comes Niger’, *Foreign Affairs*, 12 February 2013 2013. Boeke, Sergei and Schuurman, Bart, ‘Operation ‘Serval’: A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali, 2013–2014’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38/6 (2015), 806–807. doi:10.1080/01402390.2015.1045494.

⁷⁶Author’s interview with French official, Paris, August 2016.

policy decision-making, notably the Elysée (the office of the President) and the Ministry of Defence.⁷⁷ During the previous Sarkozy presidency, the chief of the military staff of the president of the republic, a high-ranking military officer who was attached to the Elysée, had become a remarkably powerful actor. Via two executive orders, Sarkozy had delegated to him issue areas previously under control of the defence minister.⁷⁸ Le Drian wanted to change this. He was eager to re-establish 'civilian' control over French defence. Thus, in his first weeks in office, he initiated major political reforms with the intention to diminish the role of high-ranking military officials to a degree that some considered these reforms a mini civilian putsch.⁷⁹ An intervention in Mali could further boost these reforms. Most importantly, it would offer Le Drian an opportunity to 'repatriate' all operational decision-making from the Elysée to the Ministry of Defence.⁸⁰

Le Drian's initial proposal to the President with regards to Mali included three options: (1) organising an ECOWAS force to help stabilise the situation; (2) launching an EU training mission to strengthen Mali's security forces; or (3) deploying a French intervention to check the rebel expansion.⁸¹ On 31 May 2012, the Elysée approved the principle of international intervention without, however, settling on a particular intervention format. By 31 October 2012, Le Drian and his team took this decision for them. They settled on the third option: a French-led ad hoc intervention.⁸² Le Drian's reform programme at the French Defence Ministry had disgruntled important segments of the French military establishment. To mollify these segments and bring them on board of the intervention proposal, Le Drian decided to launch a type of intervention that would please these segments, that is an operation that was led by France – outside of an ECOWAS, UN, or EU framework. '[The French military establishment] has always dreamed of going [to Mali] alone, to be more effective,' a former administration official recalls.⁸³ 'They don't want to worry about allies that don't speak the language, don't know Africa and whose national rules slow down the operation. For this type of operation, the French know it all.'⁸⁴

From October onward, Le Drian and his team started to put this intervention plan into action – although other powerful players, notably the Elysée and the Quai d'Orsay, had not yet officially approved the decision.⁸⁵ Still, Le Drian ordered that all French intelligence tools – satellites, spy planes, surveillance electronics,

⁷⁷Thomas Hofnung, 'Un chef d'état-major très particulier', *Libération*, 12 juillet 2014. Jean Guisnel, 'Remaniement: Jean-Yves Le Drian, le réformateur tranquille', *Le Point.fr Défense ouverte*, 2 avril 2014.

⁷⁸Notin, *La Guerre De La France Au Mali*, 145. Lasserre and Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrete Au Mali*, 182. Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*, 98.

⁷⁹Lasserre and Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrete Au Mali*, 183.

⁸⁰During France's Libya intervention, most important operational decisions were taken at the Elysée not the Ministry of Defence.

⁸¹Lasserre and Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrete Au Mali*, 28.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 30.

⁸³As quoted in *ibid.*, 26.

⁸⁴As quoted in *ibid.* See also Notin, *La Guerre De La France Au Mali*, 106.

⁸⁵*La Guerre De La France Au Mali*, 128. Lasserre and Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrete Au Mali*, 31.

and human spies – focus on Mali and the larger Sahel. In addition, French Special Forces were deployed to Mali to establish the exact location of the command centres of the rebels and find their fuel and ammunition depots.⁸⁶ The French military also sought fuel and ammunition depots for itself and pre-deployed equipment, notably Mirage 2000 fighter jets to N'Djamena.⁸⁷ Even airstrike targets were being chosen.⁸⁸ Once these preparatory measures were put in place, Le Drian and his team eagerly waited for a 'window of opportunity,' which could be used to launch the intervention. The French military leadership even prepared a list of 'pretexts' that might be used to justify a rapid French intervention in Mali. Among these possible pretexts were the execution of a French hostage or threatening movements by the jihadist groups.⁸⁹ In early January, one of these pretexts occurred. On 8, 9, and 10 January 2013, French intelligence picked up that the rebel groups in the North, in particular Ansar Eddine, were in permanent contact with the coup leaders in Bamako. French officials concluded that the Malian President, Dioncounda Traoré, was about to fall – either because the rebel groups with help of Capitain Sanago's supporters would take over Bamako or advances in the North through the capture of important cities such as Kona, Mopti, and Sévaré would exemplify once more the weakness of the president and thus legitimise a new coup d'état. With this intelligence analysis in hand, Le Drian requested a meeting with President Hollande on 10 January 2013. Le Drian's objective at this meeting was to convince the president that a French-led ad hoc force operating outside of formal multilateral channels had to be deployed immediately to Mali. Any other plan would fail.⁹⁰ Why was Le Drian able to convince Hollande? Le Drian painted a picture of absolute necessity. Any other intervention force would be incapable of effectively resolving the Malian crisis; it would be too slow, too weak, and thus ineffective.⁹¹ Moreover, Le Drian and the military had put everything in place so that a 'forceful' intervention could be launched at a moment's notice.⁹² Hollande was pushed into a corner. He was unable to deny the urgency of the situation. In addition, Le Drian was Hollande's closest ally in the cabinet.⁹³ Hollande needed and wanted his support.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ *Notre Guerre Secrète Au Mali*, 30. The day before the official decision was taken to intervene in Mali, these units were flown to the airport in Sévaré. On 11 January 2013, these units played a crucial role in launching the intervention. Boeke and Schuurman, 'Operation 'Serval'', 814.

⁸⁷ Author's interview with French intelligence official, Paris, August 2016.

⁸⁸ Lasserre and Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrète Au Mali*, 30.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹⁰ At the time, French diplomats had been very busy organising a force under ECOWAS command: AFISMA. Its deployment had been authorised by UNSC resolution 2085, adopted unanimously on 20 December 2012.

⁹¹ Lasserre and Oberle, *Notre Guerre Secrète Au Mali*, 26. Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*, 41.

⁹² Author's interview with French defence official, Paris, August 2016.

⁹³ Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*, 97.

⁹⁴ Nougayrede, 'Mali: Les Faucons De François Hollande', *Le Monde*, 29 January 2013. Lénaïg Bredoux, Clément Fayol, 'L'Afrique de Hollande donne le premier rôle aux militaires', *Médiapart*, 11 janvier 2016.

Assessment of case illustration

In this section, I will weigh the evidence in favour of the theory on intervention entrepreneurs and its competitors using the three different dimensions developed above: agency, preference formation, and decision-making process (see Table 2).

In the case of EUFOR Chad-CAR, Foreign Minister Kouchner was critical in determining the institutional intervention choice; he personally developed plans for how this operation ought to be conducted largely independent of the French military leadership, the Elysée, and certainly fellow EU member states. His choices were pragmatic; he focused on how to overcome obstacles in his way to 'to do something about Darfur.' Once he decided on the intervention format, Kouchner combined an appealing narrative with political pressure to get President Sarkozy's approval of the project.

A similar story can be told about Mali. The intervention entrepreneur, Defence Minister Le Drian, dictated institutional intervention choices. His ambitious 'civilian' reform program at the French Defence Ministry had disgruntled important segments of the French military establishment. To mollify these segments within the bureaucracy and bring them on board of the intervention proposal, Le Drian settled on a French-led ad hoc military intervention outside of formal multilateral channels – a format that he knew would please these segments. French diplomats were planning for an alternative intervention format, while the Elysée and especially General Puga were hesitant regarding an intervention until Le Drian presented his plans on 11 January 2013. They then accepted Le Drian's plans without debate. Why? Le Drian painted a picture of absolute urgency. Moreover, he used personal ties to President Hollande to get his message across.

The Libya intervention depicts a different set of dynamics. The intervention entrepreneur, Nicolas Sarkozy, wanted to conduct the intervention on an ad hoc basis as a Franco-British intervention endeavour – again operating outside of formal multilateral channels. Nevertheless, British military officers fiercely opposed this plan. They insisted that the United States be brought on board. In their opinion, a Franco-British tandem lacked the necessary military capabilities to conduct a successful operation. Sarkozy ultimately relented. He realised his choice was between no intervention and an intervention under NATO command.

In summary, the three case illustrations present some evidence for my argument described above. It appears that in the French context, intervention entrepreneurs have great influence on intervention formats. Nevertheless, the Libyan case requires that the theory undergo further scrutiny. The intervention entrepreneur, Nicolas Sarkozy, was *not* able to impose his preferred institutional intervention choice. More research is necessary to determine whether Libya constitutes an exception to the norm or rather represents political dynamics that occur on a regular basis.



Table 2. Summary of findings.

	Chad-CAR	Libya	Mali
Agency	Kouchner served as intervention entrepreneur. He conceived institutional intervention choices. Military and others officials were secondary actors.	Sarkozy served as intervention entrepreneur but high-ranking British generals derailed Sarkozy's institutional intervention plans.	Le Drian controlled discussions on institutional intervention choices. The military leadership was involved in the planning but did not 'mastermind' intervention plans.
Preference Formation	Kouchner's intervention choice intended to stall opposition from the French military, French diplomats, and UNDPKO by proposing an intervention that (1) focused on refugee camps in Chad-CAR; and (2) was going via the EU instead of the UN.	The British generals argued that Gaddafi's surface-to-air missiles and integrated air defence systems could only be taken out with U.S. help.	Le Drian's reform program at the French Defence Ministry had disgruntled important segments of the French military establishment. To mollify these segments and bring them on board of the intervention proposal, Le Drian decided to launch a type of intervention that would please these segments.
Decision-Making Process	Sarkozy agreed because otherwise his 'gouvernement d'ouverture' would have fallen apart.	Sarkozy relented because he was running out of alternatives as time was pressing. Without NATO, no intervention would occur.	Hollande agreed because Le Drian used his close personal relationship and the dire situation in Mali to sell his distinct intervention plans.

Conclusion

France engages in military interventions more frequently than almost any other country. Yet, to this date, we lack a thorough understanding of the political processes that lead to these intervention decisions, their timing, and especially their international institutional format. This article set out to take a first stab at this puzzle. It thereby focused, in particular, on the agency of who decides the type of intervention venue. The article proposed that intervention entrepreneurs are the critical agents in the latter endeavour. The assembled empirical evidence provides preliminary confirmation of the validity of these causal claims.

The findings of this article have important theoretical and policy implications. First, we learn about French decision-making with respect to military interventions. Thus far, the bulk of the literature suggests that French presidents are omnipotent in this regard.⁹⁵ The evidence presented above suggests instead that other actors also play important roles in the latter effort. Second, the article sheds light on French conceptions of the utility of international institutions when it comes to military interventions. It examines whether French military and civilian actors share systematic views with regard to the UN or the EU, for example. What it finds is that French actors do relish UN Security Council and regional multilateral approval of French interventions. Nevertheless, besides this desire for political backing, all other assessments appear to be held selectively and inconsistently. Third, the findings above suggest that to better predict the form and shape of future French interventions, we need to look out for intervention entrepreneurs. Who in the French context is driving the intervention endeavour? It is these actors – rather than the French government writlarge – that experts, civil society, and the interested public need to hold accountable for their actions and decisions to maximise the utility of French interventions for the international community.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Northwestern University Farrell Fund.

⁹⁵Rachel Utley, 'The New French Interventionism', *Civil Wars* 1/2 (1998). doi:10.1057/9780230595644_10. 'The Sacred Union? French Intervention in Lebanon and Chad under François Mitterrand', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 10,3 (1999). doi:10.1080/09592319908423248.

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