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Why did France intervene in Mali in 2013? Examining the role of Intervention Entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

Military interventions are without a doubt the most forceful and most costly foreign policy tool extant. But how do they actually come about? The bulk of the existing literature on military interventions points to the head of state and his/her closest advisers to explain intervention decisions. This article argues instead that *Intervention Entrepreneurs* play a critical role in the political decision-making process of military interventions. Intervention Entrepreneurs are individuals or groups that promote the launch of a specific military intervention because they anticipate benefitting disproportionately from the intervention decision and/or aftermath. To further their intervention proposal, these entrepreneurs employ very similar techniques which include: (1) the creation of a narrative for intervention; (2) the act of spreading and “selling” this narrative to the media, think tanks and other thought leaders; (3) the act of establishing *faits accomplis* – actions that can create a slippery slope toward intervention such as leaking information or (if possible) pre-deploying troops or other personnel to the intervention theatre; and (4) the lobbying of critical decision-makers (including the head of state) to support the intervention proposal. This article uses the French intervention in Mali (2013) to introduce the concept of Intervention Entrepreneurs and illustrate the strategies and power these actors exert.

RÉSUMÉ

Les interventions militaires sont sans l'ombre d'un doute l'instrument de politique étrangère le plus ferme et le plus coûteux existant. Mais comment se réalisent-ils exactement ? Le volume de la littérature existant à ce jour sur les interventions militaires laisse clairement entendre que c'est le/la chef(fe) d'État et ses conseillers les plus proches qui peuvent expliquer les décisions d'intervention. Cet article s'oppose à ce point de vue en soutenant plutôt que les entrepreneurs d'intervention jouent un rôle critique dans le processus de prise de décision politique d'engager des interventions militaires. Ces entrepreneurs d'intervention sont des individus ou des groupes qui encouragent le lancement d'une intervention militaire précise parce qu'ils anticipent qu'ils bénéficieront démesurément de la décision d'intervenir et/ou de ses conséquences. Pour pousser leur proposition d'intervention, ces entrepreneurs emploient des techniques très similaires qui incluent : (1) la création d'un récit

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appelant à l'intervention ; (2) la propagation et la « vente » de ce récit aux médias, aux groupes de réflexion et aux autres leaders d'opinion ; (3) l'établissement de faits accomplis – des actions pouvant créer des pentes glissantes vers les intervention, comme par exemple des fuites d'information ou (si possible) le pré-déploiement de troupes ou autre personnel dans le théâtre d'intervention et (4) le lobbying auprès de décideurs essentiels (parmi lesquels le/la chef(fe) d'État) pour qu'ils soutiennent la proposition d'intervention. Cet article prend pour exemple l'intervention française au Mali (2013) pour présenter le concept des entrepreneurs d'intervention, et illustre les stratégies et le pouvoir exercés par ces acteurs.

France is one of the most interventionist countries in the world. Between the end of the Franco–Algerian War in 1962, which officially terminated the French colonial empire, and today, France has launched more than 35 military interventions abroad – all of them in Africa. When it comes to explaining these interventions, academic literature points almost exclusively in one direction: France seeks to maintain its grandeur, influence and power (Prunier 1995, Utley 1998, 1999, Chafer 2001, Charbonneau 2008a, 2008b, Charbonneau and Sears 2014). French status in world politics is inextricably linked to its presence in Africa, or as Chipman (1989, p. 62) writes: “images of a Franco–African entity [symbolize] the greatness of France.” As a result, each instance of French interventionism is in one way or another tied to its colonial African past. Moreover, French presidents are usually credited with holding a *domaine réservé* over all matters of French defense and foreign policy. Consequently, it is they who are in the lead of politically planning and orchestrating French military intervention decisions (Utley 1998, 1999).

This article proposes an alternative explanation. It stipulates that while neocolonial interests and the pursuit of grandeur are in no way absent in recent French interventionism, other dynamics also need to be taken into account to assess the specific *timing* and *configuration* of these interventions. In other words, France's quests for grandeur and its colonial past are a constant condition which cannot explain specific intervention decisions, especially with regards to why France intervenes in some places in Africa but not in others, when exactly these interventions occur, and what shape and form they take (i.e. unilateral vs. multilateral; full-scale vs. surgical). Instead, to fully understand these intervention decisions, we need to focus on *agency*: which actors in the French political system push for intervention and why? This article argues that it is the identification of these actors and their motives that holds the key to understanding recent French intervention choices. I call these actors *Intervention Entrepreneurs*. Driven by a particular set of normative, political, economic or other interests, these entrepreneurs use specific techniques to sway the French president in favor of a particular intervention proposal.

To illustrate the influence of these Intervention Entrepreneurs as well as the strategies they employ, this article presents an in-depth case study of the political decision-making process that led to the French intervention in Mali in 2013. *Operation Serval*, as the Malian operation is generally called by French officials, was launched on 11 January 2013 and lasted until 15 July 2014 when it was renamed *Operation Barkhane*. At the height of its deployment, 5100 French troops participated in Operation Serval – the largest French

foreign deployment since France's war in Algeria, which terminated in 1962 (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 53). To reconstitute the decision-making process leading up to the launch of the intervention, I conducted interviews in Paris during May and August 2016 with high-level French government officials who were involved in the planning process of Serval.¹ In addition, I consulted numerous French articles, books and documents – many of them translated into English for the very first time.

Why is this research topic important? First and foremost, this article tries to advance our knowledge on why military interventions occur. Most of the existing literature on this topic has put forward *categorical* causes to explain intervention decisions (e.g. states hold a particular set of normative motivations, threat perceptions, or economic or political interests) (e.g. Feste 1992, Carment and James 1996, Khosla 1999, Auerswald 2000, Rathbun 2004, Schmidt 2013, Chang 2016). This article instead not only tries to focus on the *why* but is equally interested in the *how*: Which actors put the topic of intervention on the agenda of a particular country and why? Moreover, what techniques do these actors use to persuade others to support the intervention proposal? Thus far, these micro-foundations have received little scholarly attention. The limitations of the article are clear: Because it is based on only one case, this study should be seen as exploratory and hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis-testing (cf. Collier 2011). Nevertheless, the Mali case can serve as a first attempt at building a theory that is able to explain the role Intervention Entrepreneurs play in intervention decisions – both in the French context and internationally. The variability of intervention decisions (i.e. where they occur, when and how) is puzzling in the context of not only French interventions but also interventions conducted by other states, notably, the United States, Great Britain and even Australia.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: I first review the literature on French intervention policy and military intervention decision-making in general. I then develop various hypotheses on how and why Intervention Entrepreneurs influence French government decision-making on military interventions. I then present the case study on Operation Serval to illustrate the existence and lobbying techniques of these entrepreneurs. The last section concludes.

France and military interventions: what does the literature say?

The academic literature has paid remarkably little attention to French military interventions in Africa. The few scholars who have worked on this topic have pointed to two key drivers of French interventionism: (1) France's interest in maintaining global status via its involvement in Africa and (2) the lasting legacies of French colonial involvement in Africa (Prunier 1995, Utley 1998, 1999, Chafer 2001, Charbonneau 2008a, 2008b, Charbonneau and Sears 2014). With regards to Mali, these motives have also been identified as the principal rationales behind Operation Serval (e.g. Bergamaschi and Diawara 2014, Charbonneau and Sears 2014, Chivvis 2016, Taylor 2015). Moreover, most scholars point to the importance of the French President as the "mastermind" of French intervention decisions (Prunier 1995, Utley 1998, 1999). Charbonneau (2008b, p. 2) represents a notable exception to this conventional wisdom by suggesting that "[French security policy in Africa] is the result [not only of the French President but] of the relationships of French and African elites, their mutual interests ... in sustaining and reproducing the status quo."²

Outside of the French realm, intervention decisions have garnered more widespread academic attention. Similar to the literature on French interventions, a large group of scholars suggests that it is mainly the head of state and his/her closest advisers that politically plan and orchestrate where, when and how to intervene abroad (e.g. Smith 1996, Huth 1998, Auerswald 2000, Taliaferro 2004, Saunders 2011, 2015, 2017). However, a smaller group of scholars challenges this analysis and suggests instead that intervention decisions are often the product of logrolling among presidential advisers and other bureaucratic, legislative or party elites. Scott (1996, p. 11), for instance, looking at US President Reagan's intervention decisions, concludes that "most of the time, President Reagan was a spectator to disputes between advisers, bureaucratic agencies, the executive and legislative branches, and complicated groupings of all three." Rathbun (2004) argues that party affiliation matters in intervention decisions, while Western (2005) suggests that in the American system four elite political groups exist that either actively promote or oppose military interventions abroad. Finally, a third group of scholars proposes that a domestic groundswell can lead to military interventions. These scholars particularly focus on humanitarian interventions. Mass civil society mobilization can put pressure on governments to stop genocide or other types of human suffering abroad. News media play an important role in this process; they are able to bring knowledge of the tragedy to anyone with a TV set or internet (Talentino 2005, p. 40). As a result, this phenomenon is often called the *CNN effect* (Livingston and Eachus 1995, Strobel 1997, Robinson 1999, Gilboa 2005).

What the current literature is lacking

Most, if not all, military interventions today are "wars of choice" (Finnemore 2003, Haass 2009). They do not result from a direct or existential threat to a particular state, or as Greenstein and Immerman (1992, p. 586) observe: "though leaders often argue that they have no choice but to act, decisions to intervene are close calls: different leaders might make different choices." As a result, to understand intervention decisions, we need to gain a grasp of the underlying political interests and processes that lead a head of state to declare that a certain conflict warrants a military intervention, and others not. The explanatory power of studies focusing on domestic civil society mobilization in favor of intervention (i.e. the CNN effect) is limited in this regard. They most often fail to address questions of collective action. Mass expressions of public concern directed toward the government are rarely spontaneous. Instead, behind most phone call, letter or email writing campaigns, mass rallies and marches there are leaders mobilizing a select group of citizens to unite behind a common message (Kollman 1998, pp. 3–4). Similarly, studies focusing on presidential leadership, elite political groups or bureaucratic competition require improvement when it comes to theorizing what exact causal mechanisms lead these actors to advocate for intervention in some places but not in others. For example, with regards to French interventions, why did French President François Hollande refuse to rescue the President of the Central African Republic François Bozizé when the rebels reached Bangui in December 2012 but agreed to intervene in the Central African Republic in 2014? Similarly, why did French President Sarkozy ignore all calls to intervene in Mali (Chivvis 2016, p. 76), but his successor Hollande made Mali one of his top foreign policy priorities? Moreover, what determines the timing and configuration of these interventions?

The role of Intervention Entrepreneurs

The theory of intervention decisions this article advances shines a light on *agency*. In particular, it focuses on Intervention Entrepreneurs, which I define as individuals or groups that promote the launch of a specific military intervention because they anticipate benefitting disproportionately from the intervention decision and/or aftermath.

The concept of *political or policy entrepreneurs* is not new. It has been employed in the policy and administration literature to understand the design and development of (mostly) domestic policy proposals (cf. Kingdon 1984, Schneider 1992, Schneider and Teske 1992, Mintrom 1997, Mintrom and Norman 2009). With regards to intervention decisions, however, the concept has not been used thus far. Scholars interested in the effects of domestic politics on intervention decisions have focused on other variables: *pluralist theories* have looked at interest groups (e.g. Khosla 1999, Saideman 2001, Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, Nome 2013) and political parties (Rathbun 2004); *elite theories* have focused on the nature of national decision makers (e.g. Scott 1996, Western 2005, Saunders 2011, 2015, 2017); and *institutional theories* have examined regime types (Auerswald 2000, Finnemore 2003, Lebovic 2004) and other bureaucratic or organizational features of states (e.g. civil-military relations) (Velazquez 2010).

I locate Intervention Entrepreneurs across the spectrum of all these fields. Indeed, Intervention Entrepreneurs can be elected government officials (e.g. congressmen, senators, 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 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media, academia, churches and other religious associations, business lobbies, and ethnic lobbies.³ These actors can operate in democratic and non-democratic state structures (cf. Moravcsik 1997). The rationales for *why* these actors turn into Intervention Entrepreneurs vary widely. Nevertheless, every single actor or group of actors strongly believes that a specific intervention will maximize their own interests.⁴ In other words, each one of these actors trusts to gain a greater utility from a specific intervention than the average citizen will. As a result, each one has an incentive to lobby in favor of the intervention despite the political and/or financial costs of such a lobbying campaign. It is important to note that these entrepreneurs are almost never *categorical* lobbyists for intervention. Rather, it is a *specific* intervention idea that calls their attention. Indeed, it is the existence of these *selective incentives* related to individual interventions that can explain change in Intervention Entrepreneurs (i.e. why specific actors and groups mobilize on some occasions and not on others).

But how can such a small number of actors capture the attention of the government? Normally, groups with very narrow interests lack the power or authority to harness the state for their own ends. Their influence may also be offset by other interests that would be potentially harmed by costly intervention policies. This article proposes that to overcome these obstacles, Intervention Entrepreneurs use a range of powerful tactics to promote their proposal for intervention. Indeed, while the rationales Intervention Entrepreneurs hold cannot be generalized, the techniques they use to further their agenda can – and this is the topic the rest of this section will focus on.

What do Intervention Entrepreneurs do to further their intervention proposal?

Intervention Entrepreneurs follow a similar playbook to promote their intervention proposal. This playbook contains four different tasks. My expectation is that not all Intervention Entrepreneurs perform all of these tasks. Depending on their position of operating from either inside or outside the government, Intervention Entrepreneurs have different resources at their disposal and face a diverse set of institutional and social constraints. Nevertheless, each one of them performs at least a few of the strategies enumerated below.

Create a narrative for intervention

As mentioned above, interventions are “wars of choice,” and somebody needs to create the political justification for such action: an intervention needs to be seen as legitimate; it needs to have popular support and cannot be hampered by bad polling numbers or mass demonstrations. Such legitimation efforts often involve the creation of a convincing narrative.⁵ This narrative includes, among other things, the following: (1) the act of defining the “security problem” at hand, involving the presentation of evidence in ways that suggest a real security crisis is at hand; (2) finding ways to highlight failures of the current policy (if in place); and (3) presenting evidence that military intervention is a (more) effective, just and reasonably cost-efficient method to address the problem at hand. On many occasions, Intervention Entrepreneurs are the first ones to create these narratives.

Spread and sell the narrative for intervention

Once a suitable narrative is created, it has to be “sold” to the media, think tanks and other thought leaders. In other words, the ground has to be prepared for the narrative to spread. To do so, Intervention Entrepreneurs operating from inside the administration often prepare reports and position papers. They frequently hold one-on-one meetings with thought leaders and prepare “dossiers” that explain the security problem at hand. They often also send surrogates (i.e. experts who are often very close to the government in power) to present their narrative on TV or radio. Intervention Entrepreneurs operating from outside the administration write articles, books, blogs and columns for newspapers. They appear on TV and radio and at other public events to spread their rationales for why an intervention is necessary (Western 2005).

Establish *faits accomplis*

If possible, Intervention Entrepreneurs also try to establish *faits accomplis* – actions that create a slippery slope toward military intervention. This is more easily done by entrepreneurs operating from inside the government than for those operating from outside. For example, Intervention Entrepreneurs can leak information with regards to the planning of a potential operation and thus create an expectation for intervention among the domestic and international publics that is hard to renounce without “losing face.” Powerful Intervention Entrepreneurs, notably those in the military or intelligence services, can also deploy troops to the intervention theater as a “precautionary measure” and thus create a slippery slope.

Lobby critical decision-makers to engage in military intervention

Finally, and most importantly, Intervention Entrepreneurs need to win over critical law-makers (e.g. the governing party leaders) and/or the head of state to sign off on the intervention proposal. The number of relevant actors depends on the constitutional provisions of a country to approve a military intervention. In some countries, the approval of the head of state is sufficient (e.g. France). In others, it requires the consent of the parliament (e.g. Germany). The lobbying process of these actors works most often in parallel with the three steps described above. To reach these people, Intervention Entrepreneurs revert to inside or outside lobbying (or both). Inside lobbying refers to the communication or interaction directed at the decision-makers themselves (Kollman 1998, p. 35). Most often, Intervention Entrepreneurs present to this latter group of people arguments related to the potential costs and benefits of military action/inaction. Frequently, Intervention Entrepreneurs also provide opinion polls that illustrate the salience of a particular intervention proposal within society – salience that is often the result of a good public relations (PR) campaign (see steps 1 and 2 above). Outside lobbying, in turn, relates to the organization of mass rallies, letter-writing campaigns, etc. These campaigns equally put pressure on key decision-makers and illustrate the salience of the cause among the wider public.

So why do Intervention Entrepreneurs often succeed in their endeavor to lobby these critical government actors? The answer is as follows: Legislative actors and heads of state often rely on the political, financial or even personal support of Intervention Entrepreneurs and their supporters. Moreover, Intervention Entrepreneurs create a political and public climate that makes it exceedingly difficult for these actors to say no to the intervention proposal.

The next section illustrates this phenomenon using the French-led operation in Mali as a case study.

France intervening in Mali in 2013

The key actor pushing for French intervention in Mali was Jean-Yves Le Drian, the French Defense Minister. He served as intervention entrepreneur for Operation Serval. It is doubtful that without Le Drian's involvement France would have deployed Operation Serval as it did, i.e. a full-scale, *ad hoc* French-led military intervention instead of a multilateral intervention under the umbrella of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations (UN) or the African Union. French intervention plans for Mali were highly contested among various branches of the French government. The French Foreign Office, the *Quai d'Orsay*, was opposed to a French-led intervention until the very last minute. It had lobbied for a different "multilateral" plan to respond to the Malian crisis (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 191). The director of the French secret service (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure or DGSE), Érarid Corbin de Mangoux, also expressed skepticism with regards to a full-scale French military intervention in Mali (Notin 2014, pp. 179–180). President Hollande, in turn, publicly insisted on French television on 11 October 2012 that "no French boots would be on the ground in Mali."⁶ He also issued a statement that France would never again conduct a war "alone" (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 15). In addition, Africa was not a topic Hollande was particularly interested in – at least at the beginning of his presidency. Similar to Nicolas Sarkozy before him, Hollande had given a speech in Dakar (Senegal) on 12 October 2012 saying that his

government would distance itself from the “incestuous” relationships *Francafrrique* had created (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 16, Chivvis 2016, p. 8).

So why was Defense Minister Le Drian pushing for intervention in Mali? Undoubtedly, there were very serious security concerns at hand. The Malian state was about to collapse. The reasons for this collapse were threefold. First, Mali had been struggling since at least 1963 with a Tuareg secessionist rebellion (Lecocq 2010). The Tuaregs, most of them living in northern Mali, felt neglected by the government based in Bamako, which was predominantly run by southern Malians. In January 2012, the armed wing of the Tuareg independence movement, the *Mouvement national de liberation de l’Azawad* (MNLA) attacked Malian military positions in the north to signal the start of a new armed rebellion. In contrast to previous efforts of a similar kind, the Tuareg rebels were helped in their endeavor by two Islamist groups called *Ansar Eddine* and *Mouvement de l’unicité du jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest* (MUJAO). Both groups were close to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI). Both groups had also considerably benefitted from the demise of the Kaddafi regime in Libya, which provided them with an influx of cheap weapons and willing fighters. Soon the two Islamist groups were able to politically overpower the Tuareg rebels. When the French troops arrived in northern Mali in January 2013, it was these groups who controlled all three northern regions of Mali including the cities of Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao (Lecocq *et al.* 2013).

As a direct consequence of these events happening in northern Mali, the political situation in Bamako dramatically deteriorated. On 22 March 2012, Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo led a mutiny in Bamako that turned into a *coup d’état* against the regime of President Amadou Toumani Touré. Sanogo argued that the regime’s inability to respond to the northern rebellion legitimated the coup. He promised that the Malian army under his leadership could take back the north and reassert Malian sovereignty (Charbonneau and Sears 2014). His rhetoric was powerful. The government of President Touré had proven helpless when faced with the northern rebel groups. Many Malian soldiers felt humiliated and underresourced and thus were willing to follow Sanogo’s cause of violently defeating the northern uprising. Nevertheless, Sanogo’s *coup d’état* only worsened the situation in the north, and led to the official declaration of an independent Tuareg state of Azawad on 2 April 2012. Concerted international pressure soon forced Captain Sanogo to step down and hand over political power to Dioncounda Traoré, then serving as the President of the National Assembly of Mali. Nevertheless, the political situation in Bamako remained extremely fragile. The junta leader and his cabal were still the *de facto* leaders in Mali. In May 2012, these pro-junta supporters stormed the office of President Traoré and beat him unconscious. Traoré was then flown out to France where he was able to recover from his injuries. With French help, he managed upon his return to Bamako to impose himself over Sanogo (Lecocq *et al.* 2013). Nevertheless, by then it had become increasingly clear to France and also the larger international community that something had to be done about Mali.

From a French perspective, Mali posed a risk to the entire Sahel region. A collapse of the Malian state could lead to an unraveling of Mali’s neighboring states including Niger, Algeria and Mauritania.⁷ Each of these countries was struggling with various types of radical Islamist movements (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 41, Boeke and Schuurman 2015, p. 807, Chivvis 2016, p. 9, Wing 2016, p. 60). Moreover, France maintained important economic relationships with several of these states. Niger stands out, in particular. Nuclear

power is the primary source of electricity in France, and France gets roughly 1/3 of its uranium from mines based in northern Niger (Elischer 2013, Boeke and Schuurman 2015, pp. 806–7, Chivvis 2016, p. 76). The key mine in Niger is close to the city of Arlit, which is about 200 miles away from the Malian border. France feared that rebel forces would attack the mine and take hostages (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 49). In addition to these economic fears, France also worried that the collapse of the Malian state could turn Mali into a terrorist safe heaven (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, pp. 21 and 48, Chivvis 2016). France hosts the largest Malian immigrant community in Europe. French government officials were worried that this community might fall prey to terrorist propaganda. Indeed, the following notion permeated French security circles: “If we don’t fight today in Mali, we will fight tomorrow in Marseille” (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, pp. 27 and 42). Finally, there was an ever-enduring threat of hostage taking. Over 60,000 French expatriates live in the Sahel region (incl. Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad and Niger).⁸ By the time of the French intervention, Jihadi groups in the region were holding seven French men captive.⁹ A collapse of the Malian state could have led to many more of these kidnappings. French intelligence services were active in the region to monitor and eventually rescue these hostages (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 22). In March 2012, they suggested to Hollande’s predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy to use airstrikes and kill key leaders of AQMI while they were meeting in Timbuktu. Nevertheless, Sarkozy refused to engage (Notin 2014, p. 76, Chivvis 2016, p. 76).

Once François Hollande took over the French presidency in May 2012, the French government conceived a plan to deploy a multinational force to Mali. At France’s request, the Malian President Dioncounda Traoré wrote to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to ask for such a deployment, and on 12 October 2012 the UNSC approved such action. It authorized via UNSC Resolution 2017 the deployment to Mali of an African force under ECOWAS command: AFISMA.¹⁰ French diplomats, who had been in charge of making such a multilateral deployment a reality, were quite satisfied with this result (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 31). Nevertheless, French Defense Minister Le Drian and his team were not – and it is indeed in this moment when Le Drian’s active lobbying for a French *unilateral* intervention (instead of the ECOWAS intervention) took full speed (Notin 2014, p. 106).

Le Drian disagreed with the ECOWAS plan for the following two reasons. First, Le Drian had strong doubts that the ECOWAS force could effectively resolve the Malian crisis. This skepticism was partly based on a general dislike of multilateral interventions combined with a fundamental belief that the French military could best operate alone (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 26, Chivvis 2016, p. 41). The first steps of the ECOWAS force were also not particularly reassuring: its deployment was slow and the forces were ill equipped.¹¹ Second, and maybe more importantly, Le Drian also saw an opportunity in a French unilateral deployment to strengthen the importance and standing of the French Defense Ministry. The latter had been one of his key political objectives when taking over as the new French Defense Minister.¹² He was eager to establish a new equilibrium between the various French government actors that were involved in French defense policy decision-making, notably the Elysée (the office of the President) and the Ministry of Defense. During the Sarkozy government, the Chief of the Joint Chiefs, a high-ranking military officer who was attached to the Elysée, had been a remarkably powerful actor. Via two executive orders, Sarkozy had delegated to him issue areas

previously under control of the Defense Minister (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 182, Notin 2014, p. 145, Chivvis 2016, p. 98). Le Drian wanted to change this. He was eager to reestablish “civilian” control over French defense policy and restore the political importance of the French Defense Ministry.¹³ 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 these reforms were considered by some a mini “civilian” putsch (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 183). A French-led intervention in Mali now promised to further implement these reforms. Most importantly, it would offer Le Drian an opportunity to “repatriate” all operational decision-making from the Elysée to the Ministry of Defense.¹⁴ Moreover, Le Drian felt that while the military leadership might not like his political reform proposals, they overall would be in favor of a French-led Mali intervention. Such a plan could even somewhat console them (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 187).¹⁵

As a result of the confluence of these two major rationales, Le Drian made Mali his top political priority (Notin 2014, p. 84). Indeed, from roughly October 2012 onward, Le Drian and his team started preparing for a war that French diplomats tried very hard to stop (Notin 2014, 128). So what did these preparations entail, and how did Le Drian convince President Hollande that a French-led intervention in Mali was necessary?

Lobbying strategy

The first step of the lobbying campaign involved the creation of a narrative: Why was a French-led military intervention necessary in Mali? This task fell to Sacha Mandel, who served as director of communications in Le Drian’s cabinet. Mandel recalls that he started working on the PR aspects of the Mali campaign from roughly September 2012 onward.

Creating a narrative

Mandel and his team decided that focusing on the terrorism angle of the Mali crisis would be best to rally support for the intervention.¹⁶ As a result, these threats were elevated to take center stage in all communication and press briefings the French Defense Ministry issued on Mali.¹⁷ Mandel also deliberately chose how to name the rebel groups that were operating in Mali. Most observers called them “jihadist groups” (“*groupes djihadistes*”). For Mandel, however, this term did not state sufficiently strongly what these groups were after. As a result, Mandel introduced the term “jihadist terrorist groups” (“*groupes djihadistes terroristes*”) to highlight that these groups posed a threat to France because of their terrorist activities. In addition, Mandel re-introduced the term “war” into the French defense vocabulary. Since the Algerian War, the French Ministry had refrained from using this term to describe the activities the French military was involved in abroad. Instead, terms such as “intervention” or “exterior operations” (“*op-ex*”) were used. Nevertheless, learning from what had worked in the United States when the fight against terrorism after 9/11 was called the “War on Terror,”¹⁸ Mandel also opted to call France’s fight in Mali a “war” against jihadist terrorist groups. Finally, Mandel focused on delegitimizing the multinational deployment. In essence, the narrative argued that AFISMA was incapable of solving the Malian crisis and only a French-led intervention could do the job.

Selling the narrative

To spread the narrative on why a French-led intervention was necessary, Mandel invited “thought leaders” to the French Defense Ministry for one-on-one conversations. Most of these individuals were French journalists working on foreign policy or military issues. Some of them were academics or researchers working for think tanks. A few foreigners were also invited, most of them hailing from Africa or other European countries. Mandel prepared a “dossier” for them containing classified satellite pictures of the “terrorist” camps in northern Mali as well as other intelligence information. Overall, Mandel described these meetings as “mini press conferences but ‘off,’” i.e. the journalists could not cite the information they had received. They could only use it as background information. Indeed, the objective of these meetings was as follows: Mandel did not aim to convince the French public that the intervention was necessary. Instead, he wanted “to prepare the ground for an eventual French-led intervention.”¹⁹ He wanted to make sure that the day the intervention occurred, all “experts” the French media could ask for opinion on the intervention were supportive of it: they were informed of the threats Mali posed and were aware that the French military had been preparing for this intervention in great detail (“La France sait ce qu’elle fait”).²⁰ The strategy worked brilliantly – at least at the beginning of the intervention. In polls conducted in early February 2013, 63 per cent of those polled approved the intervention and only 37 per cent were opposed (Chivvis 2016, p. 104).

Establish faits accomplis

On 31 October 2012, during a meeting attended by the highest officials in the French Defense Ministry, Operation Serval became a *fait accompli*. Officials in the Defense Ministry decided that day to undertake preparatory steps that would constitute a “slippery slope” toward a French-led intervention (Notin 2014, p. 123). Among other things, the French military ordered that all intelligence tools – satellites, spy planes, surveillance electronics and spies – would focus on Mali and the larger Sahel. In addition, French Special Forces, many of them stationed in Burkina Faso, were deployed to Mali to establish the exact location of the command centers of the rebels and find their fuel and ammunition depots (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 30).²¹ The French military also sought fuel and ammunition depots for itself and pre-deployed equipment, notably Mirage 2000 fighter jets to N’Djamena.²² Even airstrike targets were being chosen (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 30). These preparations were not made public. On several occasions, these preparatory steps were even denied when asked about by the media (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 31).

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 (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 32). In early January, one of these pretexts occurred. On 8, 9 and 10 January 2013, French spies picked up information 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 Dioncounda Traoré was about to fall – either because the rebel groups with the help of Capitain Sanago’s supporters would take over Bamako, or because 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 legitimate a new *coup d'état*. With this intelligence analysis in hand, Le Drian requested a meeting with President Hollande on 10 January. Under the French constitution, the only actor who can and must approve a French military intervention is the French President – no additional parliamentary approval is necessary.

During that meeting, Hollande agreed to the French-led intervention proposal. Why was Le Drian able to convince Hollande? Le Drian was Hollande's best friend in the cabinet (Chivvis 2016, p. 97). Hollande needed and wanted Le Drian's support (Nougayrede 2013). Moreover, Le Drian's plan was extremely well-thought out and prepared: Le Drian and the military had put everything in place so that an intervention could be launched *immediately*.²³ Since roughly October 2012, Le Drian had created the military preconditions and political environment favorable for intervention that Hollande could now not discard. Moreover, France even had regional allies. The President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, argued strongly for a quick military operation to save his country from contagion. African presidents Macky Sall (Senegal) and Alpha Condé (Guinea) also favored such a solution (Charbonneau and Sears 2014).²⁴

Policy implications

Most scholars agree that United States Vice President Dick Cheney, in cooperation with United States Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld, played a critical role in the lead-up to the American-led Iraq intervention in 2003 (e.g. Kaufmann 2004, Packer 2005, Record 2010, Harvey 2012, Saunders 2017). In other words, Cheney and Rumsfeld served as *Intervention Entrepreneurs*. Both used several of the techniques explained above. For instance, under their guidance, the United States White House created a narrative to justify the intervention (i.e. "Saddam Hussein was likely to provide weapons of mass destruction to terrorists"). They also orchestrated a campaign to spread and sell this narrative and created *faits accomplis*, notably by leaking sensitive information (Western 2005). They thus were able to create a political environment that enticed and put pressure on President George W. Bush to support the Iraq intervention proposal. Similar *Intervention Entrepreneurs* also existed for the Kosovo intervention in 1999, the East Timor intervention in 1999, the Darfur intervention in 2007 and the Libya intervention in 2011 – to name just a few (e.g. Blair 2011, Hamilton 2011, Henke 2012, Gates 2014).

The existence of these *Intervention Entrepreneurs* across a variety of military engagements has implications for how governments, international organizations, scholars and informed citizens analyze multilateral military actions. Most importantly, civil advocates of multilateral military interventions (e.g. for humanitarian purposes) should learn from successful entrepreneurship in the past to inform their lobbying strategies. Relatedly, critics of military interventions need to pay attention to which entrepreneurs lead the fray in organizing an intervention proposal rather than targeting with their criticism a government writ large, an international organization or an unspecified international public.

Conclusion

Thus far, we know very little about why interventions are undertaken in some countries but not in others, and why interventions get launched at a particular moment in time

and take on a specific set of configurations and not any others. This article proposed that Intervention Entrepreneurs can explain some of these puzzles. These actors and groups lobby for a particular type of intervention at a particular moment in time because they anticipate benefitting from the intervention or its aftermath in disproportionate ways. In the case of Mali, this article illustrated that without Le Drian's lobbying and related preparatory measures, Operation Serval could have never been launched the way it was. Indeed, the timeframe between when President Hollande agreed to the intervention (on 11 January 2013 at around 12:30 p.m.) and the first bombardments (the same evening) was very short (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, p. 20). As a result, Hollande fully relied on Le Drian's operational plans. Very little – if anything – was adjusted to what other actors from different departments deemed necessary or useful. These findings thus largely confirm the overwhelming influence of Le Drian as intervention entrepreneur.

Further research on different intervention cases is, of course, necessary to fully comprehend the role Intervention Entrepreneurs play in intervention decisions. This article's objective was to simply set the stage: its principal aim was to introduce the concept of *Intervention Entrepreneurs* and generate hypotheses with regards to the strategies they employ to further their intervention proposal. Complex crises of today's globalized world will continue to call for complex solutions – solutions that will often require the usage of military power, including military interventions. As a result, if we are to understand the logic of past military interventions, and help inform those faced with pending and future ones, we must understand how agency – and notably the agency of *Intervention Entrepreneurs* – affects intervention decisions and maybe even their consequences.

Notes

1. Many of these interviews were conducted “on background” given the delicate information exchanged (i.e. my interview partners granted me permission to use the information, but they asked me not to identify them by name in this article).
2. Huliaras (1998), Glaser (2014) and Powell (2016) advance a similar argument.
3. On diaspora lobbying see also e.g. Nome (2013), Koinova (2011) and Moss (2016).
4. These interests can include the fulfilment of normative ideals (e.g. the protection of human rights), the protection of ethnic brethren or various types of economic benefits. Elected Intervention Entrepreneurs also often believe that a specific military intervention will increase their chances of reelection. Bureaucrats, in turn, can see in an intervention proposal the opportunity to increase their own centrality and administrative power.
5. This is also often called “framing” (see e.g. Buzan et al. 1998, Balzacq 2005, Labonte 2013, Benford and Snow 2000, Fassin and Pandolfi 2010).
6. Philippe Champleau, “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 (2016, 36).
7. Author's interview with Admiral Edouard Guillaud, Chief of the French Defense Staff, St Cloud, August 2016.
8. “Paris avait toutes les raisons d’intervenir au Sahel”; “Visée au premier chef par les djihadistes du Sahel, la France défend ainsi ses intérêts économiques et sécuritaires du Sénégal au Niger,” *Le Figaro*, 22 January 2013.
9. Email communication with Bruce Whitehouse, Professor at Lehigh University, June 2017.

10. It mandated that an actionable plan for military intervention be made by ECOWAS and the African Union within 45 days. The actual deployment was authorized via UNSC Resolution 2085, adopted unanimously on 20 December 2012.
11. Apparently, Susan Rice, the American ambassador to the UN, also hated the idea of AFISMA. She did not believe that it would solve the problem, a French diplomat recalls, “so she did everything to slow down its establishment.” See “Les Etats-Unis bloque la France a l’ONU,” *Le Figaro*, 12 December 2012; “Mali: histoire secrète d’une guerre surprise,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 10 February 2013.
12. Author’s interview with French official, Paris, August 2016.
13. Le Drian had been interested in defense affairs for a long time. His hometown is the Atlantic port city of L’Orient in Brittany. The city hosts some of France’s most important naval industries and is also a key base for France’s naval special forces commandos. As a member of parliament, Le Drian also served on the defense committee (Chivvis 2016, 98).
14. During France’s Libya intervention, all important operational decisions were taken at the Elysée, not the Ministry of Defense.
15. In 2012 (in the midst of the European sovereign debts crisis), it was also rumored that Hollande’s government was planning deep defense cuts (Chivvis 2016, 88). A successful military intervention might reduce these cuts to a certain degree.
16. Powell (2016, 17) also alludes to the importance of “grand narratives” in French intervention decisions. Nevertheless, he does not explain where these narratives come from. How are they created?
17. The reason why France had to intervene in Mali was thus that if France did not intervene, “a terrorist state would be created near Europe and France” from which terrorist acts could easily be planned and perpetrated. See also Wing (2016) on the usage of the term “terrorism” in justifying the French intervention in Mali.
18. Cf. Wing (2016, 72).
19. Mr Mandel said: “Je voulais que les esprits soient préparés.” (Author’s interview with Sacha Mandel, Head of PR in the Cabinet of French Defense Minister Le Drian, Paris, August 2016.)
20. Author’s interview with Sacha Mandel, Head of PR in the Cabinet of French Defense Minister Le Drian, Paris, August 2016.
21. 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 2015, 814).
22. Author’s interview with French official, Paris, August 2016.
23. Author’s interview with French official, Paris, August 2016.
24. Some analysts have also suggested that Hollande saw in the intervention a chance to establish himself as a strong president (Bergamaschi and Diawara 2014).

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