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Powershift and Strategic Adjustment in French Military Engagement in Central Africa[1]

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Introduction

On Power, Military Intervention and Foreign Policy

This study is about changes and evolution in the military relationship between France and its former colonies in the Central Africa sub-region. It is guided by three operational hypotheses:

International Politics as Power Politics

International politics (as any form of politics) is a matter "of *goal attainment* and control over one's environment" (Deutsch, 1967). For this reason the use of power, militarily or otherwise, is a guiding principle of actors' behavior in the international arena (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1993). On the other hand, within an anarchical world (Bull, 1995) of competing goals and struggles (for power, wealth or honour), one of the fundamental (although tacit and unwritten) rules of the international game is to put this power to use whenever and wherever necessary.

In this study, "power" is "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber, 1964: 152). When "put simply and crudely, [power] is the ability to prevail in conflict and to overcome obstacles" (Deutsch, 1967). Under cooperative or collaborative circumstances, like the ones characterizing the military relationship between France and its former African colonies, the second part of this definition, (i.e. "the ability [...] to overcome obstacles") is the more relevant. In the 1960s, the former French colonies allowed France to establish a web of military cooperation arrangements,

because it tackled the problem of endemic political instability and consolidated their power position. France, in turn, used this network for steering the process of independence while at the same time continuing to control, and sometimes determine, policy making within its former colonies. Arguing that "power" is a major factor determining behaviour within the international arena is not to say that international politics can be considered a chaotic, Hobbesian game. Put differently, "anarchy" is not "chaos". The international theatre is considered to be an anarchic scene of competing and struggling sovereign actors (Bull, 1995; Aron 1984). In this game of power and might the status quo, in terms of an ongoing "international legitimate order" is continuously called into question (Kissinger, 1972).

Military Diplomacy as a Foreign Policy Goal

By "military diplomacy" we mean the potential or effective projection of military might abroad in time of global peace. This means at least three things in the light of France's military relationship with its former colonies: (1) when militarily engaging in Africa, French authorities do not respond to a formal declaration of war against France; France does respond to a formal call for assistance from an African partner whose national security and stability are jeopardized; (2) the national security interest of France is not really at stake; and (3) the potential or effective intervention is a matter of commitment to a formal contractual agreement: in this case, a defence agreement.

Within this context then, a military engagement abroad (here defined as the promised or actual use by a sovereign state of military might beyond its national borders) is an act of foreign policy whose ultimate goal it is to serve the national interest.

The Basic Determinants of the "Shape" of a Military Intervention

Last, but not least, the various structural forms as well as the substantial importance of a foreign military intervention by one state (let us say for instance France) in another state (a former French African colony) are considered to be directly affected by three basic parameters:

- *the global relationship* of powers at the international level. This global relationship is defined as the current "legitimate world order" (Kissinger 1972). As we shall see in due course, interventions or engagements during the Cold War are not identical to those undertaken after the new global relationship of powers known as the "post-Cold War" era.
- *the "diplomatic orientation" and the "structure and 'determinant' of the diplomatic system"* (Kontchou, 1977) of the recipient (the state in which intervention is undertaken). For the case in point, the African diplomatic system's weaknesses and deficiencies, its structural needs and functional or

utilitarian "orientations" all determine the shape and scope of "military cooperation" with the former colonial power, France.

- *the nature and quality of the national policy order of the intervening state.* This national policy order is determined by the political orientation of the government (right-wing or left-wing government for France or Democrat or Republican for the USA, for instance), the nature and intensity of the power struggle between political parties, the structural configuration of the governing body (in the case of France, cohabitation or no cohabitation), etc.

From these operational hypotheses, one main conclusion can be drawn: (1) power shifts in global politics, (2) changes in the prioritization of national interests, and (3) the diplomatic orientation of states all affect both the will and the capacity to intervene militarily. On the other hand, since power shifts determine the nature and quality of military engagement or intervention, any shift in the configuration of the international legitimate order is rationally followed by a "strategic adjustment" from the intervening power's military diplomacy (Boniface, 1998).

France's politics of military involvement in Africa constitutes an interesting case study for testing these hypotheses and conclusions. For the last four decades, all major historical "turning points" in international power relations were followed by fundamental reconfiguration of the military links between France and its former African colonies.

On Turning Points and Strategic Adjustments

As far as the relationship between Africa and the world is concerned, the last forty years have witnessed three determining power shifts within the international arena. Each of these was "automatically" followed by an active strategic readjustment on the part of France.

- **The colonial era until 1960** [2]
  This is the era of utter domination and crude use and abuse by France of military power over its colonies. There is no room for "cooperation" or any kind of "partnership". Politically as well as militarily, relationships were strictly hierarchical. It was an era of overwhelming power to rule and dominate.

- **1960-until the end of the Cold War in the 1990s**
  In the sixties, the independence of African colonies institutionalized a new structure of legitimacy in world power relations. This turning point gives a new meaning and substance to the legitimate world order. This required France to adopt major strategic adjustment, i.e., from the power to rule by

utter domination to the power to guide by parochial cooperation. General Charles de Gaulle made this well understood when he declared that France was abandoning "colonization" for "cooperation" (Ageron, 1994: 165). This parochially framed hegemonic foreign policy is known in French rhetoric as the politics of "pays du champ" [or "pré-carré"] (Cadenat, 1983). Stability and maintaining the status quo, in terms of consolidating the existing friendly African regimes, characterize this era. Issues of democratic peace and constructive stability are on the margins, if not completely absent.

- **From the 1990s onwards**
  The end of the Cold War which appears to be what some Africanist scholars call "the end of the postcolonial era" (Bayart & al., 1998), which also marked a major change in the relational network between France and its former African colonies, was followed by another strategic adjustment. For the time being, this latter essentially presents three characteristics. The first one is making multilateral the military link binding France to its former African colonies. The second one is the focus on issues of morality, good governance, constructive peace and sustainable stability. The third and last one is "the reform of cooperation" in Paris. This is essentially embodied in the globalization of France's cooperation project (which becomes part of the tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the resulting "death" of the Ministère de la cooperation (which specifically aimed at cooperation between France and its former African colonies). Crudely put, this period inaugurates the end of Africa as an exception and the beginning of the continent's "normalization" within the French foreign policymaking machinery. Jean-Pierre Cot, the former French Minister of Cooperation who once lost his job for recommending exactly this policy, can surely feel vindicated (Cot, 1984).

What the Study is About

This study analyzes power shifts and military strategic adjustments in France's military cooperation with its main central African partners. The era covered is 1960-2002.[3]

Before it does so, it is worth briefly clarifying the choice of "power politics" as the fundamental theoretical or (as some would say) ideological perspective adopted in the analysis. It is true that the concept of power in (international) politics has several operational limits and weaknesses of validation (Deutsch, 1967; Masters, 1964). For instance, there are obvious deficiencies in considering "might makes right" as an essential "rule of the game" of "politics among nations". Nevertheless, here a deliberate choice is made in favor of a "realist", power-oriented approach to the international game between sovereign actors. This is based on at least two reasons:

- "Deficiencies and weaknesses" of validation do not rule out considering power as a major determinant of international relationships. Weakness in methodology does not imply meaninglessness in reality. We are dealing with military and security issues, which are power issues par excellence.
- The relationship between France and its former colonies, beyond any appearance of being" familial" or "patrimonial" has always been essentially a "power link" between (1) a great power in search of optimal implementation of its foreign policy, and (2) "small powers" who have sometimes failed to understand the working of France's policy of cooperation. For instance, it is tragic to see that today, some Africans continue to wonder: "why does France not militarily intervene in Congo-Brazzaville" in order to "stabilize" this situation? (*Jeune Afrique* ...). It is all the more tragic that this question is still raised ten years after the end of the Cold War, and just a couple of weeks after France had adopted its major new foreign policy strategic adjustment with the "death" of the Ministère de la cooperation (sometimes informally called the "Ministry of Africa Affairs in Paris"). Therefore, adopting the power policy perspective in international relations might actually educate such naïve African "sentimentalists" or "familialists"!

Having set out and clarified these operational hypotheses, we can now examine the first turning point and its subsequent strategic adjustments.

Decolonization and The Politics Of Cooperation

From Colonial Empire to Strategic Hegemony

Colonization can essentially be considered as a set of asymmetric power relations between the colonizing countries and their colonized territories. In this relationship, there is no room for "equality", "partnership" or "cooperation". The colonial relationship between France and Africa resulted from a clash of powers that brought victory to the former and defeat to the latter. African colonies thus became part of the French Empire and politically and militarily dominated by France. The daily relationship between the two parties was conducted within the "centre-peripheral" model (Aron, 1972: 495-96; Braudel, 1992; Wallenstein, 1990).

The process of independence set in motion a radical power shift between colonial power and colonized states. Independence occurred as a bold severing of the umbilical cord connecting Africa to the rest of the world. In the arena of global politics, the birth of African sovereignty meant the establishment and institutionalization of a new partnership among equal and equally sovereign nations. It was a transition from an era of "ownership" to a new order of "partnership".

One unfortunate reality of African independence is that issues of power and (national) interest were not substantially taken into consideration. Only a few

visionary leaders, such as the Osagyefo Kwamé Nkrumah (of Ghana) or the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (of Tanzania), were really aware of the true meaning of freedom and independence within a world of competing anarchic sovereignties (Ayissi, 1994: 22-32). Consequently, in a universe where freedom means the power to be and remain free, the de jure statehood of these newly independent African states was not matched by de facto statehood (Jackson, 1993).

Their overwhelming lack of power, in terms of economic strength, military might and political voice, gave them only a very small degree of autonomy within the international arena. In diplomacy, the most dramatic consequence of this reality was what Kontchou (1977: 170) calls the "extroversion of the African diplomatic system", one of the most striking symbols of African dependence *vis-à-vis* the international arena (Kodjo, 1985; Luckam, 1979; Zartman, 1967).

The diplomacy of France's former colonies was certainly among the most extroverted of all. France made sure that independence did not put an end to its hegemony Luckam, 1982). Its former colonies were all supposed to remain within one large "family", the grande famille franco-africaine. In fact, for France this politics of family, essentially made with what Constantin (1995: 183) calls "affective diplomacy", was a matter of strategic adjustment. In reality, there was no systematic change in power relations between the colonies and their metropolis. Once the decolonization process became unavoidable, French diplomacy wisely opted for a strategic adjustment known as the *politique de cooperation française* (the French policy of cooperation) (Andereggen, 1994; Domergue-Cloarec, 1994).

Under this unequal partnership the ending of formal colonial domination is almost automatically followed by a subtle, de facto form of hegemony. The whole genius of this scheme is that it institutionalizes an overwhelming unbalanced relationship under a label of mutually shared sovereign equality. Officially pronounced a "partnership", this pattern of cooperative links fundamentally remains a top-down relationship. Hence, some observers have denounced it as a "new form of colonization". In French official rhetoric and that of its "official"

Table 1: Independence as Radical Powershift Process

Eras / Actors	Colonization (Radical) Asymmetrical Power-politics)	Independence (Radical Symmetrical De Jure Powershift)
Colonial Powers	Hegemony & Ownership	Cooperation & Partnership
Colonized territories	Disownership	Partnership
Inter-Relations	Dominative	Subtle Cooperative Hegemony

African partners, however, it is simply called "cooperation" in the sense of a mutually beneficial partnership or a "contractual association of sovereign and independent states" (IDPD & ICDG, 1984: 172). Within such a context, asymmetry in power sharing and inequalities in power projection are perceived as "temporary abnormalities" bound to be eliminated over time by the equalizing virtues of the politics of cooperation.

In this light, it is clear that with decolonization, France lost a colonial empire; and with the new diplomacy of cooperation France tried hard to maintain, under an "adjusted" form, a strategic hegemony in Africa (Joseph, 1976: CEDETIM, 1978). In doing so, France made of its former colonies de facto "subordinate systems" within the global web of international relations (Zartman, 1967).

The Diplomacy of Military Cooperation: Issues and Contexts

The French postcolonial project of cooperation is essentially made with legal instruments called "cooperation agreements" – *accords de coopération*. These can have two forms:

- A civil option, aiming at the promotion of social and economic development, and
- A military option, aiming at the maintenance of security and stability.

The basic rationale of these legal tools is twofold. On the one hand, they constitute a road map for France's (military or civil) interventions in Africa. On the other hand, they guarantee both the legality and the legitimacy of such interventions. As far as the military dimension is concerned, Louis Balmond has shown that

Table 2: Defence and Technical Military Cooperation Agreements between France and Central African States

States	Year of Independence	Technical Military Assistance Agreements Signed or Modified in	Defence Agreements Signed or modified in	Military Bases
Burundi		1969-74	—	—
Cameroon	1960	1974	1974	—
C.A.R.	1960	1966	1960	Yes
Congo	1960	1974	—	—
Gabon	1960	1960	1960	Yes
Rwanda	1961	1975		—
Chad	1960	1976		Yes
Zaire (DRC)	1960	1974-76	—	—

these formal agreements primarily serve to enable France, as an "État du droit" and "État de droit", to "sustain its military interventions in Africa with circumstantial legal bases" (1998: 15).[4]

Two types of military agreement institutionalize the partnership for security. These are: the Technical Military Assistance Agreements on the one hand – "Accords d'assistance militaire technique", and the Defence Agreements – "Accords de défense", on the other hand.

For the eight Central African countries analyzed in this study, the French law of military intervention is made with about ten legal instruments (defence and technical military assistance agreements). All of these instruments were signed within the fifteen years following independence, that is, during 1960-75.

Table 2 gives a temporal and geographical distribution of the French law of military intervention in Central Africa. This distribution calls for two comments:

- Concerning the distribution by (sovereign) territories, two states appear to be the "hard core" of the French diplomacy of military engagement in Central Africa, namely Gabon and the Central African Republic. In fact, these two countries are the only ones in the group which signed military agreements with the former colonial power from the moment they became independent – that is, in 1960. They are also the only states in the subregion with French military installations.[5]
- Also striking are the dates of signature of the agreements. In the mid-1970s, no fewer than six out of the eight countries studied, signed new military agreements with France or felt the necessity to modify the existing ones. These are: Burundi (1974), Cameroon (1974), Congo (1974), Rwanda (1975), Chad (1976), and Zaire (1974-76). It is equally interesting to note that only the two "hard cores" of the group, Gabon and the Central African Republic, had not signed new agreements or modify the older ones by that time. This can easily be explained by the fact that since the early 1960s, they were already militarily bound to France in an optimal way. After all, optimum military efficiency was the main consideration pushing African countries to seek foreign military assistance. Since for these states this factor had already been exploited, they did not feel any need to either sign new agreements or amend the existing ones.

One question that emerges from this table is this. Why were the mid-seventies such a dramatic turning point in French military cooperation with the Central African subregion? In other words, if this unprecedented rush into military agreements can logically be interpreted as the result of a more acute need on the part of the Central African countries to be militarily bound to France, what, then, were the underlying reasons?

The concept of "refroidissement" of the Cold War may offer a credible

explanation. This is related to the effect of the Cold War percolating to the African continent. Historically, the mid-seventies represent the height of the Cold War. The "Détente" of the early seventies, with its "rich dialogue" and rising "expectations" (Tinguy, 1985: 8) turned out to be mere illusion (Wajsman, 1977). Outside the arena of formal dialogue, a radicalisation of the bipolar confrontation took place from which Africa suffered tremendously. The cases of extensive bloodshed in Angola and Ethiopia are just two examples of its destructive impact on Africa.

This also partially explains the high incidence of French military intervention in the mid-seventies. In an era of Cold War radicalisation, with substantial implications for African politics, France could no longer confine itself to the role of a "watch-dog" of the Western Zones of influence in Africa. It now became the "policeman" for the Western liberal order in Africa, thus multiplying and intensifying military engagements with its African "friends". The official rhetoric of Paris, "*si une fissure s'installe dans notre réseau d'Alliances, l'URSS s'y engoufrera*", became a very fashionable slogan when discussing the "Communist threat" in Africa (Balmond, 1998: 51).

This Cold War wisdom was one of the basic justifications for interventions in Zaire, when the "gendarmes Katangais", with the support of the communist Angola and their Cuban allies fought very hard to overthrow President Mobutu in 1978. The same logic prevailed to a certain extent in Chad, where "Arabic" and "socialist" Libya had planned to establish its hegemony. This also holds true for French participation in the harsh and merciless "eradication" of a long standing "Marxist" armed rebellion in Cameroon during the seventies.

It is important to note that to avoid accusation of "neocolonialism", the French diplomacy of military cooperation was always presented as an original and innovative form of asymmetric partnership which successfully and happily produced what a former adviser to General Charles de Gaulle appropriately called the "conjunction of cooperation and sovereignty" (Plantey, 1998: 112). "Cooperation", it was said, could no longer be branded as yet another form of neocolonialism, for it fully respected the "sovereignty" of the African partners. Time and again, however, reality showed that what appeared as a fragile and uneasy equilibrium between military cooperation and sovereignty was actually a potentially pervasive asymmetric balance of power that usually lacked a self-evident "juste milieu".

Central Africa: Hard Core and Weakest Link

Hard Core, Weakest Link: The Great Paradox

When we compare trends and models of military cooperation with Central Africa on the one hand, and West Africa (its "twin sister") on the other, we can observe

that French interventionism in the Central African region has several characteristics unknown to the West African region.

- In this region, France has realized its most important external military presence during the last four decades. Here, also, it undertook the most intense and controversial military actions: Rwanda, Zaire, Chad, Central African Republic, etc.
- Central Africa is also the region where French military diplomacy has experienced the most tragic failures and stalemates. This is the case for Rwanda in the first half of the 1990s and for Zaire at the end of President Mobutu's long reign.
- At the same time, in this region France finds some of its most faithful African military partners. States like Gabon, and occasionally the Central African Republic are good examples. For a long time two of France's most important African military bases were situated in these two countries. They were perceived as real strategic "plaques tournantes" of the French military defense system in Africa.

Paradoxically, then, Central Africa has tended to be both the hard core and the weakest link in the French strategy of military engagement in Africa. At least four factors explain this:

- At the dawn of the sixties and for a good deal of the seventies, Central Africa was a highly turbulent geo-strategic area caught in the web of the bipolar struggle of the Cold War. In addition to being an explosive nest of internal conflicts and violence, Central Africa is a land of **prox**y wars and tensions. The unfinished tragedy of "Congo/Zaire/Congo" is certainly the direst expression of the Cold War's impact on this region of Africa. Explosive convulsions in the Southern flank (Angola), as well as high tension in the sixties and early seventies in Cameroon, are other illustrative cases. When one adds the Chadian "imbroglio" to this already bleak picture, it is easy to understand why the East-West dimension of instability in post-colonial Central Africa has been so acute and so crucial in creating a power vacuum (as well as, paradoxically, a power vortex) within the area (Laïdi, 1986; Tshiyembe, 1999).
- Three French-speaking states, Congo/Zaire, Burundi and Rwanda, albeit not French colonies, emerged from colonization deeply divided by internal tensions (Prunier, 1995; Braeckman, 1994).
- In terms of natural resources, Central Africa is one of the world's richest regions. It is endowed with strategic natural resources, eg. oil, uranium, etc. that are indispensable for the rich Northern countries' industrial and military power (Chaliand & Rageau, 1983).
- Last, but not least, for at least five of the eight states analyzed in this paper

(Burundi, Cameroon, Congo/Zaire, Rwanda, Chad) independence was followed by tensions or struggles for the control of state power. Internal tensions facilitated (necessitated?) external military interventions. In such a context France, driven by loyalty, national interest, or simple diplomatic naivete became not only militarily entangled, but also politically sucked into many parts of the Central African region's conflicts. Chad, Rwanda, and to a certain extent the Central African Republic and Zaire, are among such diplomatic "quagmires" (Chaliand & Rageau, 1983: 48-49; Kalflèche, 1986).

Despite this complex web of considerations, or (probably) because of it, the military link between France and Central Africa has remained particularly strong and intense throughout these forty years.

Engagement and its Shapes

French military cooperation with Central African states, contains no uniformity between schemes of engagement or alliance. Beyond the global logic of defence and military assistance agreements, the cooperative progrgamme of each of the eight countries depends on local circumstances and, most of all, on the more or less strategic importance that France gives to each of the countries (Table 3).

Some other factors, related either to the global logic of the Cold War or to endogenous hegemonic games among African actors, add to the specificity of each military link. For instance, the shape and logic of France's intervention in Chad is affected by the hegemonic ambition of an African actor (Libya), whereas in Zaire the Cold War factor was much more pronounced. In Rwanda, internal tensions seem to have established the rules and principles of military intervention.

As international and domestic power relations change, shifts in power may

Table 3: Intricacy "internal/external" factors in French military interventions in Central Africa: a Tentative Taxonomy

State	1960s	1970s	1990s
Burundi	Internal	Internal	
Cameroon	Internal/Cold War	Internal/Cold War	Regional
Chad	Internal	Internal/regional	Internal/regional
Congo			Internal
DRC	Internal/Cold War	Internal/Cold War	Internal
Gabon	Internal	Internal/Cold War	Internal
Rwanda	Internal	Internal	Internal
CAR	Internal	Internal	Internal

occur within one country. This was the case for Cameroon. In the early seventies, a merciless internal struggle for power with varying ideological dimensions resulted in heavy French military engagement in this country. In the eighties, this engagement was reduced in both scope and density until it was almost non-existent in the nineties.

Table 3 calls for two comments:

- French military interventions in Central Africa much more frequently occur in response to internal instability than to external threats.
- Within the category of interventions dealing with external threats to sovereignty, only very few relate to "regional" threats. The case of Libya and Nigeria (threatening Chad and Cameroon, respectively) are the exceptions.

On the other hand, we may observe that the daily management of French military intervention or engagement in central Africa is limited by two groups of parameters:

- One is what we call the law of circumstantial necessity. This is dictated by situations and ongoing circumstances in the recipient African state. Of course it goes without saying that any view of circumstantial necessity is ultimately affected by the major objectives in French foreign policy, defined in terms of power projection and national interest.
- The other one is determined by the more or less elaborated agendas of the African partners. The items on these agendas are: the consolidation and the perpetuation of political power by law and order enforcement on the one hand, and stability building on the other hand, the defence of national sovereignty against external aggression, etc.

Dealing with Time and Space

The above-mentioned law of circumstantial necessity turns French military interventions in Central Africa into very specific operations in time and space. If we take the time factor into consideration, it appears that there had been a great variety of interventionist schemes during the last forty years. For instance, interventions in the 1960s and the 1970s are not identical in scope and density. The same is true for the 1980s and the 1990s. This also holds true for the spatial factor. In terms of power projection and diplomatic boldness, there existed varying degrees of intensity within the eight different countries and within the different time periods.

At the border line of this general taxonomy, one can also observe that not all French military interventions in central Africa are identical in terms of their logistical, financial or good will input. Some are high density interventions while others are low density ones.[6]

If we consider the spatial factor, (for instance, Zaire in the second half of the 1970s, Rwanda in the first half of the 1990s and, in a certain sense, the Central African Republic in the second half of the 1990s), all of them represent areas with a high density and a high intensity interventionism. Burundi is both a low density and low intensity area of intervention, while Cameroon and Congo seem to be "uncategorizable".

What Facts Tell Us About Interventionism

On Rules of Legal Agreement and Constraints from Circumstances

From the above analyses, we can conclude that military interventions in Africa by France respond to two sets of rules:

- One set is made of the rules of legal agreements (Defence Agreements and Technical Assistance Agreements); and
- The other set embodies the constraints from circumstances ("in the field").

The Table 4 gives an overview of the main French military interventions in Central Africa since the second half of the seventies.

Data from this table show that:

1. One of the most striking characteristics is the high frequency of French military interventions in Central Africa. In 20 years, French military forces have been in action more than 20 times. That is, more than once a year.
2. Concerning the objectives of the interventions, before the 1990s most interventions deal with civil turmoil. This is for instance the case with regard to the following.
   - The Barracuda operation in the Central African Republic, an operation aiming at the establishment of a new national political order (in conformity with France's national interest).
   - The Tacaud operation in Chad.
   - The Bonite and Leopard operations in Zaire.
3. Very few interventions were a response to external aggression. In this respect, Chad is an atypical exception. By contrast, the case of Cameroon, while being an intervention against external aggression, is a very low density intervention. As a matter of fact, France has never been heavily involved militarily in this country's long border conflict with its giant neighbour, Nigeria. "Intervention" by France in the Cameroon/Nigeria war essentially involved sending to Cameroon small teams of "military advisers". For the Balata operation for instance, this team consisted of just 9 persons. Finally, the low frequency of French military intervention for reasons of external aggression also stems from the small number of "wars of aggression" within

Table 4: French Military Interventions in Central Africa: 1978-1998[7]

State	Date of Intervention	Operation Name	Operation Purpose
Burundi	October 1993	Yabmo	
Cameroon	Feb.-Sept. 1994	Balata	
	February 1995	Aramis	
CAR	September 1979		
	July 1991	Barracuda	C.U.
	1996-1997:	MISAB	EP.N.
	1996-1997:	Almandin 1 & 2	EP.No.
Congo	March 1997	Pélican	EP.N.
	June 1997	Pélican 2	EP.N.
	June 1997	Pélican 3	EP.N.
Gabon	Mai-june	Requin	EP.N.
Rwanda	Oct.1990-Dec. 1993	Noroît	C.U./EP.N.
	April 1994	Amaryllis	EP.N.
	June-August 1994	Turquoise	H.I.
Chad	1978:	Tacaud	C.U.
	June 1983-Nov. 1984	Manta	C.U./E.A.
	February 1986 – ...	Epervier	E.A.
Zaire (DRC)	May 1978:	Bonite	C.U./E.A.
	May 1978	Léopard	C.U./E.A.
	Sept.- Nov. 1991	Baumier	EP.N.
	Jan.-feb.1993	Bajoyer	EP.N.
	Nov.96-Dec.96	Malebo	EP.N.

C.U. = civil unrest.
E.A. = external aggression.
H.I. = humanitarian intervention.
EP.N. = evacuation/protection of (French) nationals.

the Central African region. The most frequent causes of turmoil in this area are of a domestic nature.

4. By the 1990s, we note that French military intervention in civil unrest had almost disappeared. Rwanda, until the end of President Habyarimana's regime, remained an exception. The modal type of military intervention for the nineties (i.e., the post-Cold War era) is the humanitarian and/or peace-keeping intervention.
5. At the start of the civil unrest in the Central Africa Republic, France

inaugurated a new type of military engagement. One may call this "peace-making interventionism". Old (or pre-1990) interventions in civil unrest were about the restoration and the consolidation of stability and the status quo (Zaire, Rwanda, Cameroon, Gabon, etc.), or about shaping a new friendly national political order (Barracuda in the Central African Republic). The MISAB operation in Central African Republic is neither a rescuing operation for the restoration of the status quo, nor a unilateral attempt to establish a new, friendly political order. It is about creating sustainable peace and constructive stability (The MISAB and MINURCA operations in the Central African Republic are analyzed below).

6. Chad in the eighties is a good illustration of the above-mentioned paradox of French military cooperation in this part of Africa. This country, as we have seen, is both the "hard core" and the "weakest link" of French diplomacy of military engagement in the continent. As a matter of fact, from the duration and the intensity of military intervention by France in Chad one may conclude that it constitutes one of the highest concentration spots of French military intervention in Africa. Nowhere else in Africa has France invested such a huge amount of political will and logistics through military interventions as in Chad since 1983 (Buijtenhuis, 1995). This confirms the hard core hypothesis. On the other hand, military intervention in Chad by France is also a severely divisive issue in French domestic politics (Balmond, 1998: 91-97), which confirms the weakest link hypothesis. One French journalist therefore described Chad as "lieu géométrique de nos contradictions" – The geometric point of all our contradictions ("our" for French people) (Kalfléche 1986: 15).
7. If Chad is the most illustrative point of the paradoxical nature of military interventions in Central Africa by France, Zaire (DRC) under President Mobutu represented a good example of a "hard core". Since President Mobutu had been "a good and faithful friend" to the West (including France), French military assistance in times of internal challenges to the status quo has always been taken for granted. The 1970s formed the highest point of France's policy of unconditional military support for President Mobutu regime. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent new relations of power dramatically changed this situation, leading to the regime's final collapse. Within this new international context, France could no longer afford (politically or morally) the luxury of unconditional bilateral military support.
8. By contrast, Gabon, although a territory of high density French military engagement, has never really been provided an opportunity for high intensity intervention. It has the lowest frequency of intervention in terms of a huge French military presence. However, this low frequency does not imply that Gabon is lowest on the French list of strategic priorities. On the contrary, it

belongs to the "hardest core" of France's military dispositif not just in Central Africa but in the entire African continent. This paradoxical position has at least two explanations.

- Since independence, Gabon fully belongs to the Franco-African "Holy Family" called the "pré carré". Its loyalty to France, unlike that of the Central African Republic for instance, has never been challenged.
- Gabon hosts a permanent French military installation. This permanent military presence surely reduces the risk of internal upheaval.
- The rapid eradication, through French military intervention, of a coup attempt in the early sixties (under the first President Leon Mba) probably still echoes in the minds of many domestic amateurs of public order destabilization.

Time For Transition and New Models

With the end of the Cold War and the dawn of global and regional (African) power shifts, France has made a dramatic strategic adjustment in its military involvement in Africa. This adjustment is embodied in what the French Centre opérationnel interarmées ("Operational Inter-Army Centre") calls "the new types of mission" (COIA, 1998). The new missions take into consideration issues of human rights, good governance and ethics in politics, which seem to suggest that the times of unconditional trust and blind loyalty to military agreements between France and its African partners are (definitely?) over. Human security, more than national security, is at the centre of these new types of mission. These are undertaken according to the basic principles defined five years ago in the French army's White Paper (Livre Blanc sur la défense 1994). Hence the insistence on "humanitarian intervention" or "good governance conditionality" (Alibert, 1997: 2520). For reasons of "bad governance" or gross violation of human rights, France suspended its military cooperation with Zaire (DRC) in 1992, Burundi in 1996 and Congo in 1997.

As mentioned above, the first three decades of African independence constitute an era of "unconditionality" in French military assistance to its African partners. The key word for this strong and powerful military relationship was stability, defined as sustainable status quo. During this time of tough realpolitik, France appeared as the best guarantor of "its" African powers' stability and longevity (sometimes, until their dying days: eg., Rwanda and Zaire).

With the end of the Cold War, the intervention schemes of the sixties, seventies and eighties became obsolete. They lost not only their ability to operate, but also their strategic and political legitimacy (in France as well as in Africa). Labertit (1998: 50) rightly mentions that "un des fondements des accords de défense entre la France et les pays d'Afrique est balayé par l'évolution du monde". Out of this vanishing era in which the normal model became obsolete, there emerged a new

strategic dawn in which France thoroughly revised its military relations and its traditional global agenda for cooperation with the former African colonies (Sada, 1999; Iheden, 1998; Ministére de la Défense, 1998).

The Cold War Double Agenda: a Historical Reminder

I should recall that during the Cold War, military interventions in Africa by France responded to a double agenda:

- On the one hand, there was the bilateral link binding France and its former African colonies, in the "best mutual interest" (pour l'intérêt bien compris) of both parties. For France, military cooperation basically remained a matter of power projection beyond its borders for the sake of national interest. This explains why the majority of its military interventions aimed at stabilizing (or "status quoing") its faithful partners (President Mobutu in Zaire, President Mba in Gabon, President Dacko in the Central African Republic, President Habyarimana in Rwanda, etc.). Within this logic of national interest there was no room for ethics or human sentiments. Deep faith in and strict respect for defence agreements provided the only rationale for action.[8]
- On the other hand, there also existed the global linkage steered by the Manichean logic of the bipolar struggle for world hegemony. At this level France also continuously acted on the basis of its own national interest, but its power projection was endowed with a new (larger) utilitarian dimension and meaning. In this regionalized world hegemonic order, France became the "watchdog", the "policeman" of the Western zone of influence in Africa (Chaliand, 1980; Kodjo, 1985). Hence, President Mobutu became a key ally not only for France's parochially circumscribed national interest, but also for the Western world's globally defined strategic interest. Consequently, military intervention by France to maintain president Mobutu in power, for instance, represented both an expression of loyalty to a friendly regime and a defensive or pre-emptive strategy against the Eastern Bloc's search for "tropical clients".

When for instance justifying the intervention by French parachutists in Kolwezi (then Zaire) in 1978, French President, Valerie Giscard d'Estaing, clearly explained the logic of this double agenda. He widely proclaimed Zaire to be the closest neighbour of "communist Angola" (Labertit, 1998: 50) and, consequently, its President a crucial protection for the West's position in Africa. As Biarnes explains(1986: 50), the timing of this move was crucial in this context. For, when the French President decided to send troops to threatened Zaire, the Soviet Union (and its Cuban allies) had already taken control over Angola and Ethiopia and had begun supporting the Zairian rebels.

This double Cold War agenda also explains, to a certain extent, the French

intervention in Chad. In fact, the Libyan Jamahiriya, against whom France fought in Chad, claimed to be not only "Arab", but also "socialist" (Otayek, 1981).

The End of the Cold War and the Obsolescence of Models

The end of the Cold War is a metaphor for the end of French politics of unquestioned and unconditional military support to African partners. This can be interpreted as a sovereign foreign policy choice; but it can also be perceived as inevitable consequence of the new power relations, both globally and in the African region. With the end of the Cold War, France's old models of intervention are called into question not only by new leaders in the Central African region (Rwanda, Zaire), but also by some of France's closest Cold War allies (for instance, the United States).

This new situation, in which France and the USA have become rivals on the one hand, and France and Rwanda "foes" on the other hand, is not surprising. With the end of the Cold War the old rules of the international power game immediately became outdated (Robin, 1995, Touraine, 1995; Badie & Smouts, 1992; Laïdi, 1992). The global "entropy of the bipolar order" (Roche, 1998) led to drastic changes in the "universal environment of confrontation" (Pacteau & Mougel, 1993: 118). International politics remains an essentially power-oriented game; but the "orientation" of power, as well as the rules of the game, has fundamentally changed. There is no longer solidarity between countries of one bloc, since there are no more common enemies.

This brutal collapse of the old power order ["le temps de quelques coups de pioche et d'une brèche dans un mur [...] le rideau se lève à nouveau sur le théâtre du monde, tout est changé" (Robin, 1995: 7)] constitutes a real "earthquake" for the forty-year old web of military relationship between France and its former colonies. This "strategic-quake" required French diplomacy to reshape and reshuffle its policy of military intervention. The resulting strategic adjustment contains at least two new constitutive dimensions.

1. The depolarization of African power struggles. These are no longer considered to be the proxy wars or side effects of East-West confrontation. With the "death" of the Eastern bloc, the bipolar dimension of power struggle has lost its meaning and the second dimension of France's military agenda in Africa has become obsolete.
2. Making multilateral the military relationship between France and its central African partners. Doubts about the old models of intervention go hand in hand with doubts about the viability of the face-to-face relationship between the former colonial power and its former colonies. The international community and French public opinion no longer understand the true meaning of this "bizarre" relationship. Hence the French diplomatic efforts to make its (military and some civil) interventions in Africa multilateral.

The last French military intervention in the Central African Republic, the MISAB operation, is, for the time being, the most obvious example of this new diplomacy of multilateral engagement. After three consecutive mutinies in the Central African Republic in 1996, the 19th "France-Africa Summit", held in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), mandated four African states, Chad, Gabon, Mali, Burkina, as well as "two voluntary states", Senegal and Togo, to undertake a mediating mission in Bangui. This mission formed an international monitoring Committee headed by the former Head of State of Mali, General Amadou Toumani Toure. Subsequently, a peace agreement was signed by the Central African protagonists. On 25 January 1997, the MISAB (Mission Interafricaine de Surveillance des Accords de Bangui) was born. This was a multinational peacekeeping operation aiming at the "surveillance" of the peace agreement's implementation. The MISAB mission benefited from French financial as well as logistic support.

On 27 March 1998, with strong French support, a UN resolution was adopted which transformed the MISAB into a United Nations peacekeeping operation called the MINURCA (Mission des Nations Unies en République Centrafricaine). France provided the "logistic component" (that is, military equipment) of this mission. At the beginning of the MINURCA, in April 1998, France also had 190 soldiers within the ranks of the peacekeepers (Ministry of Defence 1998).

The Turquoise operation is another example of French military engagement in Africa becoming multilateral. Turquoise was officially defined by French officials as a "multinational military intervention with humanitarian aim" (Balmond, 1998: 103). In June 1994, after the death of President Habyarimana in a plane crash and the start of the genocide in Rwanda, the political and humanitarian situation became chaotic and unmanageable. France, through the legitimacy of a Security Council resolution, took the lead of a "coalition" of countries with the aim of implementing a humanitarian intervention in the border area between Rwanda and Zaire. This multilateral and multinational operation lasted two months.

From these two operations, MISAB/MINURCA and Turquoise, one can draw at least four basic conclusions:

- France avoided engagement in a bilateral face-to-face operation;
- Both operations were made multilateral (i.e., legitimized by a multilateral institution: the United Nations) and made multinational (with the participation of many nations or states) as much as possible;
- At some point, France found it necessary to seek the legitimacy of the United Nations.
- The humanitarian (Rwanda) or the peace building (C.A.R.) dimensions of the operations were explicitly mentioned (and rhetorically emphasized).

The New Era of Partially Limited Competence

The strategic adjustment undertaken by France's diplomacy in Africa now enters

a new era characterized by Louis Balmond as an era of "compétence liée" (linked competence) and a time for "emerging new justification" (1998: 24).

As far as its military relationship with the ex-colonies in Africa is concerned, this new era may be characterized as follows:

- First, a drastic contraction of France's freedom of action. Zaire is once more a very good case in point. At the beginning of the conflict that overthrew President Mobutu, the United Nations Security Council, under heavy pressure from French diplomacy, adopted resolution 1080 (November 15, 1996). This "authorized" the deployment of a multinational "temporary" force in Eastern Zaire for humanitarian purposes to take care of refugees. This multinational force was stillborn because of forceful opposition from the USA, which "paralyzed the United Nations action" (Pourtier, 1996: 35). Paris claimed the operation had to be a "humanitarian" one, while Washington saw it as a subtle French attempt to save President Mobutu's "throne"(Gaud 1997). Here it is worth remembering that only twenty years before, France would have had much more power and President Mobutu, if still alive, would still have enjoyed his position on the "throne".
- Second, the normalization of Africa, i.e., the end of Africa's position as a "pôle d'attraction" (pole of attraction) or a "centre de convergence" (centre of convergence) (Kontchou, 1977: 155-156) within French (military) diplomacy. This is clear from the "death", in December 1998, of the Ministry of Cooperation (Journal Officiel, 1998: 18766-18772). This process of "decentration" (and not, as some name it, "marginalization") of Africa in France's diplomacy marks the end of Africa as an exception in French foreign policy.

Concomitant with this reconfiguration of Paris' military diplomacy is the emergence within the Central Africa of countries such as Rwanda, and Democratic Republic of Congo which are deviant – as far as the traditional bilateral diplomatic relations with France is concerned. As a result of this new (and sometimes radically "anti-French") mood and because of the emergence of new areas beyond the reach of its power, France's military intervention can no longer be taken for granted. In places like "Kagame's Rwanda", or "Kabila's Zaire", such an intervention has even become "unimaginable" – for the time being!

French political authorities in Paris have already drawn the "necessary lessons" from this new situation. They make great efforts to explain that the old days of bilateral military intervention are over. Hence, during the last "France-Africa Summit" in Paris in November 1998, President Jacques Chirac in a televised interview proclaimed to Africa and the rest of the world that "the era of military intervention in Africa is over". All future relations would be characterised by preventive diplomacy through cooperation; and the aim essentially would be the building of African peacemaking capacities.

The politics of preventive diplomacy constitutes a substantial shift away from the old obsession with stability and the status quo. It seems to lead towards new ambitions for constructive stability and sustainable peace in Africa.

This new foreign policy trend is specifically embodied in an ongoing French government cooperative project called RECAMP (Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix) – The Strengthening of African Peacebuilding Capacities. The aim of RECAMP is training and the consolidation of African peace capacities in such a way that Africans, "with the assistance of the international community", can effectively take the lead in future peacekeeping operations in Africa.

In conformity with France's new politics of multilateral strategic adjustment, a "cooperative agreement" with the United States and the United Kingdom, both of which implement nearly identical projects in Africa, was signed in June 1997. By this collaborative agreement, the three countries (the Troïka as they are called), promised to be "transparent" (exchange of information) and "cooperative" (harmonization in the implementation of projects) in their peacebuilding and preventive diplomacy initiatives in Africa. On the other hand they do insist on international legitimization of their action: for all of them, peace operations in Africa must be undertaken under the authority of "the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity" (De Bellescize, 1998). There could be no better consecration of the "de-bilaterization" and the definitive "multilaterization" of the military link between France and Africa.

On the other hand, the multilaterization (and the consequent de-bilaterization) of French military engagement in Africa is followed by a drastic decline in the scope and the density of French "military presence" in Central Africa in particular, and the African continent as a whole in general. As a matter of fact, Paris plans to reduce substantially its permanent troops on the continent (Sada, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). On 4 August 1997, The French Minister of Defence commenting on his trip to a couple of African countries, confirmed the fact that France will be "readjusting" its "présence militaire en Afrique". This "readjustment" process is currently going on in Paris. It follows the main lines defined in the "Plan Million".[9] The paramount objective of this five-year plan is to achieve about one-third reduction in French troops stationed in Africa – i.e., from 8000 troops in 1997 to 5600 in 2002.

In fact, the above mentioned readjustments do confirm and dramatize a longstanding process that has been going on since the second half of the 1980s. Table 5 shows this trend clearly.

Table 6 gives the new configuration of French military installations in Africa. The installations are divided as follows:

- Three "regroupements de force": Eastern Africa, Central Africa and Western Africa.

Table 5: Decline in French military assistants in Africa[10]

	Number of Military assistants
1985	1016
1992	900
1995	715
1999	506

Table 6: The readjustment of French military installations in Africa: Five bases and three "force groupings"

Bases (Groupings)	Number of Troops in 1998
Djibouti (Eastern African Bloc)	3180
Gabon (Central African bloc)	560
Chad (Central African bloc)	1120
Senegal (Western Africa bloc)	1000
Cote d'Ivoire (Western Africa bloc)	677

- Five military bases: Djibouti (Eastern Africa), Gabon and Chad (Central Africa), and Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire (Western Africa) (MINISTERE DE LA DÉFENSE, 1998).

Since April 1995 the Boar military installation in the Central African Republic has closed down.

I should conclude with the following observation. Whatever the importance of the changes in ongoing processes, the strategic adjustment in the French foreign policy of military intervention in Africa is still in a transitional phase. As power relations at the global and Africa regional levels continue to adjust in the post-Cold War era, structural and circumstantial changes in, for example, the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy or the quest for hegemony by Africa's regional powers (Tshiyembe 1999; Leymarie 1997; Jeune Afrique, 1998), will continue to impact on France's willingness to reshape, reshuffle and strategically readjust its military ties with Africa (Ministère de la Défense, 1998; Boniface, 1998; Kuhne, 1997; Sindjoun, 1999; Assemblée/UEO, 1998a; Assemblée/UEO, 1998b; Ayissi, 1997; UEO, 1998).

Notes

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1. In this paper, "Central Africa" refers to the eleven member states of the *United Nations Standing Advisory Committee for Security Questions in Central Africa*. These are: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe. On the other hand, French military intervention in this area is mainly analyzed within the framework of the group of eight French speaking countries. These are: Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Rwanda. For operational and methodological reasons, Equatorial Guinea which, since 9 March 1995, is linked to France by a cooperative military agreement, is only very marginally taken into consideration since this country is not really a determining actor in French military engagement in the subregion.
2. Usually, the year 1960 is symbolically taken as "the year of the Independence of Africa". This probably comes from the fact that 1960 is the year the largest group of African states became independent.
3. "2002" for this is the year until which projections are actually made in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence in Paris.
4. When no specific mention is made, the translation of French into English should be considered to be from us.
5. It is worth mentioning that France never formally had a "military base" in Chad. The sending of French permanent troops to this area was the accidental outcome of a longstanding border conflict between this country and Libya.
6. An interesting exercise at this level may be to categorize French military engagements in Central Africa in terms of high density/low density and high intensity/low intensity operations. This paper does not do so for lack of detailed information.
7. This is made from data from the following sources: (1) the French Ministry of Defence 1998. *Défense Actu:* "Afrique-France 98: la sécurité en Afrique". Paris (2) André Dumoulin, 1997, *La France militaire et l'Afrique*. Brussels: Editions Complexe; Louis Balmond, 1998, *Les interventions militaires françaises en Afrique*. Paris; Editions A. Pédone.
8. This has dire consequences: in a situation of fragile legitimacy of the political establishment (the case for many African regimes), France is perceived as and accused of supporting "tyrants" against the "people" (Mongo Beti, 1993; Tricontinental 1, 1981.
9. Charles Million is the predecessor of Alain Richard as Minister of Defence.
10. Data used in this table are from Hugon Sada 1999: 228-9.

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