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Can’t Let Go: Anxiety, Ontological Security, and French Foreign Policy Decision-Making During the Hollande Administration

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CAN'T LET GO: ANXIETY, ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY, AND FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING DURING THE HOLLANDE ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

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Peter Daniel Langley
Old Dominion University, 2023
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Why does France continue to intervene militarily in sub-Saharan Africa despite repeated commitments, both in practice and in rhetoric, to disengage and adhere to strict non-intervention? Although many accounts of France's African security policy have been put forth, few have analyzed French foreign policy choices through the decision-making process itself, let alone exclusively applied International Relations (IR) theories to understand those decisions. Synthesizing a narrative approach with an ontological security interpretation, which understands states as having identity security needs on top of their physical ones, I propose an alternative framework for understanding France's security-seeking, threats to identity, and how they shape the foreign policy decision-making process. I assess the impact 'anxiety' had upon the interventionist debates surrounding two recent crises during the Hollande administration: the terrorist threat in Mali and the humanitarian catastrophe in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2013. My conclusions are two-fold. First, anxiety can be seen as both an inhibitor *and* enabler of change. Anxiety over being labeled a neocolonial power was initially conducive to bolstering the normalization of Franco-African security relations initiated at the start of the 21st century and advocated by the Hollande administration. However, as the meaning of each crisis was discursively debated and subsequently re-interpreted, the policy of non-interference became a source of anxiety itself; ontological insecurity, in each case, enabled the behavioral change that anxiety initially prevented. Second, French actors were conflicted over having to choose between

contradictory identity preferences in their response to the crises. As such, decision-makers activated narratives surrounding France's role as a *puissance d'influence*, using historical analogies and references to proximity in order to quiet anxieties, smooth out dissonance, and restore ontological security. In the end, I argue that French interventions in sub-Saharan Africa are a form of routinized foreign policy practice, and it is through these routines that France secures its identity as a security provider on the African continent, a democracy promoter, and a human rights defender. Without interventions, France risks losing the ability to satisfy its very self-image of being an important player in the international system.

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Stephen P. Langley.

Dad, you always said you didn't pursue your PhD because you thought the doctors were all nerds. Well, I guess I'm going to be one of those nerds!

Either way, I hope I would have made you proud. I miss you and love you.

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I also want to thank my classmates throughout my course work as well as my 'Salon' cohort. Your company was much needed and welcomed during this period. Not only is a dissertation a pretty lonely exercise, but it was made more so by the pandemic and the

confinement to Zoom meetings. Somehow, we found a way to keep it light and fun, and I thank everyone who helped make that happen.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

On the morning of 11 January 2013, President François Hollande convened an emergency meeting of his national security team to consider France's options in response to the jihadist advance across the Niger river and subsequent move towards Bamako, the capital of Mali. While the actual intentions of this al-Qaeda affiliate terrorist group were still opaque, both the French Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs (Jean-Yves Le Drian and Laurent Fabius, respectively) agreed that the French President had no choice but to order a military response, and that the French needed to be in the lead. A military campaign would be ordered to protect Malian sovereignty by preventing advancing rebel, criminal, and terrorist groups from gaining any more ground on Malian territory. Later that afternoon, to the surprise of many,[1] two French helicopters with Special Forces on board took off from neighboring Burkina Faso and engaged with that same group. In the subsequent firefight, several militants were killed as well as one of the French pilots, Major Damien Boiteux.[2] Just like that, *Operation Serval* was launched – a unilateral operation at the request of Malian authorities – and France was at war. As the weeks went by, more and more French troops would be deployed to Mali, with the number exceeding 4,500 by

[1] Including US Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, who took a surprise call from Le Drian on the morning of January 11 and was notified from his French counterpart that the time had come to act rapidly in Mali. Confused by this announcement, Panetta thought that France was asking for the US to join a joint intervention force, similar to what had been done in Libya in 2011. Le Drian responded, "No, Mr. Secretary. We are not asking for you to consider an operation. I am calling to inform you that we have just begun one." From Christopher S Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1.
[2] Ibid., 100.

early February.[3] This would make *Operation Serval* the largest French foreign intervention since the Algerian War.[4]

A little less than a year later, the French ordered the dispatch of troops to intervene in another conflict in Africa, this time in the Central African Republic (CAR). Here, intervention came on the heels of United Nations (UN) Resolution 2127 on 5 December 2013, after inter-ethnic quells in Bangui left hundreds of bodies lying in the streets.[5] Up to that point, French troops had been based at the M'Poko airport, reinforced once already in November of that same year, and then augmented with an additional 600 troops after the UN mandate. The peacekeeping mission called *Operation Sangaris* began. Its initial objective was to "disarm all militia and other armed groups that have terrorized the population" and curb the sectarian violence.[6] While not as effective as the speedy operations of *Serval* eleven months prior, the mission was dangerous nevertheless, and French troops found themselves involved in another civil war in another former colony less than twenty years after the Rwandan genocide.

These two cases are a reminder of France's close ties to its former colonies and the early post-colonial practices when France was the uncontested *gendarme* of Africa. At that time, France intervened on a regular basis, deciding which African governments should be supported and which should be allowed to be overthrown. The principal concern was prioritizing political order, even if it came at the hands of "strong men" and dictators.[7] Thanks to a system of formal

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[3] Benedikt Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars* (Springer, 2020).
[4] Marina E Henke, "Why Did France Intervene in Mali in 2013? Examining the Role of Intervention Entrepreneurs," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23, no. 3 (2017).
[5] The New Humanitarian, "Briefing: Who Are the Anti-Balaka of C.A.R.?," https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2014/02/12/who-are-anti-balaka-car.
[6] François Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, À Bangui Le 10 Décembre 2013," news release, 2013.
[7] Nathaniel K Powell, "Battling Instability? The Recurring Logic of French Military Interventions in Africa," *African Security* 10, no. 1 (2017).

and informal networks and lobbies related to Africa, referred to as *Françafrique*[8], France had established a "type of nested neocolonial association" with its former colonies that defined its *pré carré*, or area of exclusive action.[9] However, the interventions described above do not belong to some bygone era. They happened in 2013, a year that marked a resurgence of French presence in Africa. Furthermore, they came on the heels of repeated promises by the French government that an intervention – specifically the type of intervention France was accustomed to in the past – was completely off the table. For instance, in the months leading up to the intervention in Mali, Hollande reaffirmed his non-interventionist stance as an attempt to break with the inglorious interventions of the past. "Those times", he said, "are over".[10] Similarly, when explaining the administration's initial reluctance to get involved in the crisis in the CAR, the President reminded us of a distant past "…when France was very present in Central Africa, too present. This is why, today, we are reluctant [to intervene]."[11]

Why, then, did this resurgence take place? Why did French policy makers choose to engage in this behavior – risking the lives of French service men and women – when their physical security was not at stake? To what extent was the response to these two cases made because they were situations that threatened France's identity security? This dissertation analyzes France's reengagement on the African continent by examining its security-seeking behavior, threats to its identity, and how they shaped the foreign policy decision-making

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[8] *Françafrique* today, when used in the fashion I've spelled it here, has criminal connotations, typically referring to the clientelist dimension of France's Africa policy in the post-colonial years (post 1960s) and the high degree of corruption that accompanied Franco-African relations.
[9] Victor-Manuel Vallin, "France as the Gendarme of Africa, 1960-2014," *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 1 (2015): 79. *Pré carré* also translates to one's own little corner, or backyard.
[10] François Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 27 Août 2012," news release, 2012.
[11] "Conférence De Presse De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française Au Mali Et Sur La Situation En Syrie Et En Centrafrique, À Bamako Le 19 Septembre 2013.," news release, 19 September, 2013.

processes that led to these two interventions. It investigates how the major actors confronted identity anxieties during the two crises and how their perceptions and beliefs surrounding those anxieties shaped the interventionist debate, thus providing a set of reasons that help explain the Hollande administration's willingness to use force as well as France's continuous draw to its former colonial sphere.

The Puzzle

The Hollande administration has come to be seen as particularly interventionist since the President took office in May 2012.[12] His mandate came on the eve of two African interventions spearheaded by his predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy: the Franco-British-led air strikes that helped to topple Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya in March 2011, and the use of French troops to support Ouattara forces in the arrest of former Ivorian President Laurent Gbabgo in April that same year. Then, within less than two years of taking office, Hollande and his advisers decided to launch two military interventions: a counterterrorism operation in Mali and a peacekeeping force in the CAR. Despite persistent commitments to disengage from the continent, 2013 saw the Hollande administration unable to stay away from France's *pré carré*.

This comes as a surprise given that François Hollande and his administration took a hard non-interventionist approach to foreign policy. They vowed to completely retreat from Afghanistan two years ahead of NATO's planned pullout, receiving international criticism along

[12] After the intervention in Mali and the CAR, France transformed its counterterrorism presence in the Sahel into *Operation Barkhane* which covered the countries of Mali, Chad, Niger, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso. France also intervened – to mount strikes against ISIS - in Iraq in 2014 and Syria in 2015, where it almost intervened following Bashar al-Assad's alleged use of chemical weapons in Ghouta in August 2013. For more, see Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer and Olivier Schmitt, "Frogs of War: Explaining the New French Military Interventionism," (2015).

the way.[13] Also, the administration promised cuts to military spending on defense while at the same time voicing its commitment to severing the existing defense agreements between France and its former African colonies, continuing a promise by Hollande's predecessor, Sarkozy, that France would no longer be "le gendarme de l'Afrique".[14] This commitment to reduce permanent military presence in sub-Saharan Africa to a bare minimum was high on the new government's political agenda.[15] But these weren't just empty promises. Troops came home from Afghanistan and for the period 2014-2019 the government froze its annual defense budget at 31.4 billion euros (2013 levels), planning to eliminate nearly 34,000 military personnel to stay within that budget.[16] Furthermore, Hollande became the first president to enter office without an 'Africa Cell' at the Elysée – the group of close presidential advisors that represented the epicenter of *Françafrique* networks – whose end was announced by Sarkozy. Although there was still an Africa 'desk', the restructuring of the office "in charge of the continent" included appointing new advisors who no longer reported directly to the President, but to his diplomatic advisor.[17] These actions, combined with a willingness to endorse African solutions for African problems,[18] a policy embraced by other Western countries as well as the African Union (AU) itself (to

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[13] Steven Erlanger and Rod Nordland, "France, Breaking with N.A.T.O., Plans to Withdraw from Afghanistan a Year Early," *The New York Times*, Jan. 28 2012.
[14]Thomas Mélonio, "Quelle Politique Africaine Pour La France En 2012," *Paris, Fondation Jean Jaurès (Essais-29 Juin)* (2011): 31.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Patrick Vigmal and Alexandria Sage, "France to Cut Military Staff by 12 Pct in Six-Yr Budget," *Reuters*, 1 August 2013.
[17] Thomas Baïetto, "Hollande Peut-Il Rompre Avec "La Françafrique"?," *Francetvinfo*, 6 July 2012.
[18] The slogan 'African solutions to African problems' dominated the French political discourse and was a common thread running through many official declarations regarding the crises, particularly by France's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Laurent Fabius. See, for instance, Laurent Fabius, "Conférence De Presse De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur Les Relations Franco-Tchadiennes Et Sur La Situation Au Mali, À N"Djaména Le 28 Juillet 2012," news release, 2012; "Extraits D'un Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Bfm Tv Le 27 Septembre 2012, Notamment Sur La Situation Au Mali," news release, 2012. Fabius also gave interviews to news agencies where he voiced a commitment to "African solutions" leading up to the crisis in CAR as well. See "Interview De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec France Inter Le 9 Décembre 2013, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, La Situation En Ukraine Et Sur Les Funérailles De Nelson Mandela," news release, 2013.

prevent external interference),[19] indicated that France was finally putting the often-promised, but never-realized, rupture with its traditional approach to African security into practice. It seemed France would finally put *Françafrique* to bed. In fact, on his first trip to Africa, Hollande announced in front of the Senegalese Parliament in Dakar in October 2012 that he would be the first president to finally break with the *Françafrique* system. "The time of what used to be called 'la Françafrique' is over", he said. "There is France and there is Africa. There's the partnership between France and Africa with relations based on respect, clarity, and solidarity."[20] However, the carefully constructed narrative of non-intervention and disengagement from Africa was put to question when Hollande ordered the counterterrorist operation in Mali and committed more troops to the peacekeeping operation in the CAR. Signs were set on change but the opposite happened and France was drawn into two more conflicts on the continent.

Aware of this contradiction between rhetoric and practice, French officials almost immediately followed their decisions to intervene with stories about the temporary nature of each operation. *Libération*, a center-left daily newspaper in France, quoted Hollande on 15 January 2013 saying, "France has no inclination to stay in Mali, but" he continued, "we do have an objective, which is to ensure that when we leave there is security in Mali, legitimate authorities, an electoral process and no more terrorists who threaten [the integrity of the country]."[21] Almost a decade later, in October 2021 *Le Figaro*, a center-right daily newspaper in France, quoted President Macron with almost the exact same expression, saying "France has no inclination to stay for the long term in Mali."[22] By that time, *Operation Serval* had morphed into a decade-long

[19] Comfort Ero, 2 December, 2013, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/problems-african-solutions.
[20] François Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Entre La France Et L'afrique, À Dakar Le 12 Octobre 2012," news release, 12 October, 2012.
[21] Libération, "Hollande: «La France N'a Pas Vocation À Rester Au Mali»," *Libération*, 15 January 2013.
[22] Le Figaro, "Mali: La France «N'a Pas Vocation À Rester», Dit Macron," *Le Figaro*, 8 October 2021.

counterterrorism operation code-named *Barkhane*. In fact, at the time of writing, France is finalizing its withdrawal of troops from the Sahel only a year after the American administration's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, causing pundits and western media circles to renew the 'Sahelistan' discourse, conflating the operations and conflict dynamics in the Sahel to that of Afghanistan.[23] Similarly, even before troops were deployed to the CAR French officials, including the President himself, were adamant that the operation would be "swift and short".[24] This begs the question: how are we to understand France's most recent excursions on the African continent amidst the backdrop of disengagement? How are we to explain the constant pull towards Africa, and why can't the French simply let go? Why does France continue to intervene militarily in sub-Saharan Africa despite repeated commitments, both in rhetoric and practice, to disengage and adhere to strict non-intervention? Why, in other words, is it so hard to change French security policy in Africa?

To be sure, Africa has risen significantly in importance on the global agenda in the 21st century, with increased investment opportunities garnering the interest of all the major world players for both economic and strategic reasons.[25] In this "new scramble", there is geo-economic competition to resource access, as well as motives to seek diplomatic support in the United Nations.[26] China in particular has become one of Africa's largest trading partners. Chinese companies are investing heavily on the continent including the establishment of several military

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[23] The neologism 'Sahelistan' gained popularity in 2012 when Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius injected the word into official discourse to liken the growing rise of terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and drug trafficking in Mali to that of Afghanistan in the years prior to the attacks of 9/11. See, for example Laurent Fabius, "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Europe 1 Le 6 Juillet 2012, Sur La Situation Politique En Syrie, Le Retrait Des Troupes Françaises D'afghanistan Et Sur La Présence Du Groupe Islamiste Aqmi Au Mali," news release, 2012; "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Itélé Le 25 Septembre 2012, Sur La Situation Au Mali," news release, 2012.
[24] Quoted in Kim Willsher and Andrew Sparrow, "French Troops Sent into Central African Republic in Effort to Stop Bloodshed," *The Guardian*, 6 December 2013.
[25] Pádraig Carmody, *The New Scramble for Africa* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017).
[26] Ibid.

bases, with the first installed in Djibouti on the coast of the Horn of Africa in 2017 and another planned in Equatorial Guinea on the continent's Atlantic coast, each with docks reportedly capable of accommodating aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines.[27] The United States now has more than a dozen military bases and camps on the continent, and Russian mercenaries – most notably the Wagner Group – have seen a resurgence in Africa, hired to fight wars, spread disinformation, and prop up autocrats in an effort to grow Russia's footprint.[28] While it seems the traditional foreign actors, i.e. the former colonial powers, are being marginalized, one can still see patterns of the old hierarchical order. The Global North continues to dominate the discourse and impose many of the security practices on the continent, and despite repeated claims for the 'Africanization of Africa's security', Africa sees continuous foreign military intervention. The difference is that unlike during the Cold War – where the scramble, complicated by the de-colonization process, was made in strategic and ideological terms as the US and USSR competed for influence – today's interventions are frequently justified in terms of promoting global security in the fight against terror, humanitarianism, or as a response to continuous civil wars.[29]

The US was one of the leading actors in the international movement to securitize the African continent with President George W. Bush and his advisors, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, pushing hard to label the Sahara as a major strategic front in the Global War on Terror (GWOT).[30] Using catch phrases like "swamp of terror", "terrorist infestation", and " magnet for

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[27] Michaël Tanchum, "China's New Military Base in Africa: What It Means for Europe and America," ecfr.eu, https://ecfr.eu/article/chinas-new-military-base-in-africa-what-it-means-for-europe-and-america/.
[28] Declan Walsh, "Putin's Shadow Soldiers: How the Wagner Group Is Expanding in Africa," *The New York Times*, 31 May 2022.
[29] Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Cornell University Press, 2011).
[30] Jeremy Keenan, *The Dark Sahara: America's War on Terror in Africa* (JSTOR, 2009).

terrorists", top military and intelligence officials in the Bush government fabricated a "fiction of terrorism that in turn created the ideological conditions for the US's militarization of Africa."[31] Keenan argues that the US needed this story to justify what they called their "banana theory" of terrorism, which was a theory that the source of anti-Western terrorism could be envisioned as a banana-shaped route that al-Qaeda terrorists dislodged from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Middle East would take into Africa across the Sahel countries of Chad, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania in order to link up with Islamist militants in the Maghreb.[32] This story, argues Keenan, became a dominant narrative within the Western-led global security discourse and justified the establishment of several initiatives designed to assist regional actors in detecting and responding to the suspicious movement of people and goods across their borders. The Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), the African Peace Facility (APF), and the US African Command (AFRICOM) were created in the wake of that discourse.

This new interest in African security made the international community look towards those powers who had longstanding experience in military interventions as well as to those who showed a continuous willingness to manage crises in the region. France fit the bill, soon becoming one of the US's greatest allies in their sub-Saharan counterterrorism strategy.[33] The European Union has also come to expect that France will intervene, when necessary, due to its special "kinship"[34] with its former colonies and because France has distinguished itself from other European states (who aren't as committed as the French to military action) by being more

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[31] Ibid., 3-5.
[32] Ibid. See also, Jeremy Keenan, "The Banana Theory of Terrorism: Alternative Truths and the Collapse of the 'Second'(Saharan) Front in the War on Terror," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25, no. 1 (2007).
[33] The Economist, "Cheese-Eating Warriors," *The Economist*, 29 November 2014.
[34] For more on this kinship see J-F Bayart, "France-Afrique: La Fin Du Pacte Colonial," *Politique Africaine*, no. 39 (1990); Pernille Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur* (Springer, 2017).

willing to accept greater risk.[35] On top of expectations from the US and the international community that France will engage in African crises when they emerge, recent observers have begun to highlight the influence that African elites have in determining France's Africa policy.[36] Continuous requests from ruling African leaders have made France a desirable security actor on the continent, particularly in francophone Africa. Despite the repeated promises by multiple French administrations to reduce their military activity in the region, France has participated in nine military operations since 2000.[37] Given Africa's growth of importance on the international security agenda and France's renewed role as security provider in Africa, I intend to follow the advice of recent scholarship which suggests it is time to re-examine French security policies and defense strategies in Africa in the 21st century.[38]

Rationalist Explanations and their Shortcomings

Before introducing how I intend to investigate this puzzle, it is important to briefly describe the state of the literature when it comes to explaining contemporary French security policy in Africa, and where some of their shortcomings lay. Traditional accounts of French security policy in Africa, while comprehensive, largely focus on three major variables in explaining why France seems unable to "let go" of its traditional sphere of influence. First, neo-

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[35] Alice Pannier and Olivier Schmitt, "Institutionalised Cooperation and Policy Convergence in European Defence: Lessons from the Relations between France, Germany and the Uk," *European security* 23, no. 3 (2014).
[36] See, for instance, Antoine Glaser, *Africafrance: Quand Les Dirigeants Africains Deviennent Les Maîtres Du Jeu* (Fayard, 2014); Powell, "Battling Instability? The Recurring Logic of French Military Interventions in Africa."
[37] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.
[38] Benedikt Erforth makes this request specifically, and it is to him that I owe the genesis of this research project. His analysis of traditional explanations of French foreign policy opened my eyes to the need to understand the process of decision-making as opposed to merely the outcomes of foreign policy choices. Nathanael Powell, Olivier Schmitt, and Pernille Rieker also take approaches to re-examine the "newness" of French foreign and security policy. See, for example, ibid.; Powell, "Battling Instability? The Recurring Logic of French Military Interventions in Africa."; Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*; Olivier Schmitt, "The Reluctant Atlanticist: France's Security and Defence Policy in a Transatlantic Context," (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

colonial domination is an analytical frame frequently used when it comes to explaining France's military interventions in Africa. Neo-colonialism alone, however, is not enough to explain why French leaders were so adamant about non-intervention despite their decision to intervene anyway. Related to the neo-colonial analysis are arguments that suggest it is France's economic and material interests in the region that drive its security policy there.[39] Again, while important, this is largely incomplete given that resource mobilization has become less significant in France's engagement decisions with Africa. For example, French exports to Africa and African natural resources (such as uranium, oil, and gas) have become less important than before.[40] Furthermore, China and other players are increasingly outcompeting French businesses in Africa in construction, telecommunications, and vehicles.[41] Philippe Hugon, the Director in charge of Africa at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS), was quoted on the news network *France 24* in 2016 saying, "You can't disassociate a military intervention from strategic and economic interests like energy, oil, and natural gas. But you can't explain a military intervention by that factor alone. It's not *the* determining factor but one of many factors present in an operation."[42] A second approach that seeks to understand those other "factors" that influence France's policies uses an ideological or identity-based framework based on the concept of *grandeur.* As a concept, however, there is hardly consensus on what that word actually means, causing different scholars to have different conclusions about how it should be interpreted. In some cases, these analyses purport that France is suffering from schizophrenia when it comes to

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[39] For example, some find that the quest for resources such as Niger's uranium or Mali's gold reserves are what drive French interventions. See Sergei Boeke and Bart Schuurman, "Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali, 2013–2014," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 6 (2015).
[40] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*.
[41] See, for instance, Paul Melly and Vincent Darracq, *A New Way to Engage?: French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande* (2013); Bruno Tertrais, *Uranium from Niger: A Key Resource of Diminishing Importance for France* (JSTOR, 2013).
[42] Florence Villeminot, "Does 'La Françafrique' Still Exist?," *France24*, 15 September 2016.

foreign policy, often times representing policy choices as evidence of a confused identity.[43] I disagree with these conclusions. As I will attempt to show in this dissertation, France is not confused about its identity. Rather, France's biographical narrative relating to African security policy leaves it with a choice between contradictory identity preferences which induces anxiety, and decision makers must reconcile those contradictions in order to smooth out their anxieties. Finally, there are approaches in the literature on French foreign policy towards Africa, in particular since the end of the Cold War, that focus on the extent to which current French interventionism fits on a continuum of historical continuity versus change.[44] Specifically, the analyses attempt to define whether French foreign policy practices of Fifth Republic Presidents reflect adherence to the traditional 'Gaullo-Mitterandist' consensus or if they reflect some type of rupture. Other studies analyze the extent to which French foreign policy practices have remained independent and autonomous – the way de Gaulle envisioned France, as a residual world power, could maintain its *grandeur* – or whether they have become more "Atlanticist/Neoconservative".[45] However, looking too far into the past risks changing the contextual environment within which decisions were made during the two crises of the Hollande administration.

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[43] See, for example Yves Gounin, *La France En Afrique: Le Combat Des Anciens Et Des Modernes* (De Boeck Supérieur, 2009); Gordon D. Cumming, "Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa Policy: Change, Continuity or Confusion?," *French politics* 11, no. 1 (2013).

[44] For a good starting point on this debate over continuity versus change, see Tony Chafer, Gordon D Cumming, and Roel van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43, no. 4 (2020); Tony Chafer, "French African Policy in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 19, no. 2 (2001).

[45] For a review of the continuity versus change literature regarding European integration and cultural universalism, see, Tony Chafer and Emmanuel Godin, *The End of the French Exception? Decline and Revival of the 'French Model'* (Springer, 2010); Emmanuel Godin and Tony Chafer, *The French Exception* (Berghahn Books, 2004). For national *grandeur*, see, Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*. For Atlantic solidarity and the willingness to play a powerful global and European role in a unique way, see, Philip G Cerny, *The Politics of Grandeur: Ideological Aspects of De Gaulle's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); Maurice Vaïsse, *La Puissance Ou L'influence? La France Dans Le Monde Depuis 1958* (Fayard, 2009).

In summary, the focus of most studies of French foreign policy rests on analysis of the practices themselves; what has been studied is the *outcome* of decision-making and not the *process*.[46] While the traditional accounts of France's African security policy agree that foreign policy is a large element of French (and French political actors') identity, I argue that studying how the meaning of French identity is made during the foreign policy-making process can offer new explanations of choices. Analyzing how policy-making processes reflect anxieties or insecurities about French identity needs, and how those anxieties and insecurities inhibit or enable certain policy choices – let alone practices – can add causal depth and point to new implications. Furthermore, understanding how those anxieties are overcome can shed light on the importance states (and their leaders) attribute to their identities and the need for continuity in their self-image.

The Approach of this Dissertation and its Contributions

Therefore, in an effort to contribute to the literature that explains French state decision-making and foreign policy processes, while purposefully shying away from an outcome-oriented analysis, I propose adopting a socio-psychological approach to studying French interventionism in Africa. In particular, I adopt an ontological security approach to understand the relationship

[46] There are exceptions, of course. See for instance Falk Ostermann, *Security, Defense Discourse and Identity in NATO and Europe: How France Changed Foreign Policy* (Routledge, 2018); Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*; Henrik Larsen, *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe*, vol. 10 (Routledge, 2005); Ole Wæver, "Identity, Communities and Foreign Policy," (Routledge London, 2002); Ulrich Krotz, *History and Foreign Policy in France and Germany* (Springer, 2015); Daniel Bourmaud, "France in Africa: African Politics and French Foreign Policy," *African Issues* 23, no. 2 (1995); Nathaniel K Powell, *France's Wars in Chad: Military Intervention and Decolonization in Africa*, vol. 150 (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Jean-Christophe Notin, *La Guerre De La France Au Mali* (Tallandier, 2014). Most notably, Notin proposes a process-oriented approach to the analysis of Operation Serval, reconstructing the decision-making of the actors from in-depth interviews. While he is interested reconstructing the process, he does not approach the analysis through a particular theoretical lens.

between state identity needs and foreign policy choices.[47] Ontological security, in its simplest form, refers to the security not of the physical body but of the self. It is security of the identity, "the subjective sense of who one is that enables and motivates action and choice".[48] Borrowing basic assumptions of constructivism – namely that power and interest are not material things but ideas, and that actors make their world by acting on the basis of meanings – ontological security provides a key point of connection between identity needs and foreign policy choices.[49] It is a concept that helps us think about how the ability to make choices and act depends critically on our sense of self. States seek ontological security because "they want to maintain *consistent self-concepts* and the 'Self' of states is constituted and maintained through a narrative which gives life to routinized foreign policy actions" (emphasis in original).[50] Furthermore, it shows us that when this sense of self is disrupted, or there is an ontological security breach (either via crises that challenge our identity and the ability to sustain routines, or our biographical narratives are called into question) we begin to feel as if we no longer know who we are.[51] As a result, we feel anxiety or shame. These emotions represent a sense of ontological insecurity.

Anxiety, therefore, is an important concept in ontological security studies, especially when trying to understand behavioral change.[52] Because the key concern of ontological security is the management of uncertainty, which is understood as anxiety, actors are taken to prefer

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[47] For the application of ontological security at the individual level, see R.D. Laing, *Self and Others* (Pantheon Books, 1961). For the sociological application of ontological security, see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford University Press, 1991).
[48] Jennifer Mitzen and Kyle Larson, "Ontological Security and Foreign Policy," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2017).
[49] For synergies between foreign policy studies and constructivism, see Juliet Kaarbo, "Foreign Policy Analysis in the Twenty-First Century: Back to Comparison, Forward to Identity and Ideas," *International Studies Review* 5, no. 2 (2003); David Patrick Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3, no. 1 (2007).
[50] Brent J Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State* (Routledge, 2008), 3.
[51] Mitzen and Larson, "Ontological Security and Foreign Policy."
[52] For a comprehensive review of the concept of anxiety in ontological security studies, see Nina C Krickel-Choi, "The Concept of Anxiety in Ontological Security Studies," *International Studies Review* 24, no. 3 (2022).

stability over change as long as that action is understood as part of that actor's biographical narrative or routine (even if that action seems irrational or comes with risks to physical or material security). On the other hand, anxiety – or the related emotion of shame – can also be seen as capable of inducing behavioral change. This is because the anxiety experienced as a result of ontological insecurity is intolerable, forcing one of two things to happen. Either the actor changes their behavior or they change their self-conception (by activating different elements of the biographical narrative to accommodate this anxiety), which allows him/her to re-establish routines that can, once again, consistently maintain self-identity.

In this dissertation, I will argue that French actors faced two main threats to their identity. First, the French narrative of relying on multilateralism and the 'Africanization of Africa's security' – although a critical part of 21st century French security policy – contradicted a more deep-seated identity, that of a *puissance d'influence* (an influential power). This created anxiety, and the decision makers, who felt responsible for creating stability, activated narratives of kinship, responsibility, proximity, and used analogies (specifically relating to the global war on terror and previous humanitarian crises) in order to smooth out those anxieties. In other words, they changed the "story" to make what seemed like irrational state behavior into something that was ontologically palatable. Second, French decision makers faced the anxiety of being seen as a neocolonial power. While at first this anxiety seemed like it would reinforce the status quo, i.e., that France would follow up its non-interventionist discourse by staying *out* of the crises, it was in fact ontological insecurity which made this behavioral rigidity impossible. France's self-image as a power that wishes to remain influential in the world and who wished to avoid the shame of another Rwanda, was merely responding to demands of ontological security. In other words, France's new unwillingness to remain disengaged from her former colonies was now seen as a

rational behavior. In the end, I argue that the French engaged in ontological security-seeking behavior in order to affirm their sense of self-identity, and this process resulted in interventions in both cases. Thus, the dissertation shows that French interventions in sub-Saharan Africa can be understood as a form of routinized foreign policy practice, and it is through these routines that France secures its identity as a security provider on the African continent, a democracy promoter, and a human rights defender. Without interventions, France risks losing the ability to satisfy its very self-image of being an influential player in the international system.

While this dissertation does engage with the continuity versus change debate, it seeks to do so through analyzing the decision-making process itself, and the extent to which the identity security-seeking behavior of French actors, and the anxieties surrounding their identities, shaped the decision-making process. Also, this approach does not falsify other accounts of state action. Rather, it provides what I consider a more focused understanding of what motivates their actions; motivation, in this case, categorized as a reflection of the identity France wants to portray to itself and the outside world. I would, however, like to acknowledge the modest aim of this project. I am acutely aware of the complexity involved with understanding France's relationship with its former colonies, particularly in the realm of security, and the numerous contexts and lenses that need to be considered to explain French interventionism in sub-Saharan Africa. One could consider (as most scholars have done) a longer historical context to explain the nature of France's relationship with the African continent and how it relates to the military culture. One could also turn the focus around and view the anxieties surrounding the crises through the eyes of the Africans themselves as opposed to through the eyes of French decision-makers. Nevertheless, the focus of this project is very specific; I have dedicated my efforts to understanding the choice to intervene by analyzing the identity security-seeking needs of French

political actors, and the extent to which threats to identity shaped the decision-making process. In the end, I hope to unravel the greater mystery of why France can't disengage from sub-Saharan conflict despite numerous commitments – both in rhetoric and in practice – to do so.

Operationalization of Research Question and Methodology

Having laid out the paradox surrounding France's rhetoric of disengagement and practices of intervention, as well as the (very small) gaps in the literature explaining French security policies in Africa, I will explain the methodology used in the present study. First, I will clearly restate my research question. *This dissertation will investigate how French leaders in the Hollande administration confronted identity anxieties during the crises in Mali and the CAR from 2012-2013, and how their perceptions and beliefs surrounding those anxieties influenced the decision-making process.* This means that my variable of interest is the decision-making process itself (as opposed to the outcome), and the explanatory variables (or the things that shape the outcome of the decision-making process) are the actors' perceptions and beliefs regarding anxieties over 'self' and identity. My level of analysis rests with the individual actors, however, as is customary in some ontological security studies, I scale up the ontological needs of the individual to those of the state. This scaling up is not without its problems, as scholars have pointed out, and I will address those in more detail in Chapter III.

How do I demonstrate my argument? Methodologically, this project starts from two outcomes, that is the two policy decisions to intervene, and asks how these decisions came about by deconstructing the processes leading to their materialization. Because I am interested in how actors created meaning for their actions (i.e., I am interested in what motivated the actions), and because I want to explicate the intentions of those actions, instead of what *caused* them, my

study is informed by the interpretivist approach to social science.[53] This approach assumes that facts and observations are not reducible to "law-like generalizations of the physical sciences" which always permit us to explain action through causal analysis.[54] Rather, it assumes that understanding the processes that motivated the action, i.e., to interpret the action, allows us to better understand the object of inquiry, without relying on a strict analysis of causal chains. The ontological security process – a process that deals with self-identity, creating meaning through biographical narratives, taking action to promote a desired vision of 'self' to others, overcoming insecurities regarding divided visions of 'self', and how all of this shapes the "place of the national self in an international context" – lends itself to an interpretative approach.[55]

In order to *interpret* the impact anxieties had upon the interventionist debate surrounding the two crises (terrorist threat in Mali and humanitarian catastrophe in CAR) I propose a case-narrative approach to resurrect, in each case, meaning as it relates to agents' perceptions and beliefs of an event. Narrative research has become a trending topic in international studies, with a growing body of research adopting methods and insights from the fields of sociology, narratology, linguistics, and related fields to better explain international relations (IR). Scholars using narrative as a conceptual tool in their research focus mostly on answering questions about how narratives can be used to shape future policy courses, or how they impact the identity of agents and actors. But narratives are not merely a chronological recollection of facts and events. Conceptually, narratives are frameworks that allow humans to make sense of the world and

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[53] Friedrich V Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge University Press, 1991); Lucas Knotter, "Interpretivism in International Relations Research," in *Handbook of Research Methods in International Relations* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022).
[54] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 6.
[55] Ibid.

create their own identities.[56] They are how "human beings order disordered experience and impart meaning to themselves and their world."[57] Narratives, however, can also be seen as either a structuring force (i.e., shaping the policy terrain where choices are made influencing what is sayable, let alone doable) or as a tool to be wielded by policy makers (to impose certainty to uncertain situations, or as a rhetorical device to influence perceptions or understanding of a crisis), all of which will be described in more detail in Chapter IV. As such, this dissertation considers narratives from all three aspects: a structuring force, a tool, and as a conceptual framework. Narratives, I will show, are critical for political life, and are important for understanding the need for ontological security.

The case-narrative approach does more than just restate observations. It reconstructs a particular "story", looking for critical junctures and important "plot" points, evaluating the "scene" of action, or the "characterization of the actors". [58] A narrative approach, therefore, seeks to uncover points at which ontological security is interrupted, where disjuncture in the narrative of the self is created, and how anxiety is overcome.

How, specifically, do I perform a case-narrative analysis? First, I will define (and defend) whose identity I am interested in studying. In Chapter IV, I argue that the units of analysis for decisions regarding foreign military interventions resides with a 'decisional group' that consists of the French President and his advisers, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Defense. While the institutional make-up of French foreign policy decision-making gives the

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[56] Margaret R Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and society* (1994): 606.
[57] Ronald R Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, vol. 138 (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2.
[58] "Plot", "setting", "characterization of actors"; these are part of what is known as Burke's dramatic pentad – the five key elements of a fully drawn narrative (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose) - and are the focus of analysis in studies doing narrative research. See, for instance, Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, vol. 177 (Univ of California Press, 1969); Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.

President exceptional autonomy in security policy, I argue that the group of advisors around him are important state agents and played a consequential role in the decision to intervene. Furthermore, I adopt a position taken by some in ontological security studies: "because they represent their state, state agents 'are the state' because they have the moral burden of making policy choices *and* the capacity to implement those decisions" (emphasis in original).[59]

Second, as this research is focused on the decision-making process of political actors, and since there is no direct access to a policy maker's mind, I rely on substitute data for reconstructing their beliefs and perceptions. All sources examined are language based – either written or oral – and include policy documents, official statements, speeches, press conferences, media interviews, press releases, and national security strategy documents (a.k.a. White Papers). I also consider the minutes of weekly hearings of the foreign minister and the defense minister in front of parliamentary committees as well as governmental declarations made in Parliament (both in front of the Senate and the National Assembly).[60] Finally, I analyze the discourse surrounding the events, using scholarly journals and news reports to contextualize the environment within which the decisions to intervene were made. Using tools from discourse analysis – with an ontological security interpretation – I seek to understand the intentions of actors, not the outcomes of their actions.

This process is complemented by content analysis, which focuses on the coding of texts, in order to assess measures of frequency of particular words (or phrases) that exist within the discourse. While content analysis has been criticized for being both presumptive about stability of meaning and prioritizing what is said over what is *not* said, I argue that they are a productive

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[59] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 18.
[60] These minutes and declarations can be accessed via the website for the Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, "Basedoc: Déclarations officielles et points de presse", http://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr

complement to discourse analysis. Yoshikoder, a multilingual text-analysis platform, is used to list all words, with their given frequency and proportion, in a given text or series of texts (by the same author).[61] It allows for easy comparison of categorical frequencies across texts and can facilitate the search for key words that reflect an actor's desire for ontological security, such as 'biography', 'routine', 'self-identity', 'shame', or 'anxiety' (and their synonyms). What I am looking for precisely (i.e., the evidence I use to make my argument) are data that suggests actors are driven to intervene in Africa by their desire to satisfy their ontological security. Specifically, I look for instances where actors *1) link justification for a policy with a description or understanding of their state's self or biographical narrative, 2) exhibit the willingness and capacity to overcome a critical situation so that it no longer threatens their identity, and 3) exhibit emotions related to anxiety, and the extent to which those emotions enabled or constrained policy change*. These concepts – biographical narrative, critical situation, and anxiety - will be explained in greater detail in Chapter III.

For analytical purposes, in order to re-create the intentions of decision-makers, I break the process into three distinct steps: 1) *how the crisis made its way onto the security agenda, 2) how the decision was discursively debated, and 3) how the decision itself was justified*.[62] Using a narrative approach to interpret actions I seek to understand how actors appropriate the 'proximity' of Africa into their biographical narrative and how that contributes to keeping African crises on the French security agenda.[63] Specifically, a narrative re-telling of how actors

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[61] Available at www.yoshikoder.org

[62] These three stages are adopted from Laswell's policy cycle, who examined the decision-making process for public policy in five stages: agenda-setting, policy formulation, public policy decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. Of these, the three most crucial are agenda-setting, formulation, and implementation. See Jean-François Savard and Rachel Banville, "Policy Cycles," *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Public Administration* (2012).

[63] The concept of *Eurafrique* best captures the importance of African 'proximity' to Europe. Primarily, a synonym for complementary growth, reciprocity, and solidarity, some scholars have found proximity to be important for explaining why francophone Africa holds special importance for French decision-makers. See, for instance,

emplot the continent into their stories, how they *characterize* the actors as having a cultural similarity, and how they set the *scene* of their stories in geographical proximity to France and Europe reveals that French policy makers have a connection with Africa and that it is a large part of the French self-identity. Furthermore, discourse analysis can reveal: how narratives are activated by actors to bring a sense of routine to counter anxieties during the intervention decision-making, as well as how the justification process served to restore ontological security amongst the actors; how state agents justify a policy by reasoning what such a policy means about their state's sense of self-identity; when considerations of self-identity led to a certain policy change or decision; and how actors create meaning of their self-identity as well as their identity threats (i.e., what causes them, where they come from, why they must be dealt with, and why intervention was the solution to best confront those threats).

Defense of Cases

The two cases, as mentioned before, are *Operation Serval* in Mali and *Operation Sangaris* in the CAR. They have been chosen for a variety of reasons. First, they represent what is called a critical situation. In ontological security studies, critical situations are situations which disturb the "institutionalized routines" of states and threaten their identity; as such, agents perceive that something can be done to eliminate them, or to get themselves out of these critical situations.[64] Therefore, as the two cases forced actors to contemplate and debate competing meanings of self (multilateralism versus independence/autonomy, or neocolonialism versus disengagement), they are a rich hunting ground for determining the extent to which the identity-

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Benedikt Erforth, "Mental Maps and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Eurafrique and the French Military Intervention in Mali," *European Review of International Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016).

[64] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

seeking needs of state actors shaped the decision-making process. Second, because both interventions occurred in former French colonies, I argue that they can shed light on contemporary views towards francophone Africa. Third, the two cases represent the dominant normative justifications for Western-led interventions in the 21st century: the GWOT and humanitarianism. Studying these two cases side-by-side allows me to understand how actors interpreted the two as 'threats' and how they shaped their sense of 'self'. This can, in turn, help explain why France chose two similar solutions regarding two very different threats. Fourth, the cases are chosen because they provide important puzzles for the traditional security literature, which assumes survival as the primary (and perhaps only) motive nations seek to satisfy. Interventions by definition are wars of choice; and as such, represent decisions that are costly (both financially and physically) and made in the face of crises that do not threaten the physical survival of the state. Why, then, does France choose to risk life and limb to fight in these wars? These cases are chosen with the purpose to advance the scholarship that considers states to be driven by needs other than survival. In other words, they have a desire to satisfy *both* physical and ontological security needs. With that purpose in mind, let me outline my argument in this dissertation by summarizing each of my chapters.

Structure of Dissertation: Chapter Summaries and Conclusion

This dissertation is comprised of seven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II outlines the current state of research as the first step in understanding the disconnect between rhetoric and practice regarding interventions in Africa as a response to French ontological security needs. This chapter not only reviews French security policy in Africa but also serves to contextualize my choice of ontological security as a research agenda. I do so by

summarizing three prominent strands of literature used to explain French foreign policy in general and French security and defense policy in Africa in particular. Covering the period from the foundation of the Fifth Republic in 1958 to present, I focus mostly on the first two decades of the 21st century. This has a two-fold purpose. First, it serves to outline France's specific biographical narrative with respect to its former African colonies. Second, I show what I perceive as shortcomings in the literature – such as the bias towards outcomes over processes – and establish the rationale for my study of decision-making.

In Chapter III, I cover the main points of ontological security studies as they relate to foreign policy and justify why the concept is a promising analytical perspective for understanding French foreign policy decision-making. This section will explain how self-identities are constructed through a state's biographical narrative; how states experience shame or anxiety when there is a challenge or disconnect with that self-identity; and how anxiety can be seen as both a change-inducing and change-inhibiting emotion.

Chapter IV will defend the methods used to capture ontological security-seeking behavior when conducting the empirical case studies. Because I am interested in a process as opposed to an outcome, i.e., I want to know what actors perceive to be threats to identity rather than how they responded to those threats, discourse analysis (via the case-narrative approach) is used to interpret the decision-making processes in each of the cases. This section will include a review of narratives as being an important conceptual tool to study foreign policy choices and will defend why the case-narrative approach is appropriate for interpreting ontological security within the cases. In a subsequent section, I define the units of analysis (i.e., who the decision-makers and narrators of a state's biography were in the Hollande administration), where the data came from, and how it was analyzed. Special attention is given to ontological security referents like critical

situations and anxiety – which I define in Chapter III – and suggest what would constitute evidence of each referent. The chapter also reviews my case selection and explains my analytical process for recreating the "story" of each case, specifically looking at three stages of the decision-making process: *agenda-setting, debating the intervention, and justifying the decision*. I end this chapter with a brief defense of these methods as being both rigorous and thorough enough to satisfy even the most rationalist of scholars, as well as address some conceptual and methodological concerns (namely the scaling up of the approach from people to states, as well as the structure-versus-agency debate in the field).

Chapter V is the first of two empirical chapters applying the theoretical framework to French interventionism in Africa. After a short description of the underlying causes that led to the security crisis in Mali, the chapter analyzes what that threat meant to the French in order to understand why decision makers would choose to intervene despite repeated commitments to the contrary. By focusing on the debates among French decision-makers, I assess the impact two contradictory state identities – multilateralism versus independence – had on the decision-making process, and how they were a source of anxiety for state agents. In particular, I assess how the *Ansar ad-Din*-led offensive in early January 2013 prevented French decision-makers from keeping their promise to stay out of Africa's problems, and I show how that changed the meaning of the crisis in Mali to one requiring a military solution, not just a political one, thus clarifying why French leaders decided to intervene despite no real threat to France's (or Europe's) physical security. I also perform a narrative reading of African proximity in order to assess how a security threat in Mali (as well as in the CAR in the following chapter) can be seen as a threat to the French 'self', and how that threat, in turn, contributed to the decision to intervene. In the conclusion of this chapter, I argue that French actors were conflicted over

having to choose between contradictory identity preferences. In response, they activated key elements of the biographical narrative to quiet anxieties, smooth out contradictions, and restore ontological security.

Chapter VI applies the same approach to the case of humanitarian intervention in the CAR. Like the previous one, this chapter first provides a background note on the political and security crisis in the CAR, tracing its emergence through inter-ethnic and inter-communal violence. Then, just as in the previous chapter, it moves to an ontological security interpretation of the decision-making process. In this case I seek to understand how state agents confronted the idea of *non*-intervention which came to be perceived as a threat to their state's self-identity. By focusing on how state agents debated intervention in the context of a desire to disengage and avoid the stigma of being labeled a neocolonial power, I argue that this stigma created anxiety which was the stimulus for sustaining France's non-interventionist policy. However, because actors saw themselves as a *puissance d'influence*, this policy stance created ontological insecurity. In this case, intervention can be seen as a product of French actors' need to reaffirm their self-image, honor, and standing in the world.

In Chapter VII, I conclude with an assessment of the contribution this type of study has made on demystifying French security policy in Africa. By highlighting the analysis of processes over outcomes, I argue that it is a step in the right direction. Furthermore, I summarize the project's principal findings surrounding the concept of anxiety, highlighting the way it shaped French foreign policy choices and whether they enabled or inhibited France's ability to maintain a consistent sense of 'self'. I also make the argument that French interventions in sub-Saharan Africa are a form of routinized relationships, and it is through these routines that France secures its identity as a security provider on the African continent, as a universal democracy promoter,

and human rights defender. Without interventions, France risks losing the ability to satisfy its very self-image of being an important player in the international system. Finally, I conclude this chapter with some implications for future research in ontological security studies.

In summary, this research project aims to unravel the mystery of why France continues to intervene in sub-Saharan Africa despite repeated commitments to disengage and adhere to strict non-intervention. While many accounts of French security policy in Africa have been made, few have engaged with the decision-making process itself, and none (that I am aware of) have approached it from an ontological security interpretation. Thus, I propose an alternative framework for understanding France's security-seeking behavior, threats to identity, and how they shape the foreign policy decision-making process. In the end, my purpose is to contribute to the literature that attempts to show how preservation of self-identity is indeed a 'security interest' of states.

And to that end, this project has shown that identity, anxiety, and narratives (all part of the ontological security process) are important factors that shape the foreign policy process and provide a deeper understanding of policy outcomes. It has also shown that narratives can be both a structural force (i.e., that a biographical narrative reinforces stability and continuity) as well as a tool to be wielded by policy makers in order to overcome ontological anxiety. Words (states use to describe their own actions and the actions of others) matter in international politics; and those words have implications for foreign policy. Therefore, we should pay as much attention to what state agents say (and how they say it) as to what they do.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW: FRENCH SECURITY POLICY IN AFRICA

France's relations with Africa have captivated the media and have fueled political and intellectual debates for years.[1] This is because France's Africa policy, being at the heart of French foreign policy, is intimately connected to the country's national identity, constituting an important part of policy-makers' role conceptions as they seek to maintain *grandeur* as a residual world power.[2] In fact, as I will show below, France's position in Europe and the world has been largely influenced by its role in Africa since the early 20th century. This remains the case today, as exemplified by a report published by the French Senate, entitled *Africa is our Future* (*L'Afrique est notre Avenir*), which highlighted ten priorities and 70 measures to improve French-African relations, indicating the degree to which Africa remains a cornerstone of France's foreign relations policy. While there are many domains of French policy-making in Africa, such as economic, political, and cultural, the most visible manifestation remains military.[3] As such, much has been written (and debated) about French African interventions. In order to place the Malian and Central African crises within the broader debates over France's

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[1] See, for instance, Bruno Charbonneau, "Dreams of Empire: France, Europe, and the New Interventionism in Africa," *Modern & Contemporary France* 16, no. 3 (2008); Daniela Kroslak, "France's Policy Towards Africa: Continuity or Change?," in *Africa in International Politics* (Routledge, 2004); M Daniel Pepy, "France's Relations with Africa," *African Affairs* 69, no. 275 (1970).

[2] For a brief summary of France's Africa policy constituting policy-maker's national identity, see Tomáš Profant, "French Geopolitics in Africa: From Neocolonialism to Identity," *Perspectives: Review of International Affairs*, no. 1 (2010); Andrew M Appleton, "France the Unexceptional," in *The French Fifth Republic at Fifty: Beyond Stereotypes* (2009). For a review of France's role conception as a residual world power in international politics, see Ulrich Krotz, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies: France and Germany Compared. Ces Germany & Europe Working Paper No. 02.4, 2002," (2002).

[3] This is particularly true since 1960, when most of its African colonies gained independence. France, since then, has launched well over 50 interventions on the continent, with approximately 20 of those occurring since 1990. See, for instance, Michele Galy, "Cinquante Ans De Fiasco De La 'Françafrique'," *Le Monde*, December 4 2013. For a more accurate count of military operations in Africa see Thierry Tardy, "France's Military Operations in Africa: Between Institutional Pragmatism and Agnosticism," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43, no. 4 (2020): Table 1 and Table 2.

security posture in sub-Saharan Africa, this chapter will review three prominent strands of literature used to explain French foreign policy (in general) and French security and defense policy in Africa (in particular). Covering the period from the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958 to present, I focus mostly on the first two decades of the 21st century.

I begin in the first section with a review of the general characteristics of French foreign policy, focusing on how a certain idea of France came to define the policies of Fifth Republic Presidents. In the second section, I introduce the longstanding relationship between France and parts of the African continent, focusing on the continuity and change of practices towards former colonies. I then move in the third section to a summary of France's security and defense policy, focusing particularly on African interventions, and the rise of multilateralism as a legitimizing principle for French African security policy. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarizing the trends that have shaped the debate over French interventionism in Africa and identifies the need for an alternative framework to understand foreign policy processes, reminding the reader how I establish a link between the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter III and the methodology – a narrative approach – advanced in Chapter IV.

Grandeur

As I have already mentioned, foreign policy is a constitutive element of France's national identity.[4] But why is foreign policy important for France's identity? There are two answers to this question. The first answer looks long into the past and is outside the scope of this project. Nevertheless, I will touch on a few formative moments and founding narratives as they pertain to France's foreign policy identity because they are important for understanding Fifth Republic

[4] Appleton, "France the Unexceptional."

security policy. First, one can summarize the aims of France's foreign policy as motivated by the desire to promote national *grandeur* and pursue an elevated global status or *rang*.[5] And second, these motivations can be traced to several formative moments of French history, including the aspirations of French bishops to recreate the Roman Empire and the legacy of Louis XIV, where France sought to grant the state a particular central position.[6] Lacking a distinct ethnicity or geography France has always required a strong central authority to resist its "inherent centrifugal forces".[7] This translated into a vision where the central state authority alone possessed the sacred mission to overcome religious and feudal divisions between its subjects in order to forge those people together as a nation. In France, the state therefore preceded the nation.[8]

This privileged status of the state was transferred, at least in theory, to the people after the Revolution of 1789 and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. The idea that a new centralized bureaucracy where power was based on merit (as opposed to possession) created what Mirow calls a "mythology which defined being French on the basis of being privileged to be a citizen of the state".[9] Furthermore, the introduction of conscripted service ensured every citizen could take part in the defense of the universal ideals and values which the revolution engendered. This further tied the citizen to the state and placed the use of military (and the use of force) at the center of French identity throughout the 19th century.

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[5] Adrian Treacher, *French Interventionism: Europe's Last Global Player?* (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2003), 2.
[6] I refer to bishops such as the Cardinal Richelieu, who sought to consolidate royal power and privilege the role of the state in foreign affairs, as well as the Sun King (Louis XIV) who is famously quoted as saying "L'état, c'est moi" (I am the state).
[7] Treacher, *French Interventionism: Europe's Last Global Player?*, 9.
[8] Brian Jenkins and Nigel Copsey, "Nation, Nationalism and National Identity in France," in *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe* (Routledge, 2003).
[9] Wilhlem Mirow, *Strategic Culture, Securitisation and the Use of Force: Post-9/11 Security Practices of Liberal Democracies* (Routledge, 2016), 60.

The perceived universality of the revolution's ideals also drove the pursuit of *rang* and *grandeur* in France's imperial endeavors during the reign of Napoleon III. After all, the idea of a *mission civilatrice*, or the mission to spread those universal ideals and values, was the official aim of French colonialism. The state's claim to greatness, both internally and externally, as well as its claim to global influence, are "firmly embedded in the mythology of traditional French identity conceptions"; and this claim to greatness logically arises out of France's claim to a high level of control and authority by the state, which needs to be backed up by the use of force.[10]

The second answer to the question of why foreign policy is important for France's identity is simply because it was decided so. As General Charles de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, he was trying to "recreate a nation and a state wrecked by decadence, defeat and division".[11] This defeat did not only stem from the Second World War, but dates back to the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War from 1870-1871, where France not only suffered a loss of territory but also of *rang* and *grandeur*.[12] Although France would recover much of its territory after World War I, it would come at a high cost. War fatigue and an outdated war doctrine (based on stationary fortifications instead of mobile defenses) would turn out to be important for explaining France's eventual military collapse in the face of a German onslaught in 1940.[13] Similarly, there would be moral collapse, embodied by the widespread collaboration with German occupiers under the Vichy regime of Marshal Pétain.[14] As such, when a new constitution inaugurated de Gaulle as the Fifth Republic's first president, he decided that the state should

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Stanley Hoffmann, "De Gaulle's Memoirs: The Hero as History," *World Politics* 13, no. 1 (1960): 142.
[12] Mirow, *Strategic Culture, Securitisation and the Use of Force: Post-9/11 Security Practices of Liberal Democracies*, 62.
[13] Elizabeth Kier, "Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrines between the Wars," (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[14] Christoph Meyer, *The Quest for a European Strategic Culture: Changing Norms on Security and Defence in the European Union* (Springer, 2006), 51.

become a highly unitary and centralized actor again. In order to gain a place and role for his country in the post-War system (especially in the wake of being left out of the Big Three conferences in Yalta and Potsdam in 1945 where Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin discussed the end of the war and post-war arrangements), he considered a proactive foreign policy the solution to most of France's troubles and a way to re-establish the country's international standing (*rang*).[15] De Gaulle was certain that despite the undeniable gap in terms of material resources and capacities compared to the US and USSR, France was still capable of ranking among the world's great powers. "Since we are not a Great Power," de Gaulle said, "we need a great policy; if we do not have such a great policy, given we are not a Great Power anymore, we won't be anything."[16] France, in other words, cannot be France without *grandeur*. To that end, the office of the new president received unprecedented powers, with security policy becoming a presidential prerogative, or its near-exclusive preserve (*domaine réservé).*

De Gaulle's successors, regardless of their political party, have abided by this basic principle: that France's exceptionalism requires it to seek to reconstitute its former great power position and regain some of its past glory and status.[17] Today, this policy is defined as one of projection (*politique étrangère de projection*) and continues to provide a guiding framework for French decision-makers.[18] At the heart of this policy lies the idea of projecting "political, economic, and cultural influence beyond the national territory", with a strong attachment to what is known as "resistance".[19] In this case, France's resistance refers to its constant quest to provide alternative explanations for the international system, which French foreign policy makers

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[15] Cerny, *The Politics of Grandeur: Ideological Aspects of De Gaulle's Foreign Policy*, 88.
[16] As quoted in Frédéric Bozo, *La Politique Étrangère De La France Depuis 1945* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 8.
[17] Bayart, "France-Afrique: La Fin Du Pacte Colonial," 48.
[18] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.
[19] Frédéric Charillon, "Peut-Il Encore Y Avoir Une Politique Étrangère Française?," *Politique étrangère* (2002): 916-17.

(including de Gaulle himself) have traditionally considered as being overly dominated by Anglo-Saxon political and ideological traditions. For instance, de Gaulle was skeptical towards any limitation of national autonomy through European or allied institutions which could not have the same status as a sovereign state, let alone one with the universalist vocation and *grandeur* of France.[20] It can explain de Gaulle's reluctance toward integration, as evidenced by his empty chair policy in Europe where he refused binding agreements and qualified majority voting in the European Communities,[21] and his preference for national autonomy (and strategic autonomy) through the creation of his nuclear *force de frappe*.[22] Finally, this resistance can be seen by the French withdrawal from North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) integrated command structure in 1966[23], France's special relationship with the developing world and particularly its former colonies, and Chirac's refusal to back the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Frachon summarizes this political behavior nicely, stating that France is one of the few members in "the Western camp that pretends – notwithstanding its limited resources – to have an exceptional global influence".[24] This resistance to Western conformism has contributed to France being seen as an atypical Western power, reinforced by the fact that French decision-makers tend to have a "self-conscious awareness of being different".[25] When explained with reference to the country's pride and historical prestige, resistance comes along with the idea of *rayonnement*, or influence.[26] French actors understand their country to be a value-promoting entity that has a

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[20] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*.
[21] Craig Parsons, *A Certain Idea of Europe* (Cornell University Press, 2003).
[22] Janet Bryant, "French Foreign and Defence Policy: Exceptional in Methods and Rhetoric?," in *The French Exception*, ed. Emmanuel Godin and Tony Chafer (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005).
[23] France later rejoined NATO in 2009 under the Sarkozy administration
[24] Alain Frachon, "Une Puissance Poids Moyen," *Le Monde*, April 15 2002.
[25] John Keiger, "Foreign and Defence Policy: Constraints and Continuity," in *Developments in French Politics*, ed. Alistair Cole, Patrick Le Galès, and Jonah D. Levy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[26] *Rayonnement* also translates into 'radiance', which in the case of international politics refers to the figurative prestige of a country or civilization. In this case, *rayonnement* refers to the influence of France to the world.

special role to play on the world stage. The importance French policy-makers attribute to their reputation as being part of a country of honor and great standing in the international system is what is encapsulated by de Gaulle's political philosophy of *grandeur*.

In sum, the Gaullist approach to foreign policy, in reference to the historical legacy of the country, can be summarized as follows: 1) it sees the nation-state as the only legitimate form of government and thinks that this can only be achieved by keeping its action independent from any constraints on autonomy;[27] 2) strives for power and rank in world affairs;[28] 3) affirms a democratic-republican, universalist *mission civilatrice* cherished in French culture;[29] and 4) opposes exclusive American leadership of the Western Alliance. While the old Gaullist approach appears to be less prominent today,[30] this does not mean that the country's citizens and leaders do not still feel the pull of this French "exceptionalism".[31] Fenby, when referring to the national identity of France, argues that "the French are educated to have a special reverence for the Republic […]. They do believe in France's exceptionalism and do not regard themselves as inhabiting a medium-sized nation which has to work its way in an increasingly competitive world".[32] François Heisbourg, a French foreign policy analyst, also argues that exceptionalism is still the backbone of elite French foreign policy-making.[33] French diplomacy today continues to operate on a conviction that "the world stands to benefit from the universal presence of France",

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[27] Henrik Larsen, *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe* (Routledge, 2005), Chapter 3.
[28] Ostermann, *Security, Defense Discourse and Identity in NATO and Europe: How France Changed Foreign Policy*.
[29] This 'certain idea of France' and the claim for exceptionalism propagated by de Gaulle and kept alive under his successors has been explained by many scholars. See, for instance, Cerny, *The Politics of Grandeur: Ideological Aspects of De Gaulle's Foreign Policy*; Phillip H Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and Gaullist Legacy*, vol. 42 (Princeton University Press, 1993); Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*.
[30] Christian Lequesne, "French Foreign and Security Challenges after the Paris Terrorist Attacks," *Contemporary security policy* 37, no. 2 (2016).
[31] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*.
[32] Jonathan Fenby, *France on the Brink: A Great Civilization in the New Century* (Simon and Schuster, 2014), 397.
[33] Francois Heisbourg, "Letter from Paris," https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=59193.

particularly around the topic of continuing European integration and autonomy.[34] In fact, at a round table discussion of France's foreign policy hosted by SciencesPo in 2017, three recent Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Alain Juppé, Hubert Védrine, and Dominique de Villepin) all agreed that France can still be a world power today by doing three things with respect to the European community. First, Juppé argued that continuing the European project as a value-driven security community, with France as its motor, is the only way to ensure everyday Europeans that Europe can and will protect them in the future just as it did in the past. Second, de Villepin argued that radiating the exceptional values of France (as they contribute to "one of the best [European] societies in the world") is how it will continue to be a great power and continue to project its place in the world. And third, it can achieve its place by "lending out its hand" to countries like China and Russia and other old relationships, reminding them of the value of multilateralism (particularly at a time when American interests have become "first"). Otherwise, argued Védrine, Europe will become *impuissante* (powerless), and become *dépendante* (dependent) on the decisions of Beijing and Moscow.[35]

However, this certain idea of *La Republique* has led France to be considered an outsider in foreign relations, and as such, scholars have used the exceptional nature of French foreign policy as something that cannot easily be explained by general models of international relations or theories of foreign policy analysis.[36] To many observers, the Fifth Republic is a political system unlike others, and that in order to understand French policies you have to understand its rich history and culture, which is just profoundly different from anywhere else.[37] As a result,

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[34] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*, 4.
[35] Alain Juppé, Hubert Védrine, and Dominique de Villepin, "La Politique Étrangère De La France" (2017). The original line given by Védrine is *"Une Europe impuissante sera dépendante aux decisions de Beijing ou Moscou"*.
[36] Appleton, "France the Unexceptional."
[37] Ibid., 1-2.

methods of foreign policy analysis are rarely applied to understand French foreign policy decision-making in general, let alone regarding the special relationship between France and Africa.[38] This is because of the close connection France had with its former colonies (what I referred to earlier as *Françafrique)*, creating a network that was intimate in character but international in scope. Thus, scholars tended to view and analyze that relationship as "a world of domestic politics than that of formal inter-state relations".[39] Hence my desire to approach foreign policy decision-making from a lens guided by international relations theory (as opposed to one guided by domestical political theory).

While the concept of grandeur has been cited as one of the principal driving forces of post-World War II French foreign policy, I argue that the concept lacks analytical clarity. It can be understood in various ways depending on the context and the actors involved in the policy-making. For de Gaulle himself, "grandeur is an imperative with a varying content", which means that it is more about an attitude than an actual policy.[40] Similarly, the concept of *grandeur* can be seen as stemming from conflicting traditions.[41] On the one hand it can refer to a self-image as 'the country of human rights' which is often translated into passionate diplomatic attitudes on multilateralism and democracy. The rhetoric relating to France's missionary self-understanding is widespread in the political discourse and is a cornerstone of France's diplomatic ambitions.[42] On the other hand, it can refer to an established tradition of self-reliance and independence which remains an objective that is never questioned by the ruling parties.[43] As such, the security

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[38] Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[39] Ibid., 89.
[40] Hoffmann, "De Gaulle's Memoirs: The Hero as History," 145.
[41] Bastien Irondelle and Olivier Schmitt, "France " in *Strategic Cultures in Europe: Security and Defense Policies across the Continent*, ed. Heiko Biehl, Bastien Giegerich, and Alexandra Jonas (New York: Springer VS, 2013).
[42] Ibid., 126.
[43] Vaïsse, *La Puissance Ou L'influence? La France Dans Le Monde Depuis 1958*; Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and Gaullist Legacy*, 42.

identity of the Fifth Republic has become based on the "sacrosanct principle of autonomous decision-making and independent defense capabilities".[44] Consequently, scholars have observed that France's goals to pursue both independence and multilateralism are conflicting, creating identity anxieties that are evidenced by contradictions between the official rhetoric of the state and its actual practices.[45]

What I argue is that while *grandeur* is difficult to operationalize as an analytical referent, it is still a critical lens through which to understand the national biography of France during the Fifth Republic. Any analysis of narratives used to routinize French foreign policy should be contextualized with the idea that the quest for *grandeur* is an important element of French identity, both for the nation and for the leaders who make its policies. French political leaders today, even François Hollande, continue to believe that their country has a special role to play in the world, even as its material power is increasingly challenged in the 21st century. Hollande himself, when speaking at the opening of Ambassadors' Week in Paris in August 2015 confirmed that, "We are the guardians of this great idea of progress, or I could say this great idea of France for the World".[46]

As will be shown, when confronted with crises, French decision-makers refer to different characteristics of French exceptionalism, and the combination of such characteristics shaped the decision-making processes that led to the two interventions in Mali and the CAR. But before I do that, I turn in the next section to the literature that explains the evolution of the special

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[44] Bastien Irondelle and Sophie Besancenot, "France: The End of Exceptionalism?," in *National Security Cultures and Global Security Governance*, ed. Emil J. Kirchner and James Sperling (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009).
[45] See, for instance, Sophie Meunier, "France and the World, from Chirac to Sarkozy," in *Developments in French Politics*, ed. Alistair Cole, Patrick Le Galès, and Jonah Lévy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[46] François Hollande, "Foreign Policy - Speech by M. François Hollande, President of the Republic, at the Opening of Ambassadors' Week," news release, 25 August, 2015.

relationship between France and Africa, and how it has shaped French foreign policies of the Fifth Republic.

Continuity and Change in Africa

While independence for France's colonies was gained in the 1960s, most scholars agree that this period did not constitute a clear break from the colonial past. Rather, a slight change to the association between France and its former colonies resembled more of "a restructuring of the imperial relationship" than it did a rupture.[47] This is particularly true in Africa. Since the possession of empire was a benchmark of France's claim to global status in the early 20th century, losing that empire at the end of World War II – especially after two hugely costly and destructive wars of decolonization in Algeria and Indochina – caused France to urgently question how it would maintain its world-power status. In contrast to Indochina and Algeria where the violent independence process was a "real watershed", truly marking "the end of an era" in those regions, the decolonization process in sub-Saharan Africa was largely peaceful, allowing a different system to take place.[48] Thus, decolonization offered the French an opportunity to focus their attention there as a place to project its power and influence.

De Gaulle himself assured France's influence remained by engineering the transition in the late 1950s and early 1960s from colonial to neo-colonial dependence.[49] This dependence came to be defined as "the survival of the colonial system in spite of formal recognition of political independence in emerging countries which [thereafter became] the victims of an indirect

[47] Chafer, "French African Policy in Historical Perspective," 167.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Dorothy Shipley White, *Black Africa and De Gaulle: From the French Empire to Independence* (Penn State University Press, 1979).

and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military, or technical means".[50] France continued to exert influence on the politics in large parts of sub-Saharan Africa for many years after African independence.[51] It did this by establishing strong personal links between French and African political and business elites, signing bilateral defense agreements,[52] cooperating in economic, military and cultural areas, as well as relying on discourse that emphasized their shared history and experiences.[53] These had a powerful influence in shaping the attitudes and mind-set of governing elites in both France and Africa, creating what Gregory calls "a 'virtual empire' in sub-Saharan Africa, premised on cultural, economic, linguistic and personalities forged during the colonial period and, somewhat less plausibly, on 'geographic proximity'".[54]

Maintaining a zone of special influence in sub-Saharan Africa is most often studied through the relationships between French and African elites, who themselves had a vested interest in maintaining a close relationship with their former colonizer.[55] Rieker characterizes this relationship as a type of *kinship*.[56] Borrowing the use of the term from anthropological studies, kinship in this case refers to the postcolonial relationship between former colonial centers and their peripheries as being a post-colonial family of nations. Even ardent anti-colonial leaders, such as Félix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast and Léon Mba of Gabon, recognized

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[50] "Resolution on Neo-colonialism", quoted in Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1962), 254.
[51] See, for instance, Chafer, "French African Policy in Historical Perspective."; Gounin, *La France En Afrique: Le Combat Des Anciens Et Des Modernes*; John Chipman, *French Power in Africa* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).
[52] Many of which contained secret clauses for intervention.
[53] Chafer, "French African Policy in Historical Perspective."
[54] Shaun Gregory, "The French Military in Africa: Past and Present," *African Affairs* 99, no. 396 (2000): 435-36. See also Pierre Lellouche and Dominique Moisi, "French Policy in Africa: A Lonely Battle against Destabilization," *International Security* 3, no. 4 (1979).
[55] Bayart, "France-Afrique: La Fin Du Pacte Colonial."; Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).
[56] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*, 40-42.

how the colonial period shaped their identities and future relationships.[57] For instance, on the Independence Day of the Ivory Coast, Houphouët-Boigny, the Ivory Coast's first president, stated, "I would like to tell you that in leaving the French family, we do not intend to forget all that we have received from it. We would like instead to develop and to enrich the large patrimony which it has left us, to the benefit of our people".[58] These words reflect certain practices in the post-colonial years including one where the elites from former French colonies were (and still are) educated in France, and during their education developed networks of relationships that become useful later on. For Houphouët-Boigny, his future wife studied in the French town of Villeneuve-sur-Lot in 1946, developing a close relationship with the town's mayor (Raphaël-Leygyes) who was later appointed French ambassador to the Ivory Coast. He held that position for 15 years.[59] But this was not unique to the Ivory Coast; similar kinship experiences can be found "in a belt running from Morocco […] to Madagascar".[60] But special relations did not just develop through universities. They developed through military exchanges, marriage, and migration. As of 2014, more than 240,000 French nationals were registered as living in Africa with more than 10% of the population on the African continent still speaking French.[61] This relationship, institutionalized through the concept of *la Francophonie*, has also been referred to as "une famille".[62]

One consequential effect of this kinship is that African elites were willing to exchange favors with their counterparts in Paris in order to maintain a web of special political and business connections.[63] These connections came to be known as *Françafrique* networks, which can

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[57] Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, 197.
[58] Quoted in ibid., 196.
[59] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*.
[60] Ibid., 41.
[61] Alexandre Wolff, *La Langue Française Dans Le Monde* (Paris: Nathan, 2014).
[62] Ibid.
[63] Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*.

conjure images of suitcases stuffed with cash or diamonds being secretly transferred between political, business, and military elites on both sides of the Mediterranean. However, the origins of the term are less dubious. Houphouët-Boigny first used the term *France-Afrique* to describe the close relationship and amicable ties between his country and the former colonial power. In the late-1990s, however, a critic of the special relationship, François-Xavier Verschave, renamed it *Françafrique*, focusing on the blending of two nations (by blending the two words) through the corrupt and clientelist activities of French and African elites. Since then, the term has been used to denounce scandalous aspects of the Franco-African relationship involving French support for corrupt and autocratic regimes as well as secret financing of French political parties. These activities, of course, were handled covertly by the *cellule africaine* in the Elysée – a unit headed by its founding father, Jacques Foccart, and succeeded by his many understudies.[64]

The aim of the *Françafrique* network was to manage and maintain close relationships with former colonies after independence and was driven largely by the political ideology of preserving or restoring French *grandeur*.[65] As such, the paternalistic policies and personal ties allowed France to exert direct influence over its *pré-carré* – an area much larger than its own territory. In fact, policies towards Africa were typically represented in France as being made in a part of the world that was considered a natural extension of the *métropole*, bringing about the notion of "the so-called Franco-African state".[66] For a long time, France's relations with the African continent were not even considered part of France's official foreign policy; they were

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[64] The secret sides of these activities have been well documented in books and television documentary. See, for instance, François-Xavier Verschave, *La Françafrique*, Le Plus Long Scandale De La République (Paris: Stock, 1998); Chafer, "French African Policy in Historical Perspective."; Jean-François Médard, "France and Sub-Saharan Africa: A Privileged Relationship," in *Africa and the North: Between Globalization and Marginalization*, ed. U. Engel and G.R. Olsen (London: Routledge, 2005); P. Benquet, "Françafrique, 50 Années Sous Le Sceau Du Secret," (2010).
[65] Cerny, *The Politics of Grandeur: Ideological Aspects of De Gaulle's Foreign Policy*.
[66] Jean-Pierre Dozon, "L'état Français Contemporain Et Son Double, L'état Franco-Africain," *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques. Archives*, no. 30 (2002).

relegated to a corollary of domestic politics, controlled until 1999 by the Ministry of Cooperation, which was a distinct and autonomous ministry when compared to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[67] Nevertheless, France's influence over its former colonies allowed it to restore its own self-image to that of a Great Power, bringing itself to the international stage as a counterbalancing force between the US and USSR during the Cold War.

While continuity defined France's relationship with its former colonies for decades after decolonization, the post-Cold War years put pressure on French policy-makers to change their comfortable rapports with the African sphere.[68] Several key events occurred, when seen through the lens of the triumph of the neo-liberal world order after the end of the Cold War, that characterized the close ties associated with *Françafrique* as particularly damaging for the image of France. For example, France's role during the Rwandan civil war,[69] the gradual replacement of the old political generation who grew up in the shadow of Foccart's *cellule africaine* (also known as *les Anciens*),[70] and the advocacy work by pressure groups condemning the *Françafrique* system – including Verschave himself – have forced France to try and normalize its relationship with sub-Saharan Africa.[71] Others account for France's decision to intensify its commitment to the European integration project in the late 1980s as a reason for why it was forced to incrementally disengage from the African continent. In this case, France is characterized as preferring to form closer relationships with Europe's industrialized and Asia's emerging economies as opposed to protecting its image abroad.[72] This, admittedly, is only half

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[67] Jean-Marc Châtaigner, "Principes Et Réalités De La Politique Africaine De La France " *Afrique contemporaine* 220, no. 4 (2006).
[68] Gordon D. Cumming and Rachael Langford, "Introduction," in *Modern & Contemporary France* (2005).
[69] Kroslak, "France's Policy Towards Africa: Continuity or Change?."; *The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide* (London: Hurst, 2007).
[70] Gounin, *La France En Afrique: Le Combat Des Anciens Et Des Modernes*.
[71] Tony Chafer, "Franco-African Relations: No Longer So Exceptional?," *African Affairs* 101, no. 404 (2002): 347-49; Médard, "France and Sub-Saharan Africa: A Privileged Relationship."
[72] Bayart, "France-Afrique: La Fin Du Pacte Colonial," 50.

the story, as France has emerged as the principal advocate of the African continent in the European Union, allowing for many African issues to be put on the European agenda in the first place.[73] This is particularly true in the policy realm of security and defense, with some scholars arguing that the only way to understand the EU's role in Africa is to understand the French one.[74]

Although rupture has been the key terminology used to describe France's changing Africa policy since the early 1990s, it was only in 1997 that true changes began to take place during the Chirac administration and his period of partisan *cohabitation* with his prime minister Lionel Jospin.[75] At that time, the Jospin government made incremental changes including a holistic reconsideration of the *entire* African continent (as opposed to just the francophone *pré carré*), the divestiture of the old *Françafrique* networks, and the transfer of principal responsibility of African affairs to the *Quai d'Orsay* (which houses the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The fact that the Ministry of Cooperation – the colonial relic with immediate ties to the former Ministry of Colonies that symbolized the continuity of France's special relationship with a small number of African states and guaranteed their leaders direct access to the French president – was absorbed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is noteworthy, especially as it came against vehement protests from francophone African heads of state.[76] Equally noteworthy was Nicolas Sarkozy's decision to eliminate the notorious *cellule africaine* at the Elysée Palace, turning it from an office that used to enjoy comparable diplomatic power to the president into one that was accountable to the president's diplomatic advisor. However, it has been argued that Sarkozy still listened to special advisor Robert Bourgi, the symbolic heir to Jacques Foccart who

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[73] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 15.
[74] Bruno Charbonneau, "What Is So Special About the European Union? E.U.–U.N. Cooperation in Crisis Management in Africa," *International Peacekeeping* 16, no. 4 (2009).
[75] *Cohabitation* describes the political system when the president is from a different political party than the majority of the members of parliament, resulting in a prime minister and president – from two different parties – cohabitating the Elysée Palace.
[76] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 15-16.

was the grand master of the *Françafrique* system and the embodiment of France's neo-colonial practices in Africa, when making decisions regarding African security.[77]

In addition to these functional reforms, France also began to take a more multilateral approach to Africa.[78] The United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), at the request of France, began to transfer more political responsibility to African countries themselves through renewed dialogue with regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). Furthermore, the *Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix* (RECAMP) program was established in 1998 as an initiative designed to financially support African peacekeeping forces, becoming the new heart of France's Africa policy in the 21st century.[79] While this gradual change towards normalization did not completely undo the nature of France's relationship with its former colonies it did allow for France's Africa policy to be gradually integrated into the general framework of French foreign policy (as opposed to an isolated policy realm).[80]

However, despite initiating some important reforms during the Chirac administration, the Sarkozy administration which followed failed to make major shifts in African policy in the early 2000s. In particular, Sarkozy, who promised a break with traditional policy, sent mixed messages when he came to power in 2007.[81] Like many of his predecessors, Sarkozy spoke with good intentions and of the urgent need to break with previous practices towards sub-Saharan Africa.

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[77] Foccart has also been referred to as the 'Monsieur Afrique of several French administrations. See, for instance, Gregory, "The French Military in Africa: Past and Present," 436-37; Bourmaud, "France in Africa: African Politics and French Foreign Policy."; Jacques Foccart and Philippe Gaillard, *Foccart Parle: Entretiens Avec Philippe Gaillard* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).
[78] Roland Adjovi, "La Politique Africaine De La France," *AfRI* 2 (2002).
[79] D. Bourmaud, "Clientelism and Patrimonialism in International Relations," in *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, ed. Daniel Bach and Mamoudou Gazibo (London: Routledge, 2013).
[80] Gordon D. Cumming, "French Aid to Africa: A Changing Agenda?," in *France*, ed. Tony Chafer and Brian Jenkins (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).
[81] "Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa Policy: Change, Continuity or Confusion?."

Yet, after his election, his first African state visits went to the traditional francophone allies in Northern Africa (Tunisia, Senegal, Algeria, and Gabon) in an effort to promote his vision of a *Mediterranean Union*, cementing a clear contrast in French ambitions between Northern and sub-Saharan Africa. As some African commentators have observed, Sarkozy failed to outline any real vision for French engagement with sub-Saharan Africa during his speeches in the visits to the Maghreb region.[82]

In one particular speech in Dakar, Senegal in 2007, he made that contrast clear. Although he declared that colonialism had indeed been wrong, he went on to say that "the tragedy of Africa is that the African has not sufficiently made its mark on history . . . They have never really launched themselves into the future".[83] To the Africans, the language of the speech was remarkable on two accounts. First, they came from a head of state who had, in forming his government, attempted to calm the xenophobic vitriol coming from the Front National during the election campaign. This type of condescending language came as a shock and surprise to many. Second, the language of the speech reinforced the perceptions that Sarkozy saw the continent largely in negative terms.[84]

While these were symbolic gestures that reinforced the old way of dealing with Africa, actual practices did not show any changes or inspire confidence that his promise to end *Françafrique* was possible either. As before, the usual players – a mixture of businessmen, former diplomats, people from the intelligence services and former military officers – continued to come to the Elysée Palace to discuss African issues with the French president.[85] As Cumming

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[82] Makhily Gassama, ed. *L'afrique Épond À Sarkozy: Contre Le Discours De Dakar* (Paris: Phillippe Roy, 2008).
[83] Nicolas Sarkozy, "Speech to the Université Cheikh-Anta-Diop," (Dakar, 2007).
[84] Assane Thiam, "La Politique Africaine De Nicolas Sarkozy: Rupture Ou Continuité?," *Politique étrangère*, no. 4 (2008).
[85] Cumming, "Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa Policy: Change, Continuity or Confusion?."

notes, Claude Guéant, Sarkozy's Chief of Staff, continued informal diplomacy with the *Françafrique* network even though Sarkozy officially shut down the *cellule africaine*.[86]

Speaking in Cape Town the following year, however, Sarkozy made four proposals for changing France's Africa policy. This included adapting older cooperation accords with certain African states through increased dialogue with African actors, re-creating bilateral relations on the principle of transparency, using French military presence to help Africa build its own collective security system, and making Europe a major partner in matters of peace and security.[87] The aim was to allow France to keep its voice on the architecture of African security even as it reduced its physical military presence on the ground. Nevertheless, military presence was maintained despite his initial plans for slimming it down. The intention had been to maintain two permanent bases, but in the end four were kept: one in Djibouti, one in Gabon, one in Senegal, and one in the French overseas department of La Réunion.[88]

With the election of François Hollande in 2012, France finally seemed to be entering a new era in its African policies,[89] with changes a welcome sign in France and abroad.[90] When the President declared, on a trip to Senegal in 2012, that the days of *Françafrique* were over,[91] many African commentators responded with positive reactions. The daily newspaper of the Democratic Republic of Congo – where Hollande participated in the Francophonie summit of French-speaking countries – said it marked a new beginning characterized by "honesty, respect and equality".[92] While it was not the first time that a French president declared the death of

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Melly and Darracq, *A New Way to Engage?: French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande*.
[88] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*.
[89] Tony Chafer, "Hollande and Africa Policy," *Modern & Contemporary France* 22, no. 4 (2014).
[90] Melly and Darracq, *A New Way to Engage?: French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande*.
[91] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Entre La France Et L'afrique, À Dakar Le 12 Octobre 2012."
[92] Quoted in Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*, 50.

Françafrique, it was the first time it was followed by real changes in practices.[93] First, Hollande denounced France's brutal colonial rule over Algeria, something none of his predecessors had dared to do.[94] Second, he was instrumental in shifting African policy more towards the economic potential of the continent as opposed to it being merely a strategic source of raw materials like oil, gas, and uranium.[95] Third, he paid greater attention to development issues than his predecessors, promising to almost double the percentage of Gross National Income that would be contributed towards development assistance.[96] Finally, he made a symbolic change to the head of the Elysée advisory unit for Africa, a position that had previously been the very incarnation of the old *Françafrique* institution. He gave the position to Hélène Le Gal, a diplomat whose career expertise had focused largely on the anglophone east and south of the African continent (and not its francophone west), marking an indication of real changes to practice and policy.[97] Even her deputy, Thomas Mélonio, was cut from a different cloth. In the run-up to the elections, he published an essay in which he called for a large re-structuring of Africa policy and the establishment of a new, more transparent partnership with Africa, greatly influencing the administration's vision of security on the continent.[98] Furthermore, Hollande was the first president to take office with the dissolved *cellule africaine*. Now, the traditional actors of the old *Françafrique* networks are officially denied access to the Elysée Palace. While some of the same persons are still present in Africa as advisors to African presidents, their access to state

[93] Chafer, "Hollande and Africa Policy."
[94] François Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Franco Algériennes, À Alger Le 20 Décembre 2012," news release, 20 December, 2012.
[95] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*, 50.
[96] Melly and Darracq, *A New Way to Engage?: French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande*.
[97] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*.
[98] Mélonio, "Quelle Politique Africaine Pour La France En 2012."

institutions is more difficult, and France's ambassadors to Africa do not have regular meetings with these advisors, as was the case in the past.[99]

This trend of policies breaking or continuing with past traditions has led many observers of French policy-making in Africa to scrutinize those policies and simply ask whether they still confirm to the infamous "French Exception".[100] Consequently, the majority of scholarship acknowledges that there are elements of both continuity and change in French security policy, with the majority of disagreements and struggles occurring between what are known as the modernizers and the traditionalists (or *les Modernes* and *les Anciens*) within the French government.[101] As a result, similar yet slightly nuanced, interpretations of France's changing Africa policy have emerged, describing it either as increasing adjustment,[102] disengagement via normalization,[103] or being in a state of confusion.[104] Nevertheless, save few exceptions (such as Charbonneau),[105] it is largely accepted that France is experiencing decline in the traditional

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[99] Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur*.
[100] See, for instance, Thiam, "La Politique Africaine De Nicolas Sarkozy: Rupture Ou Continuité?."; Alistair Cole, Sophie Meunier, and Vincent Tiberj, "From Sarkozy to Hollande: The New Normal?," in *Developments in French Politics*, ed. Alistair Cole, Sophie Meunier, and Vincent Tiberj (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jolyon Howorth, "French Foreign and Security Policy: In Search of Coherence and Impact," in *Developments in French Politics* ed. Alistair Cole, Sophie Meunier, and Vincent Tiberj (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[101] For studies that analyze elements of continuity and elements of change, see Jean-François Médard, "Le Changement Dans La Continuité: La Conférence Des Chefs D'état De France Et D"Afrique (Paris, 3 Et 4 Novembre 1981)," *Politique Africaine* 5, no. March (1982); Guy Martin, "Continuity and Change in Franco-African Relations," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33, no. 1 (1995); Asteris C Huliaras, "Continuity and Change in French Foreign Policy Towards Africa," in *Africa in Crisis: New Challenges and Possibilities*, ed. Tunde Zack-Williams, Diane Frost, and Alex Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Kroslak, "France's Policy Towards Africa: Continuity or Change?."; Cumming, "Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa Policy: Change, Continuity or Confusion?."; Howorth, "French Foreign and Security Policy: In Search of Coherence and Impact." For debates between *Les Anciens et Les Modernes*, see Bourmaud, "France in Africa: African Politics and French Foreign Policy."; Gounin, *La France En Afrique: Le Combat Des Anciens Et Des Modernes*.
[102] Bryant, "French Foreign and Defence Policy: Exceptional in Methods and Rhetoric?."
[103] Médard, "France and Sub-Saharan Africa: A Privileged Relationship."
[104] Maja Bovcon, "Françafrique and Regime Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 1 (2013); Tony Chafer, "From Confidence to Confusion: Franco-African Relations in the Era of Globalisation," in *France on the World Stage: Nation State Strategies in the Global Era*, ed. Mairi Maclean and Joseph Szarka (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Cumming, "Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa Policy: Change, Continuity or Confusion?."
[105] Charbonneau sees the past two decades of change as a sign of restructuration rather than decline. See, for instance, Charbonneau, "Dreams of Empire: France, Europe, and the New Interventionism in Africa."

French-African relationship. This decline is evidenced by France's general loss of interests in Africa,[106] as well as its loss of capabilities to influence outcomes on the continent.[107] The rising presence of emerging countries on the continent has become the primary challenge to those relations and stands in the way of continued French influence in the region. This feeling of decline is of course exacerbated by many other domestic factors in France, including the 2007-2008 financial crisis, Europe's sovereign debt crisis, France's slow to negative economic growth, rising unemployment, and a generally unsatisfied electorate that has become less hesitant to voice their dissatisfaction with elites by giving their votes to the political fringes.

Erforth points out two important things regarding these traditional interpretations. First, he suggests that since the most common framework for evaluating French-African relations remains the pre-1990s period – while it does provide a point of reference that allows analysts to trace patterns of continuity and change, and it provides readers with a clear story line and big picture of the *longue durée* – it biases analyses towards the colonial/post-colonial era.[108] . Second, he argues that the notion of decline is used in an "uncritical manner", with most works avoiding defining it explicitly (however, implicitly, they suggest decline refers to the deviation from the status quo of the colonial and post-colonial past).[109] I agree with Erforth's assessment, arguing that neither colonial grandeur nor its decline alone explain the Hollande administration's decision to intervene in both Mali and the CAR. They are important, however, in understanding the actors' perceptions and beliefs about their role in Africa and how that role is important for their individual (and national) identities. Once these perceptions and beliefs come under stress

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[106] Daniel Bourmaud, "From Unilateralism to Multilateralism: The Decline of French Power in Africa," in *From Rivalry to Partnership? New Approaches to the Challenges of Africa*, ed. Tony Chafer and Gordon Cumming (Routledge, 2016).
[107] Châtaigner, "Principes Et Réalités De La Politique Africaine De La France ".
[108] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 17.
[109] Ibid.

during a crisis we can gain better insight into the decision-maker's minds and the decision-making process.

However, Africa's strategic and economic re-emergence on the international scene has forced major players, including France, to reverse its declining interest in the region.[110] As I mentioned in Chapter I, the fact that major international players are paying more attention to the African continent has created a *Renaissance* in the discipline of IR, with a number of scholars attempting to understand the international competition over African markets and resources.[111] Referring to the colonial scramble of the 19th century, where borders were brokered between a few European powers, some scholars see a "new scramble for Africa emerging".[112] However, this scramble is different on two accounts. First, the traditional actors involved in this scramble are no longer European. China has emerged as one of the most active players on the continent.[113] Second, whereas African had little say in the carving of their continent 100 years ago, today African elites are key players with considerable bargaining power over the continent's raw materials, markets, and lands.[114]

This growing interest in Africa has coincided with growing interest in France's Africa policy-making. In particular, in a special issue of *Politique Africaine*, Banégas, Marchal, and Meimon called upon scholars to revive the debate on France's relations with the African continent with the use of more tried and true tested social theories.[115] As Bourmaud points out, a

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[110] Ulf Engel and Gorm Rye Olsen, *Africa and the North: Between Globalization and Marginalization* (Routledge, 2004).
[111] For the idea of an *African Renaissance*, see Peter Vale and Sipho Maseko, "South Africa and the African Renaissance," *International affairs* 74, no. 2 (1998). For an explanation of the competition over markets and resources, see Engel and Olsen, *Africa and the North: Between Globalization and Marginalization*.
[112] Carmody, *The New Scramble for Africa*.
[113] Chris Alden, *China in Africa* (New York: Zed Books, 2007).
[114] Stephen Ellis, *Season of Rains: Africa in the World* (University of Chicago Press, 2012).
[115] Richard Banégas, Roland Marchal, and Julien Meimon, "La Fin Du Pacte Colonial? La Politique Africaine De La France Sous Jacques Chirac Et Après," *Politique africaine*, no. 105 (2007).

weakness of the literature on France's policy-making in Africa is that those "analyses […] very rarely explain their epistemological categories and their theoretical bases".[116] Since then, a series of efforts have been taken to answer that call, attempting to move away from mere description to theoretical analysis: Chafer and Cumming, working on Anglo-French bilateral and multilateral cooperation in Africa resort to neo-classical realism to explain leaders' rationales and motivations;[117] Irondelle and Balleix address French security from a constructivist perspective, increasing the scope by including a European dimension;[118] Bovcon uses an institutionalist interpretation to explain France's continuous engagement in its *pré carré* by focusing on the importance of path dependency and the longevity of regimes.[119] In particular, the military dimension of the relationship surrounding crises in Africa have gained the attention of a growing number of scholars.[120]

However, common to most studies is a focus on outcomes rather than processes, which risks conflating results with goals, or simply ignoring the latter altogether.[121] Furthermore, analyzing outcomes by themselves misses out on understanding what motivates actors, what their interests are, and the extent to which identity shapes those interests. For example, the work of Bovcon, which uses an historical-institutionalist framework, acknowledges the difficulties in discerning when actors are motivated by agency or structure, and she underestimates the extent

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[116] Bourmaud, "From Unilateralism to Multilateralism: The Decline of French Power in Africa."
[117] Gordon D. Cumming and Tony Chafer, "From Rivalry to Partnership? Critical Reflections on Anglo-French Cooperation in Africa," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 5 (2011).
[118] Irondelle and Besancenot, "France: The End of Exceptionalism?."; Corinne Balleix, "La Politique Française De Coopération Au Développement," *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 4 (2010).
[119] Bovcon, "Françafrique and Regime Theory."
[120] See, for instance, Tobias Koepf, "France and the Fight against Terrorism in the Sahel: The History of a Difficult Leadership Role," in *Note De Lifri* (2013); Amandine Gnangueon, "What Will Be France's African Policy under Nicolas Sarkozy?," *Dynamiques Internationales* 4, no. May (2011).
[121] Bastien Irondelle, *La Réforme Des Armées En France: Sociologie De La Décision* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2011).

to which identity (which reflects both agency and structure) can change over time.[122] The only way to understand how identity motivates actors to prefer one action over the other (in this case, intervention over non-intervention) is by engaging with the decision-making process itself, and by adopting an analytical framework that replicates the situation of the moment when a decision is made. Only by looking at what actors intended to achieve and how they confronted anxieties regarding their roles and expectations regarding sub-Saharan Africa can we create an alternative framework of reference against which contemporary French security policy in Africa can be evaluated. Such an evaluation requires a focus on the actual beliefs, preferences, capacities, and identity conceptions of French actors within the international context at the time of a given decision to intervene rather than evaluating it with reference to some former period in the past. Hence, this study is both (French) actor-centric and context sensitive. While this type of approach is admittedly modest in its aims, it still concedes the importance that the past has in shaping present decision-making and acknowledges how history plays an important role in shaping current identities.[123] I simply claim that using a pre-defined point in time against which to evaluate present-day security decisions is not the most important use of history; rather, I claim that using history to establish a biographical narrative of present-day actors (which differ from person-to-person, and context-to-context), and how uncertainties surrounding that identity narrative shape the decision-making process, might provide a fuller understanding of present-day security policies. This is what is at the heart of this dissertation.

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[122] Bovcon, "Françafrique and Regime Theory."
[123] On how history shapes present-day choices, see Robert Jervis, "Perception and Misperception in International Politics," in *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2017), Chapter 6.

The Rise of Multilateralism

As outlined above, France's maintenance of a sphere of influence in sub-Saharan Africa has been central to its claim to great power status.[124] French foreign policy elites generally believe that their country's ties to Africa lie at the heart of France's global vocation.[125] Prior to the 1990s, key to maintaining that influence was the complex network of client-patron relationships – symbolized by the infamous *Françafrique* networks – which were the epitome of neo-colonial dependence. A part of those networks included offering political, military, and financial support to weak African rulers. In exchange, these nominally independent rulers accepted France's right to be consulted on major policy decisions; outsourced their security requirements and defense policy to Paris; granted the French privileged access to raw materials and domestic markets; and, for the most part, supported France in various international domains.[126]

A main pillar of this system of influence was the series of bilateral military and defense cooperation agreements concluded with more than a dozen francophone countries.[127] Following their independence, almost all former colonies had agreed to cooperate with France in military matters and signed – with the exception of Guinea – *accords de coopération* (military cooperation agreements).[128] The essence of these military agreements consisted of what was termed 'technical assistance', which implied that France would assist with the formation of the African armies by supplying them with military equipment and placing French instructors at the

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[124] Not mentioned in this study yet, but equally important for securing France's great power status, is also its nuclear deterrent and permanent member ship on the UN Security Council.
[125] Treacher, *French Interventionism: Europe's Last Global Player?*, Ch. 7.
[126] Ibid., 124-25; Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*, 175-79.
[127] Stefano Recchia, "A Legitimate Sphere of Influence: Understanding France's Turn to Multilateralism in Africa," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43, no. 4 (2020).
[128] Robin Luckham, "Le Militarisme Français En Afrique," *Politique africaine*, no. 5 (1982): 99; Patrice Emery Bakong, "La Politique Militaire Africaine De La France: Forces Sociales Et Changements Récents," *La politique militaire africaine de la France* (2012): 192.

former colonies' disposal in order to aid in the formation of trained military personnel. Often times French troops, who were integrated into the African armies, were sent out to solve conflicts without the help of the host country, and French officers played a highly directive role in managing those conflicts.[129] In return, African rulers agreed to resort to French expertise concerning future acquisition and maintenance of the military equipment.[130] Ultimately, this type of agreement was designed to maintain dependency on the French military.[131]

In addition to these military agreements France also signed defense agreements – known as *accords de défense* – with eight of its former colonies, which transferred "responsibility for African states' external (and in most cases internal) security to Paris".[132] In many cases, these agreements allowed the permanent garrisoning of French troops on African soil, and they legally authorized intervention at the request of the African leaders when faced with external aggression, and in some cases, internal political instability.[133] These *accords* also gave France, in the name of guaranteeing the stability of the signatories, the necessary discretion and legitimacy to intervene in what were now *legally* independent and sovereign states. Thus, some have argued that the agreements contributed to a prolongation of the colonial hierarchy of the international system.[134]

This particular system involved resorting to unilateralism in French military interventions throughout the Cold War, and no other former colonial power intervened more frequently or as

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[129] Chipman, *French Power in Africa*, 123, 48.
[130] Bakong, "La Politique Militaire Africaine De La France: Forces Sociales Et Changements Récents," 193.
[131] Martin Staniland, "Francophone Africa: The Enduring French Connection," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 489, no. 1 (1987).
[132] Rachel Utley, "Franco-African Military Relations: Meeting the Challenges of Globalisation?," *Modern & Contemporary France* 13, no. 1 (2005). France signed agreements with Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Senegal, and Togo.
[133] The French response to domestic unrest was typically achieved by means of secret clauses. See, for instance, Marco Wyss, *Postcolonial Security: Britain, France, and West Africa's Cold War* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2021).
[134] Gregory, "The French Military in Africa: Past and Present."

manifestly in its former colonies as France did.[135] In fact, from 1960 to 1991, France intervened militarily more than three dozen times in 16 African countries, primarily with the aim to support weak regimes from domestic opposition, firmly cementing its reputation as the *gendarme* of Africa in its *pré carré*.[136] This reputation helped bolster the practice of self-legitimation among French security policy makers. In other words, interventions were made according to French interpretations of security: by helping a weak African head of state from any threats to their regime, the French president could decide the rules of engagement or the levels of forces without reference to external legitimating authorities.[137] France alone decided on the scope and responsibility of its operations. This level of commitment went hand-in-hand with France's credibility on the continent, which in turn helped to maintain security concerns as the core of the French-African relationship.[138] Because France's influence relied upon the acceptance and cooperation of African ruling elites, "upholding the credibility of French security guarantees – by means of military assistance and frequent interventions – became a central concern of policymakers in Paris".[139] This was especially relevant from the 1970s onward, as French policymakers felt they needed to ward off Soviet, Libyan, and US encroachments on their African sphere of influence. In fact, Nathaniel Powell argues that signaling credible commitment was among the main drivers of French intervention in Zaire in the 1970s, Chad in the 1980s, and Rwanda in the early 1990s.[140] As a result, the preferred form of military intervention became short in-and-out missions, involving only a few hundred troops.[141] Through the Cold War,

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[135] Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*, 176.
[136] Ibid., 180; Vallin, "France as the Gendarme of Africa, 1960-2014."
[137] Chipman, *French Power in Africa*.
[138] Utley, "Franco-African Military Relations: Meeting the Challenges of Globalisation?."; Charbonneau, "Dreams of Empire: France, Europe, and the New Interventionism in Africa."
[139] Recchia, "A Legitimate Sphere of Influence: Understanding France's Turn to Multilateralism in Africa," 516.
[140] Powell, "Battling Instability? The Recurring Logic of French Military Interventions in Africa."
[141] Lellouche and Moisi, "French Policy in Africa: A Lonely Battle against Destabilization," 122; Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*, 182-88.

France's small-scale military interventions, marked by a predominantly unilateral approach, offered a low-cost low-risk approach to securing its great power status. It was also welcomed among other Western powers; France was afforded relatively free rein so long as it maintained stability and kept the Soviet Union out of Africa.[142]

At the same time, French unilateral interventions were generally underpinned by an assumption that France and its army knew "their" Africa.[143] Since the military played a large part in the colonization of sub-Saharan Africa, army officers learned a great deal about the societies with which they came into contact, privileging them with knowledge of their *pré carré* that served to justify France's presence and military actions on the continent. This, in turn, has continued to underpin French interventionism in the post-colonial period.[144]

However, the end of the Cold War marked a major change in the international system and significant changes in the politics of francophone Africa occurred between the late 1980s and early 1990s. Increasing demands from popular opposition movements, together with financial pressure from conditional aid packages, put pressure on dictators and autocrats to open up their political systems and welcome multi-party elections, often for the first time since independence.[145] However, certain rulers who were reluctant to let go of power reacted by playing on ethnic divisions: in diverse countries such as Cameroon, the CAR, Chad, Gabon, and Togo, leaders who wanted to entrench their position would play off the communal tensions to garner support from members of their own ethnicity while sidelining and dividing the

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[142] Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective."
[143] Niagalé Bagayoko-Penone, *Afrique: Les Stratégies Française Et Américaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).
[144] Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective," 8.
[145] Jean-Pierre Bat, *Le Syndrome Foccart. La Politique Française En Afrique, De 1959 À Nos Jours* (Paris: Folio, 2012), 507-08.

opposition.[146] When faced with this changing landscape, policy makers in Paris at the time were faced with two general mindsets. On the one hand, President Mitterand (French president from 1981-1995) would declare in 1990 that France's aid would also be conditioned on democratic reforms; on the other hand, however, French leaders would privately reassure their African allies that reforms didn't need to happen so fast – that they could be gradually and carefully managed.[147]

Obsessed with its loss of influence in Africa, President Mitterand and his defense advisers clung to a paternalistic mindset, believing that allowing francophone African leaders to be overthrown would harm the credibility of France's security guarantees and undermine its regional influence.[148] Consequently, when African opposition movements turned violent, France would intervene militarily. These interventions were justified in the name of protecting French nationals but they were in fact mainly used to prop up the established political order.[149] Between 1989 and 1992, hundreds of French troops were dispatched to quell domestic conflict, with policy makers considering them to be legally justified based on the bilateral defense agreements mentioned above, and no effort was made to involve the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) or regional multilateral bodies.[150] But the inherent tensions between Africa's new politics based on ethnic mobilization and France's paternalistic instincts finally came to erupt in Rwanda, a former Belgian colony which was incorporated into France's sphere of influence in the 1970s.

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[146] Powell, "Battling Instability? The Recurring Logic of French Military Interventions in Africa," 60-61.
[147] Bat, *Le Syndrome Foccart. La Politique Française En Afrique, De 1959 À Nos Jours*, 507-10.
[148] Recchia, "A Legitimate Sphere of Influence: Understanding France's Turn to Multilateralism in Africa."
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

France had signed a military assistance agreement with Rwanda in 1973, after Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, an ethnic Hutu, came to power in a coup. While the country had experienced major ethnic tensions between majority Hutus and minority Tutsis (dating back to Belgium's colonial strategy of divide and rule), strained relations were kept, for the most part, under relative control.[151] However, the tenuous peace broke down in the early 1990s. In October 1990, the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a mostly Tutsi organization, invaded Rwanda from neighboring Uganda with the aim of toppling Habyarimana and gaining control of the Rwandan capital, Kigali. Mitterand and his senior advisers feared that allowing Rwanda to fall to the RPF would not only discredit France's security guarantees but might also create a chain reaction of regional instability that could weaken Paris's hold over its African domain.[152] Within days, Mitterand dispatched 300 troops (which eventually increased to 600) to support Habyarimana.[153] This was happening at the same time that France was putting pressure on Habyarimana to establish a pluralist political system, believing that political reforms would reduce popular support for the RPF.[154] President Habyarimana, however, reacted by exaggerating the Tutsi threat as an attempt to divide the opposition and rally his supporters. Reports of ethnic violence grew throughout 1992 and as a result most Western donors began to distance themselves from the Habyarimana regime. France, on the other hand, remained militarily and diplomatically loyal – thus de facto condoning the regime's growing extremism.[155]

Gradually, France realized that they were trapped in a conflict in Rwanda that it would not be able to solve on its own. Consequently, Mitterand and his advisers decided in 1993 that it

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[151] Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (Columbia University Press, 1997).
[152] Recchia, "A Legitimate Sphere of Influence: Understanding France's Turn to Multilateralism in Africa."
[153] Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 100-10.
[154] Ibid., 89-91.
[155] Powell, "Battling Instability? The Recurring Logic of French Military Interventions in Africa," 61.

should 'internationalize' the problem by inviting mediators from other countries and handing off long-term stability operations to a UN peacekeeping force.[156] However, hopes that either a Rwandan government and RPF-signed peace agreement or that peacekeepers from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) could help stabilize the country quickly evaporated. On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana's plane was shot down, most likely from radicals within his own camp who opposed the peace agreement. Within hours, Hutu militias set up roadblocks in the capital and the genocide began, leading to the slaughter of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus within weeks.[157]

By mid-May 1994, as news reports of the genocide became available, French leaders began to ponder their response, and senior officials proposed the deployment of an interposition force – a French-led humanitarian intervention to separate the warring parties.[158] While there was public justification of the intervention based on humanitarian grounds, privately the objective was to prevent an RPF victory and ultimately preserve the stability among the two Rwandan communities.[159] However, decision-making in the Elysée at the time was shared between the socialist Mitterand and the conservative prime minister, Edouard Balladur, who strongly opposed the intervention force going beyond anything other than humanitarian assistance.[160] Furthermore, Balladur avowed to veto any unilateral intervention (despite really having the authority to do so), and made his consent to any French assistance contingent upon multilateral involvement and a UNSC mandate. In the end Balladur prevailed and France received its mandate for humanitarian

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[156] On 3 March 1993, Mitterand declared before his defense council that, "We need to leave, but through the United Nations. We can't just leave like that". Available at https://francegenocidetutsi.org/ConseilRestreint3mars1993NotesVedrine.pdf.
[157] "Rwanda Genocide", *BBC News*, 7 April 2014, at https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-26875506/.
[158] Olivier Lanotte, *La France Au Rwanda, 1990-1994* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007), 387-88.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Edouard Balladur, *Le Pouvoir Ne Se Partage Pas: Conversations Avec François Mitterrand* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), 244-45.

intervention and sent 1, 200 troops to Rwanda in what became known as *Operation Turquoise*. It marked the first time that France sought UNSC approval before intervening in its African sphere of influence.[161] While it is estimated that *Operation Turquoise* might have saved 10,000 to 15,000 lives, the damage to France's reputation had already been done. French leaders, then and now, have to deal with being known as the key international supporter for the regime responsible for the genocide.[162] Furthermore, many critics believe that *Operation Turquoise* was less about humanitarian intervention than it was with allowing Hutu *génocidiares* an escape route into eastern Zaire.[163] Consequently, these actions prompted domestic, regional, and international criticism and vociferous accusations of French neocolonialism.[164] As such, the Rwandan genocide became the tipping point – the critical juncture – causing France to reassess its military approach to Africa.[165] The traditional, unilateralist method to deter the RPF did not work, and the turn to *Operation Turquoise* had undermined France's image and moral authority towards Africa to the extent that, as Rachel Utley proposes, the continuation of France's traditional policies towards Africa became unsustainable.[166]

While it wasn't the Rwandan "moment" alone that completely forced France to transform its military policy, it is argued that it was important for engendering a new "path-dependent"

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[161] France also received (largely symbolic) troop contributions from several African countries, including Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal. See Lanotte, *La France Au Rwanda, 1990-1994*.
[162] Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*.
[163] Jean-Marc Marill and Philippe Chapleau, *Dictionnaire Des Opérations Extérieures De L'armée Française: De 1963 À Nos Jours* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions, 2018).
[164] Bruno Charbonneau, *France and the New Imperialism: Security Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Routledge, 2016); Luc De Heusch, "Rwanda: Responsibilities for a Genocide," *Anthropology today* 11, no. 4 (1995); Kroslak, *The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide*. United Nations, "Report of the Security Council, 16 June 1999-15 June 2000"; Assemblée Nationale, "Rapport d'information sur les operations militaires menées par la France, d'autres pays et l'ONU au Rwanda entre 1990 et 1994", 15 December 1998.
[165] Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective."
[166] Rachel Utley, "'Not to Do Less but to Do Better…': French Military Policy in Africa," *International Affairs* 78, no. 1 (2002).

approach to security that was centered on multilateralism.[167] This, of course, was facilitated by other events, including the end of the Cold War, the emergence of a new generation of French leaders born after decolonization, a decreasing belief in the cost benefit of preserving the *pré carré*, increasing budget constraints, the internationally denounced backing of Zaire's Mbotu, and the disclosure of several scandals related to the *Françafrique* networks such as the so-called *Angolagate*.[168] A push towards normalizing its post-colonial security architecture resulted in France recognizing the need to respect mandates and rules of engagement as prescribed by international, usually UNSC, mandates and move away from the substitution of African forces (with French ones) towards capacity building and support for 'African solutions to African problems'.[169]

Consequently, succeeding French governments since the Rwanda genocide have become increasingly committed to a multilateral turn. And how has France tried to make this turn towards multilateralism? First, France reduced its military presence on the continent from the mid-1990s onward. This didn't mean that France wished to disengage from Africa entirely.[170] Rather, it was an attempt to curtail the most visible aspect of its presence in the region and a design that hoped to avoid temptation of further unilateral military interventions in African

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[167] Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective," 10.

[168] *Angolagate* refers to the scandal that came to light in 1999 when it was revealed that several senior French political figures – including Jean-Christophe Mitterand, son of President Mitterand – plotted to covertly supply arms to the Angolan government for use in its renewed war against the rebel group National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), circumventing a UN embargo of arms sales. Beyond the illegality of the arms sales, the Angolagate deals involved both bribery of Angolan political and military figures in exchange for funds allegedly in support of French political campaigns. For more details on the scandal, see Pascale Juilliard, "France Jails "Angolagate" Power Players," *The Times Online (South Africa)*, October 27 2009. http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=15464. Utley, "Franco-African Military Relations: Meeting the Challenges of Globalisation?," 29-30.

[169] Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective."

[170] Eric Berman, "French, Uk, and Us Policies to Support Peacekeeping in Africa: Current Status and Future Prospects," (2002).

conflicts by reducing its standing forces.[171] This reduction of forces stationed on the African continent was institutionalized in the *loi de programmation militaire 1997-2002* (law on military programming), which also led to a parallel transfer of military responsibility to African troops. Another early sign of this shift came at the 1998 Franco-British summit in Saint-Malo, when the British and French Governments promised to "harmonise policies towards Africa and pursue close cooperation on the ground" leading to the creation of RECAMP, military schools, and the quest for a more credible European defense Union.[172]

Second, there has been a turn away from self-legitimation and an "acceptance that French interventions could no longer be undertaken purely on the basis of French criteria and that they needed to be mandated by international bodies such as the UNSC, ideally also with approval from regional bodies such as the EU and/or the AU."[173] Third, France began to move away from the practice of determining the scope of operations without reference to others. Instead, in a new international context marked by the need to receive support from other powers, France began to accept new rules limiting the conduct of missions, length of operations, and the use of violence which were set by the EU, UNSC, or troop-contributing countries.[174] And fourth, there was a shift away from the substitution of African forces and towards the idea of 'Africanizing African security'. Considerable French investments were made in the establishment of an African standby force to be deployed across the entire continent and on short notice.[175] Building the capacity of African forces for peacekeeping and peace support operations reflected a new line of

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[171] Gorm Rye Olsen, "The Eu and Military Conflict Management in Africa: For the Good of Africa or Europe?," *International Peacekeeping* 16, no. 2 (2009): 250.
[172] Saint Malo II agreement, cited in Tony Chafer and Gordon Cumming, "Beyond Fashoda: Anglo-French Security Cooperation in Africa since Saint-Malo," *International Affairs* 86, no. 5 (2010): 1132.
[173] Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective," 11.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Melly and Darracq, *A New Way to Engage?: French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande*, 13.

thought – a rebranding of policy, so to speak – embracing a paradigm that France would engage in "the participation in multinational humanitarian and peacekeeping operations on behalf of the world community".[176] Indeed, 'African solutions to African Problems' and multilateralism had become new doctrines of French security policy.[177]

This does not mean that the trend towards multilateralism went smoothly. At times, the Chirac government went against or ignored the tenets of the new multilateral approach by undertaking unilateral interventions on several occasions, particularly in Cote d'Ivoire (from 2002-2004).[178] First, France intervened unilaterally to prevent northern rebels from taking Abidjan, dividing the country in two: French troops separated the northern rebels from southern government troops. However, after a ceasefire failed to find the warring parties a political solution, Chirac ordered another unilateral strike to destroy the Ivorian air force after an Ivorian military plane killed nine French soldiers in an attack on a French military base in November 2004.[179] While efforts were being made to implement practices that were consistent with the new multilateral approach by working with ECOWAS and gaining the support of the UNSC, old unilateral reflexes found themselves returning center stage.

It also does not mean that the efforts towards multilateralism of French security policy in Africa stalled under the Chirac regime. Instead, Chirac was seen to step up those efforts by involving the EU in France's peace and security actions in Africa in different ways as an attempt to "share the costs and risks, both financial and political, of that commitment".[180] His successor,

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[176] Treacher, *French Interventionism: Europe's Last Global Player?*, 2.
[177] Gregory, "The French Military in Africa: Past and Present," 442.
[178] Recchia, "A Legitimate Sphere of Influence: Understanding France's Turn to Multilateralism in Africa."
[179] Ibid.
[180] Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective," 13.

Sarkozy, amplified those efforts.[181] He even initiated, against the opposition of most francophone African leaders who cherished the merits of their *life insurances*, a general revision of all existing defense treaties. Consequently, neither the intervention in Mali (which had never signed a defense agreement with France) nor the peacekeeping operation in the CAR were justified on the basis of any bilateral defense agreement. Furthermore, under the Hollande administration, African ownership of their own security became an absolute priority in both discourse and practice.[182] For instance, the Élysée Summit on Peace and Security in Africa in December 2013 was held under the motto of *African solutions to African security problems*, where forty African heads of state came together (with representatives from the UN and EU) to discuss their longstanding desire to see a permanent pan-African rapid reaction force that could replace French troops, which presently remain Africa's sole rapid deployment force.[183] From the point of view of French leaders, this was an overdue and economically necessary move; in light of tightening defense budgets during the years of European austerity, the Hollande administration was becoming not only unwilling but unable to commit the resources required for maintaining a high-profile African security presence. *Operation Serval* alone, for example, cost the French treasury an estimated 650 million euros in 2013.[184]

However, just because France desires to move towards a more multilateral approach to African security does not mean that France should abandon its traditional role as first responders to conflicts in francophone Africa. In crisis situations, "Paris is still seen as a key source of diplomatic, military and financial pressure on or support for the countries in the region".[185] In

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[181] Under their presidencies, there were three French-inspired European Security and Defense Policy (EDSP) missions in Africa: Operation Artemis took place in the DRC in 2003; EUFOR DRC in 2006; and EUFOR CHAD/CAR in 2008-2009. Ibid.
[182] Benedikt Erforth, "Multilateralism as a Tool: Exploring French Military Cooperation in the Sahel," ibid.
[183] Ibid., 565-68.
[184] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 22.
[185] Melly and Darracq, *A New Way to Engage?: French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande*, 3.

fact, African rulers themselves still see that role as a critical component of not just France's identity, but of the identities of its former colonies. For example, during the crisis in Mali, the interim government expressed "greater confidence in their former colonial master's capabilities than in those of the AU or ECOWAS".[186] Similarly, just before he was ousted from office by the Seleka rebellion, the former Central African President François Bozizé appealed first to France for help.[187]

Several scholars argue (including French policy makers themselves) that France relies on multilateralism for its military commitments mainly to gain legitimacy and for the purpose of reducing its own costs and risks.[188] Olsen makes this argument explicitly with reference to the 2006 European Union Force (EUFOR) mission to Congo. That mission, he argues, would have been unthinkable under a French flag due to France's involvement in the region in the early 1990s, specifically the role it played during the genocide in Rwanda.[189] Similarly, Charbonneau suggests that France is the same old unilateral force in Africa but that "the *gendarme* has simply put on a cloak of multilateral humanitarianism".[190] Despite the growing dependence on multilateralism as a means to legitimize its interventions in Africa, France does not always feel as if it is sacrificing sovereignty, autonomy, or leadership. The EUFOR Chad in 2008 was a perfect example of this; it was operationally an EU mission but under French leadership. In fact, France bore most of the costs and provided the majority of the soldiers and equipment to that mission. Furthermore, France was able to frame the mission as one emanating from a common European consensus, reinforcing the long desire for France to create a united and strategically

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[186] Thomas G Weiss and Martin Welz, "The U.N. And the African Union in Mali and Beyond: A Shotgun Wedding?," *International Affairs* 90, no. 4 (2014).
[187] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 22.
[188] Kroslak, "France's Policy Towards Africa: Continuity or Change?," 76; Livre Blanc, "Défense Et Sécurité Nationale," (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008).
[189] Olsen, "The Eu and Military Conflict Management in Africa: For the Good of Africa or Europe?," 8.
[190] Charbonneau, *France and the New Imperialism: Security Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 293.

autonomous European defense capability (with France playing the leading actor, of course).[191] In Chapters V and VI of this dissertation I will show that France's commitment to multilateral solutions cannot always be reduced to the quest for legitimacy. Rather, it is pursued as a normative value, something that 21st century policy makers in France have sought to achieve for any international crisis (with the most notable, of course, being the strong objection to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003). Beyond its instrumentalism, multilateralism has been internalized by decision-makers and is a driving force of French action.

However, seeking multilateral solutions and promoting African ownership of security creates conflict with France's traditional solutions to crisis management. Despite budget cuts over the previous two decades, which had brought France's military expenditure down to 1.8 percent of its gross domestic product in 2013 (compared to 3 percent in 1988),[192] the ability to intervene beyond its borders continues to be a cherished and principal tool of French foreign policy-making.[193] As Maulny comments, "defense policy, as an instrument of diplomacy, gives evidence of the vision we have of the place in our country on the international stage", reflecting the importance French politicians still attribute to their country's capacity to wage war and their interpretation of the use of force as a viable diplomatic tool.[194]

The reliance on old identities – that France is a country with an independent and autonomous foreign policy, and that it should be the one to lead responses to African crises because it is one of the few European powers with the capacity to do so – presented themselves

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[191] For a brief summary of the origins of France's strategy for EU foreign policy and the genesis of Strategic Autonomy, see Mathilde Ciulla and Tara Varma, "The lonely leader: The origins of France's strategy for EU foreign policy", European Council on Foreign Relations, 6 January 2021. Accessed at https://ecfr.eu/article/the-lonely-leader-the-origins-of-frances-strategy-for-eu-foreign-policy/.
[192] World Bank, "Data: Military Expenditure," (2022).
[193] Livre Blanc, "Défense Et Sécurité Nationale," (Paris: Direction de l'information légale et administrative, 2013).
[194] Jean-Pierre Maulny, "Nicolas Sarkozy Et La Politique De Défense De La France," *Revue internationale et stratégique*, no. 1 (2010): 109.

to foreign policy decision-makers in 2013, as I will show in Chapters V and VI.[195] French security culture continues to cherish the "sacrosanct principle of autonomous decision-making and independent defense capabilities", and is today one of the world's biggest military spenders.[196] Despite France being the biggest advocate of a common European defense policy, however, its desire to maintain autonomy in foreign policy, particularly in Africa, leads scholars to conclude that it is trapped between two conflicting goals: multilateralism and independence.[197] As such, when considering interventions in Africa, French decision-makers are forced to choose between or reconcile two contradictory identities. This, in turn, creates anxieties – anxieties over prioritizing the security of their identity or prioritizing their physical/material security interests. It is against the backdrop of this identity challenge and sometimes ambiguous policy orientation that the Hollande administration decided to intervene in Mali and the CAR. And it is the extent to which these two apparently contradictory identities shaped the decision-making processes during the two crises that will be further elaborated in Chapters V and VI.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a brief review of the characteristics of French foreign policy and the nature of its security aims in Africa since the former colonies' independence, outlining France's biographical narrative vis-à-vis sub-Saharan Africa and how engagement on the continent came to be an integral part of the national narrative. I have elaborated on the notion of grandeur as the principal ideational variable used to explain French ambitions in foreign

[195] The 'traditionalists' in French foreign policy circles still cling to the old ways and advocate the original unilateralism in Africa policy that served France's grandeur until the 1990s.
[196] Bastien Irondelle and Sophie Besancenot, "France: A Departure from Exceptionalism?," in *National Security Cultures* (Routledge, 2010).
[197] Meunier, "France and the World, from Chirac to Sarkozy," 243.

policy; I have highlighted the continuity and change in that policy; and I have summarized the notion of decline that French decision-makers face when confronted with crises in their former sphere of influence.

As I have argued, the prevailing approaches covered here, whilst allowing for situating the relationship on a timeline and providing a clear understanding of the historical legacy against which decisions are made, are less situated to understand the motivations that inform those decisions. Additionally, I have argued that these approaches are biased towards outcomes, establishing the rationale for my study of the decision-making process. I propose that a process-oriented analysis of decision-making – via an ontological security approach – can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of France's Africa policies. Consequently, my approach doesn't attempt to analyze the decision-making process by referencing it as a deviation from a particular point in time (namely, the post-colonial period) or against an ambiguous concept such as grandeur. Rather, I attempt to understand the decision-making process as it reflects anxieties surrounding how French actors wish to see themselves and how they wish the world to see them. I want to understand how decisions to intervene in Africa are shaped by threats to France's self-image and how those threats are overcome. France's identity vis-à-vis sub-Saharan Africa, which has moved towards multilateralism and the Africanization of Africa's security, can be challenged when the question of intervention arises and creates the potential for ontological insecurity. The next chapter shows how engaging with the perceptions and beliefs that mattered during the decision-making process of *Operations Serval* and *Sangaris* through an ontological security lens can contribute to the ongoing debate on France's role on the African continent.

CHAPTER III

ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH FOR ANALYZING FRENCH DECISION-MAKING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

As I highlighted in the introduction to this dissertation, the genesis of this project comes from the desire to demystify France's continuous draw to its former *pré carré*, and I proposed that an under-explored avenue regarding France's African security policy lies in exploring identity anxieties and how they shape the decision-making processes of that policy. This chapter outlines the framework that has been used in this study to try and understand those processes. More specifically, it explains the theoretical assumptions and concepts that inform the research, with a view to highlighting the benefits of an ontological security interpretation for analyzing what motivated French agents during their security policy decision-making. In the end, this chapter will clarify how an ontological security studies approach helps answer the research question: How did French leaders in the Hollande administration confront identity anxieties during the crises in Mali and the CAR and how did questions about identity frame policy choices and shape the decision-making process?

In order to understand the disconnect between rhetoric and practice regarding interventions in Africa as a response to French ontological security needs, the first section covers the main ideas of ontological security – i.e., what it is and how you achieve it – and lays out how it has been applied to questions of world politics in general. In the second section, I move on to review the literature that has applied the concept of ontological security to the study of foreign policy, mapping the various ways ontological security has been used to shed light on state decisions and policy processes. The third section will cover the major concepts of ontological

security, such as how self-identities are constructed through a state's biographical narrative; how states experience shame or anxiety when there is a challenge or disconnect with that self-identity; and how anxiety can be seen as both a change-inducing and change-inhibiting emotion. Finally, the chapter concludes by establishing a link between the literature review, the theoretical framework, and the methodology – a narrative approach – advanced in the following chapter.

Ontological Security and World Politics

This section summarizes the central idea of ontological security, focusing specifically on what it is and how you get it. Starting with its roots in psychology and then moving up to sociology, it summarizes how the concept – security of the self – has been used to analyze various puzzles in world politics. I begin first with describing how the concept applies to the individual – and then show how it has been scaled up to the level of states later on in this section.

At its foundation, ontological security is a concept that has been developed with the individual in mind, focusing on the link between psychological well-being and the need for structure and order. Anthony Giddens, who borrowed the concept from the psychoanalysis of R.D. Laing,[198] and introduced the concept to sociology (and whose account ontological security scholars in IR are indebted to), uses the example of trust between a baby and its caregiver to emphasize the importance of routines and habits for establishing "a 'formed framework' for existence by cultivating a sense of being and its separation from non-being".[199] This formed framework, he argues, is what allows individuals to answer existential questions about the "basic parameters of human life": who we are, what we are, and why we are.[200] Through the creation of

[198] Laing, *Self and Others*, 168-85.
[199] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 38-39.
[200] Ibid., 48-55.

trust – which is established by routine – the baby, in his example, learns about itself, the caregiver, and the broader world within which they are situated. This, in turn, provides a fundamental sense of security. For Giddens, all individuals form frameworks that, "based on routines of various forms", answer basic questions about themselves, others, and the world around them; as such, these answers have to be "taken for granted in order to keep on with everyday activity".[201] Therefore, knowing what you are doing and why you are doing it – in other words, having a stable sense of self-identity – is crucial for establishing ontological security. But identity is not something "that we simply have"; rather it is best understood "as a social construct, formed and sustained via practices and relations with others".[202] "The Self", as explained by Giddens, is "reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography".[203] Therefore, the combination of habits, routines, and a sense of biographical continuity (and how its communicated to others) is essential for individual ontological security.[204]

Another intuition behind ontological security is that all social actors need to protect this constructed framework (of the 'self') in order to simply 'get by' and realize a sense of agency in the world. Above all, ontological security is the "confidence most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action".[205] However, uncertainties created by the "social and material environments" can paralyze an individual, causing them to question their identity, and robbing

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[201] Ibid., 37.
[202] Mitzen and Larson, "Ontological Security and Foreign Policy," 3.
[203] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 53.
[204] Bahar Rumelili, "Ontological (in) Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution," in *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security* (Routledge, 2014).
[205] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1990).

them of their agency. Identity, therefore, "seeks protection to shield itself from the forces that may cause it to disintegrate".[206]

This is not to say that identities are unchanging, as if one can use routines as "emotional shackles that 'fix' identity [to keep] the social world … at bay".[207] Identities can change, and those changes create anxiety. How an individual attains ontological security is not by returning to a stable identity but through routines that give individuals the *feeling* of stability. When individuals *feel* their identity is stable, they are ontologically secure.[208] However, this is hard to do, because the root of all anxieties that individuals face (whether related to stability of identity or the chaos imposed on our lives by the outside world) comes from their acute awareness of the fragility of life; the fact that mortality lurks around the corner implies that life is inherently unstable. But if we were constantly consumed by the fear of death, we would be unable to live our lives. Ontological security, therefore, is the need to suppress this anxiety, giving us "the ability to go on in the face of what would otherwise be debilitating anxieties of existential dread".[209]

As mentioned above, ontological security is formed and sustained through the day-to-day practices (i.e., routines) and the narratives we use to organize our sense of self. Because routines and narratives are vital to our psychological well-being, we become attached to them and would feel overwhelming anxiety at the thought of their destabilization. The assumption of ontological security, however, is that in our daily lives we simply *are* ontologically secure; we don't go around the world trying to actively *achieve* it. Rather, we are only made aware of ontological

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[206] Regina Karp, "Identity and Anxiety: Germany's Struggle to Lead," *European security* 27, no. 1 (2018): 63.
[207] Ibid.
[208] See, for instance, Catarina Kinnvall, *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India: The Search for Ontological Security* (Routledge, 2007); Christopher S Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, "Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity," *Cooperation and conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017).
[209] Christopher S Browning, "'Je Suis En Terrasse": Political Violence, Civilizational Politics, and the Everyday Courage to Be," *Political psychology* 39, no. 2 (2018): 243.

insecurity "in the breach, when … self-stability is threatened".[210] Jennifer Mitzen, who argued that physical security was not the only kind of security states seek and showed how an ontological security framework might change the way scholars think about the security dilemma, summarizes the concept nicely. She says:

> When aspects of the social and physical world that we rely on are destabilized or threatened and we can no longer sustain our routines, or our self-narratives are called into question, we can begin to feel as if we no longer know who we are. In such situations, we seek ontological security by reasserting routines or appealing to comfortable narratives. That is, ontological security-seeking means engaging self-consciously in practices that remind us of and reproduce who we feel ourselves to be.[211]

Another assumption about ontological security is that it is conservative, i.e., that it implies continuity. This means that as actors are concerned primarily with maintaining a "sense of continuity and order in events", it assumes that they prefer the status quo.[212] In other words, on some level, humans prefer stability to change. As such, if ontological security needs drive certain political actions, then taking this assumption can contribute to a deeper understanding of homeostatic tendencies in social systems (including large systems, like the international system of states). As mentioned before, this is achieved through routine behaviors and narratives that maintain 'biographical continuity'.[213] In contrast, explanations for policy *change* – at both the individual and collective level – are undertheorized in ontological security literature.[214] There has been movement on that front, however, with more recent scholarship aimed at explaining the relationship between policy change and ontological security. These scholars take a different

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[210] Mitzen and Larson, "Ontological Security and Foreign Policy."
[211] Ibid., 4.
[212] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 243; Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 7.
[213] Linus Hagström, "Great Power Narcissism and Ontological (in)Security: The Narrative Mediation of Greatness and Weakness in International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2021).
[214] For a notable exception, see, Jelena Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change," *Foreign policy analysis* 12, no. 4 (2016).

approach to human tendencies, arguing that the norm of daily behavior exists in a state of ontological *in*security. This state of insecurity is something people (and states) are constantly trying to alleviate.[215] The assumption here is that identity can never be fully stabilized; thus people (and states) are always insecure, and moments of ontological security are fleeting.[216] Nevertheless, the premise behind ontological security-seeking of the individual is that they need some semblance of certainty in their lives. While all uncertainty cannot be eliminated, an ontologically secure actor is one who has filtered enough anxiety out of their life to "allow a continuous self-narrative and purposeful agency".[217]

Now that I have outlined the ontological security-seeking needs of individuals, I will move on to how IR scholarship has adopted this concept and scaled it up to the needs of states. While Jennifer Mitzen was the first to promulgate states, like individuals, have an identity they are compelled to secure from threats – even if doing so risks their physical security[218]– most ontological security scholarship in IR attributes the genesis of their research to Giddens' account. This line of scholarship has as its focus the study of 'security of being' rather than 'security as survival', questioning the primacy of physical security in IR. While most studies share this common starting point, there is indeed great diversity with constructivist, post-structuralist, and post-colonial approaches being developed.[219] As a result, there has been a shift amongst scholars

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[215] Browning and Joenniemi, "Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity."
[216] See, for instance, ibid.; Stuart Croft, *Securitizing Islam: Identity and the Search for Security* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[217] Karp, "Identity and Anxiety: Germany's Struggle to Lead," 65.
[218] Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006).
[219] For constructivist approaches, see, Felix Berenskoetter, "Parameters of a National Biography," *European journal of international relations* 20, no. 1 (2014); Felix Berenskoetter and Bastian Giegerich, "From NATO to ESDP: A Social Constructivist Analysis of German Strategic Adjustment after the End of the Cold War," *Security Studies* 19, no. 3 (2010); Trine Flockhart, "The Problem of Change in Constructivist Theory: Ontological Security Seeking and Agent Motivation," *Review of international studies* 42, no. 5 (2016). For post-structuralist approaches, see, Christopher S Browning, "Brexit Populism and Fantasies of Fulfilment," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019); Jakub Eberle, "Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression: Fantasy as a Factor in International Politics," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 1 (2019); Catarina Kinnvall,

away from referring to an ontological security *theory* and towards a field of ontological security *studies* (OSS).[220] Nevertheless, the scaling up of ontological security for the study of world politics has allowed scholars interested in status,[221] ideology,[222] and nationalism,[223] to engage with scholars working on identity practices,[224] collective memory,[225] diasporas,[226] populism,[227] security communities,[228] and above all foreign policy.[229] It has allowed the generation of interesting and alternative explanations on a variety of issues in world politics.

While there are some issues associated with scaling up the individual's need for ontological security and biographical continuity to the needs of the state (which will be

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"Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," *Political psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004); "Ontological Insecurities and Postcolonial Imaginaries: The Emotional Appeal of Populism," *Humanity & Society* 42, no. 4 (2018). For post-colonial approaches, see, Christine Agius, "Ordering without Bordering: Drones, the Unbordering of Late Modern Warfare and Ontological Insecurity," *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 3 (2017); Giorgio Shani, "Human Security as Ontological Security: A Post-Colonial Approach," ibid.; Carmina Yu Untalan, "Decentering the Self, Seeing Like the Other: Toward a Postcolonial Approach to Ontological Security," *International Political Sociology* 14, no. 1 (2020); Marco A Vieira, "(Re-) Imagining the 'Self'of Ontological Security: The Case of Brazil's Ambivalent Postcolonial Subjectivity," *Millennium* 46, no. 2 (2018).

[220] See, for instance, Brent J Steele and Alexandra Homolar, "Ontological Insecurities and the Politics of Contemporary Populism," (Taylor & Francis, 2019); Faye Donnelly and Brent J Steele, "Critical Security History:(De) Securitisation, Ontological Security, and Insecure Memories," *European Journal of International Security* 4, no. 2 (2019); Brent J Steele, "Welcome Home! Routines, Ontological Insecurity and the Politics of Us Military Reunion Videos," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019).

[221] Andreas Pacher, "The Diplomacy of Post-Soviet De Facto States: Ontological Security under Stigma," *International Relations* 33, no. 4 (2019); Ayşe Zarakol, "Ontological (in) Security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan," *International relations* 24, no. 1 (2010).

[222] Jim Marlow, "Governmentality, Ontological Security and Ideational Stability: Preliminary Observations on the Manner, Ritual and Logic of a Particular Art of Government," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 7, no. 2 (2002).

[223] Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security."; Michael Skey, "'A Sense of Where You Belong in the World': National Belonging, Ontological Security and the Status of the Ethnic Majority in England," *Nations and Nationalism* 16, no. 4 (2010).

[224] MLR Combes, "Encountering the Stranger: Ontological Security and the Boston Marathon Bombing," *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017).

[225] Jelena Subotic, "Political Memory after State Death: The Abandoned Yugoslav National Pavilion at Auschwitz," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019).

[226] Yehonatan Abramson, "Securing the Diasporic 'Self' by Travelling Abroad: Taglit-Birthright and Ontological Security," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 4 (2019).

[227] Browning, "Brexit Populism and Fantasies of Fulfilment."; Kinnvall, "Ontological Insecurities and Postcolonial Imaginaries: The Emotional Appeal of Populism."; Steele and Homolar, "Ontological Insecurities and the Politics of Contemporary Populism."

[228] Patricia Greve, "Ontological Security, the Struggle for Recognition, and the Maintenance of Security Communities," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, no. 4 (2018).

[229] As this is the subject of the proceeding section – and the focus of this dissertation - I will cover those works in greater detail there.

addressed in Chapter IV), not all scholarship on ontological security in world politics is state-centric or even situated within the standard IR framework of states interacting in anarchy.[230] Some studies focus on state-society relations, while some focus on inter-societal relations. Indeed, many scholars of ontological security reject the application of the concept to conventional IR because it problematically reifies the state. For these scholars, assuming that a state "seeks" ontological security narrows rather than enhances our understanding of patterns and change in conflict and security studies.[231] Nevertheless, what unites the bulk of scholarship on ontological security in IR is the agreement that identity is central to structuring preferences in foreign policy choices.[232] As I am interested in how a state confronts identity anxieties as they relate to foreign policy choices that challenge its biographical continuity, what proceeds is a review of the literature that has applied the concept of ontological security to the study of foreign policy, mapping the various ways ontological security has been used to shed light on state decisions and policy processes.

Ontological Security and the Study of Foreign Policy: State Decisions and Processes

As I have shown, the work on ontological security is quite prolific in international relations. As a reminder, what this scholarship adopts as its core assumption is that collectives, including states, long for continuous and stable identities as a way to impose order on an otherwise contingent, uncertain, and messy international environment. In order for states to 'go on', they need to filter uncertainty associated with anxieties, and create a cocoon – or cognitive

[230] Mitzen and Larson, "Ontological Security and Foreign Policy."
[231] See, for example, Alanna Krolikowski, "State Personhood in Ontological Security Theories of International Relations and Chinese Nationalism: A Sceptical View," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, no. 1 (2008); Stuart Croft and Nick Vaughan-Williams, "Fit for Purpose? Fitting Ontological Security Studies 'Into'the Discipline of International Relations: Towards a Vernacular Turn," *Cooperation and conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017).
[232] Christopher S Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, "The Ontological Significance of Karelia: Finland's Reconciliation with Losing the Promised Land," in *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security* (Routledge, 2015).

filter – which will protect them from the sheer complexity of what is going on in the world. As the world is constantly changing, in both the 'social and material environments' (as Giddens notes), ontological security studies seek to explain how states deal with this changing environment. Thus, this section reviews the literature on foreign policy that draws on insights from ontological security to examine how states confront that uncertainty in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the works reviewed here either accept that states seek ontological security or does not explicitly reject it. Specifically, they focus on how the actions associated with ontological security-seeking condition foreign policy choices, processes, and outcomes.

The introduction of an ontological security approach to foreign policy studies can be attributed to those studies that focused on decisions and processes, as opposed to practices and outcomes.[233] At the focus of their research is to determine how the process of foreign policy-making is complicated by ontological security demands. This, of course, comes in the face of a major assumption in conventional IR that states seek only to satisfy their physical or material security demands. In mainstream IR, when scholars refer to the physical security of the political entity, they are referring to the interest in maintaining the territorial and institutional integrity of the state, or to the protection of the lives of its people; when referring to material security, they are referring to the state's interest in maintaining its economic and military power. Ontological security, therefore, is defined in contrast to both of these assumptions. Because ontological security has its roots in constructivism, it does not view power and interests as material things; rather those things are merely 'ideas'. Also, it assumes people don't act on the basis of material

[233] See, for example, Kaarbo, "Foreign Policy Analysis in the Twenty-First Century: Back to Comparison, Forward to Identity and Ideas."; Valerie M Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign policy analysis* (2005).

forces; rather they act on the basis of meanings.[234] As such, the focus of ontological security analyses – including this project – rests on how meaning is created and intention is understood through the socially constructed 'self'. The main idea is that the effects of material and physical security demands "depend partly on the subjectivities of those engaged in reproducing them".[235] Hence, subjectivity is an important focus of research in ontological security studies.

Nevertheless, at the heart of determining how ontological security demands complicate foreign policy decision-making is to identify how states (and the actors within) reconcile contradictory material and ontological security demands. In doing so, the literature can be seen to exist on a spectrum. On one end are cases that exemplify how the two are irreconcilable. In these cases, the question is how actors explain choices that serve to secure their sense of self-identity but also threaten their very survival. In the middle are cases that exemplify how modifying strategic choices or manipulating perceptions of those choices create the mere appearance of reconciliation. Still, on the other end, are others that serve to exemplify where material and ontological security needs can serve to reinforce one another; in other words, they are not opposed. The following is a breakdown of that spectrum.[236]

Material and Ontological Security are Irreconcilable

Some of the earliest IR scholarship on ontological security and foreign policy addresses these irreconcilable cases, those seemingly irrational choices a state makes in its foreign policy that so clearly deviates from its material interests. Brent Steele does this through analyzing why a state would engage in war when its physical security interests demand the opposite (in the case

[234] See, for instance, Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, vol. 67 (Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[235] Mitzen and Larson, "Ontological Security and Foreign Policy."
[236] I borrow this categorization of literature existing on a spectrum from Mitzen and Larson. See ibid.

of Belgium during World War II) and why a state would abstain from war when its material interests demanded that it should (in the case of Britain during the American Civil War).[237] In both these cases, the subject of study is observed to choose a foreign policy that sacrifices their interests. Great Britain, by remaining neutral, does not intervene on behalf of the Confederacy to break up a potential hegemonic rival; Belgium, on the other hand, does engage in combat with a German foe that it cannot compete with even though it means the loss of political independence.

Steele explains both of these 'irrational' foreign policies through the lens of ontological security. Up until the Emancipation Proclamation, Britain was considering intervention. However, after Lincoln's speech, which made it clear to Britain that the American Civil War was about slavery, Britain – which understood itself to be an avowedly antislavery state – decided to stay out of the conflict. Intervention on behalf of the Confederacy would have been inconsistent with the integrity of the British 'self'.[238] In the case of Belgium, its honor associated with being a neutral nation demanded that it fight Germany.[239]

Jennifer Mitzen is another scholar who used an ontological security interpretation to understand why foreign policies seemed at such odds with material interests. In particular, she studied the security dilemma, arguing that traditional realist explanations – which assert that despite the preference for the absence of conflict, sates choose aggressive postures towards one another – was insufficient to explain the phenomenon. Instead, she offered that long-term conflictual relationships are a source of stability. They are stable routines that provide more comfort than the uncertainty associated with changing identities or relationships. Even though changing behavior would be materially beneficial, she argues that it is discomfort with change

[237] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*.
[238] Ibid., 76-93.
[239] Ibid., 94-113.

that prevents the behavioral change leading to the prolongation of existing conflicts.[240] "Conflict", she says "may benefit a state's identity even as it threatens its body".[241]

While Steele and Mitzen approach foreign policy choices from a perspective that they are seemingly 'irrational', they actually have diverging theoretical views. The difference comes from their interpretation on what it is that facilitates the sustenance of a state's routine. For Steele, that sustenance comes from inside the state, emphasizing the continuity of a state's biographical self-narrative, which can also be understood as the production and maintenance of self-understandings. For Mitzen, it is inter-state relationships, or forces from outside the state, that help reproduce the routines that are essential for a state's ontological security. And the distinction of these two interpretations can be boiled down to which aspect of ontological security each author stresses, anxiety-avoidance, or shame-avoidance.

For Mitzen, anxiety can be produced by a rupture in routines with other states. In the international system, when day-to-day routines are disrupted by a crisis (or other shock to the system) states may no longer feel confident in their ability to predict how their decisions will affect the overall system. In other words, its trust in the stability of the environment – which was otherwise taken for granted – is eroded. Not knowing what policies to pursue, or what consequences those policies may have, can produce anxiety. The result is that a state loses its ability to feel as if it is preserving its identity on the world stage (as a great power, civilian power, or *puissance d'influence*). Along this same line, Bahar Rumelili's work on conflict transformation argues that the prospect of peace can generate anxieties in states accustomed to being in a state of conflict, and that these anxieties can perpetuate the longstanding routines of

[240] Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma."
[241] Ibid., 365.

conflict.[242] In other words, the conflict may have threatened the material and physical security of the states involved but it provided ontological security, nevertheless. The prospect of peace, therefore, threatens that security by disrupting the conflictual routines and habits that promote an image of 'self' in the face of a threatening 'other'.

Steele, on the other hand, focuses on shame-avoidance and how it reflects in a state's biographical continuity. As he argues, "shame at the level of states translates into state anxiety over the ability to reconcile *past (or prospective) actions* with the biographical narrative states use to justify their behavior. Shame represents insecurity regarding issues of self-identity" (emphasis in original), especially when its source comes from a situation in the past where a state failed to live up to its standards of self-integrity.[243] For example, as shown before, siding with the Confederacy during the American Civil War would have been seen as shameful for abolitionist Britain. Similarly, Steele shows how the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) campaign in the 1990s against the former Yugoslavia could be interpreted as driven by remorse or regret – or by shame – over the past failures of the Unites States, Germany, and the United Kingdom to do the moral thing. He analyzes, for instance, the British response in Kosovo in the context of appeasement, World War II, and Bosnia. He also analyzes the US response in the context of its role in the Rwandan genocide. Finally, he analyzes the German response in the context of guilt over the Holocaust.[244]

Zarakol is also interested in shame, focusing on why non-Western states are reluctant to issue apologies for previous misdeeds: Turkey for its role in the Armenian genocide, and Japan for its role in World War II atrocities. In each case, the author explains that while issuing an

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[242] Rumelili, "Ontological (in) Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution."
[243] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 13.
[244] Ibid., Chapter 6.

apology may not have a material cost, it does incur an ontological cost in the form of forcing the state to "reconsider its sense of self".[245] Saying sorry for their previous deeds would be comparable to an admission of being barbaric, or as accepting the stigma that the West portrays of non-Western states: "inferior, backward, effeminate, childish, despotic, and in need of enlightenment".[246] Here, as in the cases of Mitzen and Steele described above, ontological security demands take precedence and no apology is given, despite the shame those states feel over the actions that constitute their biographical self-narrative. Material security and ontological security interests are not reconcilable. In either case, it shows that when confronted with shame – and the anxiety such shame produces – states can either accept their shameful actions as a necessity for unifying and maintaining the social cohesion of the state, or they can seek to redeem such shame in future deeds.

In this study, I analyze French actors' anxiety as it relates to the demands of their state to act as a regional security provider and influential power on the world stage, while at the same time adhering to a strict multilateral response to international crises. France, as a residual world power, needs multilateral solutions to legitimize its uses of force abroad. Similarly, I analyze those same actors' sense of shame as it relates to their country's role in the Rwanda genocide and the stigma associated with being labeled a neocolonial power in the 21st century. As I have shown in the review of the above works, avoiding anxiety and shame is important in explaining foreign policy decision-making; both of which are at play in the crises France faced in Mali and the CAR. Understanding how changing state behavior in the face of a threat to the biographical narrative occurs, and how states overcome the anxieties associated with those threats (via narrative change) is at the heart of this dissertation.

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[245] Zarakol, "Ontological (in) Security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan," 7.
[246] Ibid., 10.

Material and Ontological Security are Reconcilable

More recently, scholarship on ontological security has begun to focus on cases where material and ontological security needs *are* reconcilable. For example, Lupovici discusses Israel and the problems it faces when attempting to secure itself from the material threat posed by Palestinian militants.[247] According to Lupovici, Israel has three main identities – Jewish, democratic, and security provider – and its ontological security needs demand that it acts in accordance with all three. However, Israel can only ever uphold two of the three at any given time, creating a situation where there is "ontological dissonance." How, then, does Israel satisfy both its ontological and material security needs? Lupovici argues that Israel adopts policy strategies of avoidance; in other words, it adopts a policy that permits individuals to avoid struggling with their inability to sustain all three pillars of their identity and the associated psychological strain.[248] One manifestation of that strategy is the creation of a wall built between conflicting populations within Israel. While the wall provides very little *physical* security, it allows people to feel as if they are while at the same time providing enough ambiguity about the meaning of Israeli policy to allow Israelis to 'get on' with their daily lives and avoid grappling with the contradictions within their three identifications.

Subotic also analyzes the reconciliation of material and ontological security interests by examining Serbia's Kosovo-regarding foreign policy. She begins with the assessment that Serbia's material interests are hampered (in the form of reduced EU membership prospects) by constantly refusing to recognize the independence of Kosovo. Kosovo, she argues, plays an important part of Serbia's national narrative. As a result, Serbian leaders were unable to pursue

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[247] Amir Lupovici, "Ontological Dissonance, Clashing Identities, and Israel's Unilateral Steps Towards the Palestinians," *Review of international studies* 38, no. 4 (2012).
[248] Ibid.

the nation's material interests because of their reluctance to sacrifice a territory with such rich historical meaning for Serbian identity. However, Serbia *did* come to recognize Kosovo. Subotic argues that the historical narrative underpinning the importance of Kosovo to Serbia was manipulated by Serbian elites through selective activation of tropes of sacrifice and victimhood, themes that every Serbian could also understand. Subotic shows that autobiographical narratives, while crucial for ontological security, are not immutable. In this way, a policy that had been otherwise ontologically unacceptable is made to be seen as one that is palatable.[249]

Selden and Strome make similar arguments about elite narrative manipulation regarding India in the post-Cold War era. India had forged an identity during the Cold War as one of nonalignment and wariness of the United States, however, after the fall of the Soviet Union, India's economic and military interests shifted in a way that made it necessary to rely on the United States to address threats emanating from China and Pakistan. In order to reconcile those conflicting security demands, the authors argue that Indian media began to shift the national narrative away from nonalignment and quasi-socialism towards democracy, facilitating an ontologically palatable relationship with the United States for the Indian public.[250]

The theme of these studies, which focused on the reconciliation of material and ontological security, is the manipulation of the foundations of societal ontological security by elites – in the form of political elites or media elites – to make a strategy that would have been otherwise ontologically unacceptable into one that can be adopted without compromising ontological security. This highlights the process of justification and priming that goes into the selection of any controversial foreign policy. As I have shown, physical and ontological security

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[249] Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change."
[250] Zachary Selden and Stuart Strome, "Competing Identities and Security Interests in the Indo–Us Relationship," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 13, no. 2 (2017).

can be shown to be reconcilable. The process, however, requires that decision-makers do one of two things. They can constrain their choices to those that are consistent with what they perceive to be ontological security needs. Or elites can shape the discourse over identity narratives to make their preferred physical security choices appear ontologically acceptable.

Material and Ontological Security are Reinforcing

Finally, there are cases where material and ontological security demands are not in opposition; thus, no reconciliation is required, as the two are mutually reinforcing. In these cases, threats to a country's ontological security can also be seen as threats to that country's material security, and vice versa. For one, Darwich studies the response of Saudi Arabia to the rise of Islamist governments in Iran and Egypt in 1970 and 2012, respectively. In doing so, she points out how the rise of these governments were a threat to Saudi ontological security by threatening its distinctiveness as a regime that justifies its political control by a claim to being the "protagonist of 'true' Islam".[251] Subsequently, the Saudi government began to adopt foreign policies that not only protected their material security but began to change the narrative of Saudi identity, shifting away from a pan-Islamist one to a narrow Salafi-Wahhabism. Not only did the Saudis protect their material interests in the region, but they maintained their distinctiveness and thus maintained their ontological security.

Similarly, Gustafsson applies this to the relationship between China and Japan, their growing disparities between each state's material capacities, and the increasing disdain they perceive of one another as a result. In this case, however, it is the ontological component of the threat that provokes a kind of response not predicted by a material threat alone. Also, in this case,

[251] May Darwich, "The Ontological (in) Security of Similarity Wahhabism Versus Islamism in Saudi Foreign Policy," ibid.12, no. 3 (2016): 9.

the ontological component enhances the perception of the material threat. This is because, as Gustafsson argues, there is "perceived misrecognition": China fails to recognize Japan's identity as a peaceful state, and Japan fails to recognize China's identity as a victim of past Japanese aggression.[252] As a result, failing to recognize each state according to their own self-conceptions exacerbates the traditional security dilemma between the two.

What unites all these cases, however, is that whether we are looking for the creation of identities, their change, or fall, ontological security is the search for a collective's self-narrative that can be sustained. The assumption each of these cases make – and the one I adopt in this project – is that there is a critical relationship between actor and environment, between agency and structure. What drives state behavior, when viewed through this presumption, is the avoidance of ontological insecurity; disrupting foreign policy 'routines' that might lead to anxiety and ontological discontinuity is something states (and the people who run them) cannot bear. My focus in this dissertation, therefore, is to use an ontological security approach to analyze how foreign policy choices can be made (or constrained) in order to avoid the discontinuity that can cause shame, anxiety, or both.

Conceptual Definitions

In this section I will cover in greater detail the major concepts of ontological security, such as a state's biographical narrative and how self-identities are constructed through them; how states experience shame or anxiety when there is a challenge or disconnect with that self-

[252] Karl Gustafsson, "Memory Politics and Ontological Security in Sino-Japanese Relations," *Asian Studies Review* 38, no. 1 (2014); "Routinised Recognition and Anxiety: Understanding the Deterioration in Sino-Japanese Relations," *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 4 (2016).

identity during a critical situation; and how anxiety can be seen as both a change-inducing and change-inhibiting emotion.

Biographical Narrative

As I have shown above, ontological security – or identity security – is important because it provides a consistent sense of self over time. Without a stable sense of self over time, states (just as individuals) are considered to be unable to exert agency effectively, since one's sense of self provides a guide to how one should act in a changing world.[253] More importantly, this type of security is narratively constituted. That is, rather than political communities having a fixed identity or sense of self, it must be established through repeated storytelling, or strategic narration.[254] These stories, articulated as a biographical narrative, explain their country's past, present, and future selves (albeit selectively).[255] The narratives contain, as with any other story, actors, settings, and plots. The protagonist (actor) is typically the state who undertakes selected actions (plot) in a world framed in a particular way (setting). For example, a state who wishes to portray itself as humanitarian will tend to silence atrocities to help maintain this impression.[256] Take France, a country who often views itself the founder of human rights, who only recently acknowledged using torture in the Algerian War in the 1950s and 1960s; and French governments even refused until 1999 to admit that it was a real war and not just a 'law and order

[253] Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security and Conflict: The Dynamics of Crisis and the Constitution of Community," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, no. 4 (2018).
[254] Charlotte Epstein, "Who Speaks? Discourse, the Subject and the Study of Identity in International Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 2 (2011); Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change."
[255] These stories have been called national biographies. See, for example, Berenskoetter, "Parameters of a National Biography."
[256] Roy F Baumeister and Stephen Hastings, "Distortions of Collective Memory: How Groups Flatter and Deceive Themselves," in *Collective Memory of Political Events* (Psychology Press, 2013).

problem'.[257] Similarly, a state self-identifying as a great power may narrate episodes where it exerted significant influence on world politics, but silence moments of weakness. To admit these moments might induce shame, and thus ontological insecurity.[258]

But, as I mentioned before, a national autobiography is not the only way a state achieves ontological security. It can also achieve it through established norms and routine behaviors via interactions with others. States, therefore, can be seen as performing "actions in order to underwrite their notions of who they are".[259] For example, a state self-identifying as military interventionist is more likely to see the use of force as a viable and identity-affirming political practice. Similarly, a state that self-identifies as a reliable ally may experience ontological insecurity if its ally does not recognize or value its support. What is important here is that both behavioral routines and the stories through which they are understood can reinforce each other. Colley and van Noort sum up this relationship nicely, saying:

> An ontological security narrative articulates an actor's sense of self, based on who it is today, who it has been and who it might be in future. In turn, this narrative suggests future behaviours that would maintain or enhance the actor's identity. If the actor undertakes the behaviour, and it succeeds, the behaviour is likely to maintain or enhance its ontological security. In turn, that behaviour reinforces the narrative on which it was based. The story reinforces the behaviour, which reinforces the story. This can create a self-reinforcing cycle of 'this is who we are, so this is how we act, which reinforces our sense of who we are, so we should act this way again in future', and so on. Over time, these behaviours, and the narratives used to justify them, become increasingly entrenched to the point where fulfilling them appears to be common sense.[260]

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[257] Martin Alexander and John FV Keiger, "France and the Algerian War: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 25, no. 2 (2002).
[258] Flockhart, "The Problem of Change in Constructivist Theory: Ontological Security Seeking and Agent Motivation."
[259] Zarakol, "Ontological (in) Security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan."
[260] Thomas Colley and Carolijn van Noort, *Strategic Narratives, Ontological Security and Global Policy: Responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative* (Springer Nature, 2022), 25.

Consequently, the behaviors and the stories become dominant, less subject to challenge, and alternate "narratives stop making sense".[261] This is why, as mentioned above, it is easier to maintain continuity than to justify policy shifts that run counter to the dominant narratives told by political communities about who they are. In this respect, a biographical narrative can be seen as exerting power by enabling or constraining certain actions, and by shaping how they are interpreted.[262] As a result, policies that are framed as being congruent with the dominant autobiographical narrative will seem more natural and expected; policies that deviate with that narrative may seem illogical and harder to defend.

This does not mean, however, that while there may often be a dominant biographical narrative (a dominant identity) within political communities, states do not possess a singular national narrative as such. Scholars agree that ontological security narratives are multi-layered, and because of this there are undoubtedly areas within each political community where that identity is contested and there may be multiple interpretations of a nation's past, present, and future.[263] Ned Lebow echoes this assertion when he refers to states and state actors as having multiple self-identifications (as opposed to fixed and unitary identities).[264] In the case of France, it is a country that wishes to be seen as both autonomous and independent in security practices, while at the same time relying on multilateralism as a source of legitimacy, particularly in its former *pré carré.* Similarly, it is a country that wishes to avoid the label of neocolonial power but remains a committed and active partner in the security and stability of its former colonies.

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[261] Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change," 6.
[262] Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (Routledge, 2014).
[263] See, for instance, Will K Delehanty and Brent J Steele, "Engaging the Narrative in Ontological (in) Security Theory: Insights from Feminist Ir," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22, no. 3 (2009).
[264] Richard Ned Lebow, *National Identities and International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Critical Situations

Another concept that is important for understanding how ontological security is attained or threatened is *critical situation*. In its simplest form, critical situations are ones which push actors and collectives towards a state of ontological insecurity in the first place. To be more specific, they are "radical disjunctions of an unpredictable kind affecting substantial numbers of individuals" that disturb their institutionalized routines.[265] But how do critical situations do this? Critical situations threaten ontological security because they remove the protective cocoon created by state routines, causing agents to consciously (and discursively) question fundamental answers that have previously been taken for granted; answers to what Giddens calls existential questions regarding existence and being, finitude and human life, the experience of others, and the continuity of self-identity.[266] Once an event occurs that causes these formerly taken-for-granted answers to come into question, shame and guilt flood through from the unconscious mind, resulting in the sudden inability for agents to 'go on'.[267] The upsurge in anxiety created by these critical situations is followed by attempts to re-establish routines and regain cognitive control over the changed environment.[268]

Of particular importance for my thesis are when answers to fundamental questions regarding a *state's* continuity of self-identity come into question. Because critical situations threaten the continuity that is so important to a sense of self, their mere presence represent identity threats. As I have shown, agents with stable self-identity can sustain biographical continuity through the reenactment of their daily routines. Similarly, states achieve this continuity through the construction of autobiographical narratives as continuous in time and

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[265] Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, 61.
[266] *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 47.
[267] *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, 57.
[268] Ibid., 64.

space. I have also shown, on the other hand, that agents (and states) with a fractured self-identity have a harder time sustaining their autobiographical narratives. If states are not able to synchronize their past or current activities with their autobiographical narratives, the fundamental question of "the continuity of self-identity" bursts into the discursive domain and if not completely answered, produces shame and what Tillich calls "the anxiety of guilt and condemnation".[269] It is during critical situations that state agents contest and interrogate what their state is, and also address whether their policies and decision-making reflects their self-vision. Critical situations, therefore, are intriguing because they are disruptions which open up spaces and provide reformational opportunities, hence an important avenue for research.[270]

This, however, begs the next question: how do I know a critical situation exists? It is not sufficient for me as the researcher to merely decide that a series of events meets the definition of a critical situation. What is important is whether the state agents (or other policy makers within the state) perceive the event as a critical situation. Also, on top of the recognition by state actors that an event meets the criteria mentioned above for creating conditions of ontological insecurity, I propose that a critical situation must have two additional conditions.[271] First it cannot be predicted. In other words, it must catch a state off guard – if a state could foresee the arrival of a critical situation, it would be able to adapt a priori in order to avoid the situation altogether. Second, and more importantly, I assume that critical situations threaten identity only when agents perceive that they can do something to eliminate them. Agents, in this case, must perceive that they are capable agents (i.e., that they have agency), and that they possess a capacity to either alter, prevent, or transform a critical situation into one that no longer threatens their

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[269] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 52-57; Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Yale University Press, 2008), 51.
[270] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 91.
[271] For a narrow definition of critical situation – and one which I adopt in this dissertation – see ibid., 12-13.

identity. As I will demonstrate in my case studies, the choice to intervene unilaterally in Mali and the choice to meddle in African security in the CAR constituted critical situations for France. As the Hollande built his administration around continuing the idea of multilateralism and disengagement from Africa, the demand to intervene threatened the continuity of a 21st century French biographical narrative, causing the agents to feel anxiety from a threatened self-image.

Anxiety and the Emotions of Shame

Finally, but still related to critical situations and biographical narratives, I will define the concept of anxiety in ontological security studies (OSS). As I have already alluded to earlier in this section, anxiety is an emotion which arises out of disruptions (or challenges) to a biographical narrative, brought about by one or more critical situations. It is a key concept in ontological security studies, in most cases being used synonymously with an existential sense of ontological *in*security.[272] However, despite its importance as a central concept in OSS, its definition still varies. Steele, for example, defines it as a "state of unease" without a "definite object",[273] while others refer to it as a "psychic condition or mood" rather than an emotion.[274] Still, some refer to anxiety more generally as a "state of uncertainty and insecurity" or "a feeling of inner turmoil in the face of uncertainty".[275] This linking of anxiety to uncertainty is common in the OSS literature and implies that experiencing anxiety is associated with not knowing what others will do and what might happen in the future, which generates uncertainty about one's own

[272] For authors how see anxiety as a key or central concept in OSS, see Karp, "Identity and Anxiety: Germany's Struggle to Lead."; Filip Ejdus, *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity* (Springer, 2020); Rumelili, "Ontological (in) Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution."
[273] Steele, "Welcome Home! Routines, Ontological Insecurity and the Politics of Us Military Reunion Videos," 326.
[274] Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, "Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security in World Politics: Thinking with and Beyond Giddens," *International Theory* 12, no. 2 (2020): 241.
[275] Jelena Cupać, "The Anxiety Dilemma: Locating the Western Balkans in the Age of Anxiety," *Journal of Regional Security* 15, no. 1 (2020): 10; Ejdus, *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity*, 1-2.

place in the world.[276] The OSS scholarship, in turn, deals with the consequences of those feelings of anxiety and the constant efforts of how to keep that anxiety at bay.

While the literature makes note of the different *causes* of anxiety, it also makes note of the different ways anxiety can produce various outcomes. One focus, in particular, is the analysis of whether anxiety actually inhibits or promotes behavioral change. As this dissertation concerns itself with the puzzle of why the Hollande administration promised to avoid unilateral intervention in Mali and meddling with the internal affairs in CAR yet decided to do so anyway (a behavioral change), an analysis of the ways anxiety promotes or inhibits changes in practices is fitting for this research. The next part of this section addresses the role anxiety plays in either inhibiting or promoting change in ontological security studies.

Because the key concern of OSS is the management of uncertainty – which is understood as generating anxiety – actors can be taken to prefer stability over change and to largely view change as something to be avoided.[277] The preference for stability is prominent amongst accounts of the ontological security seeking behavior of state agents, whether they emphasize routines, coherence of biographical narrative, or continuity in foreign policy behavior.[278] Continuity of practices is seen as the natural result of being emotionally attached to one's identity-sustaining routines and behaviors. In these cases, anxiety is viewed as undermining an actor's ability to act reflexively, minimizing their ability to change their behavior in a meaningful way.[279] Thus we see deep-seated identity preferences as an explanatory variable for

[276] Felix Berenskoetter, "Anxiety, Time, and Agency," *International Theory* 12, no. 2 (2020): 275.
[277] Browning and Joenniemi, "Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity."
[278] See, for instance, Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma."; Zarakol, "Ontological (in) Security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan."
[279] Krickel-Choi, "The Concept of Anxiety in Ontological Security Studies."

why foreign policy change is so hard in certain domains. I will show this to be the case for France with respect to its African security policy in Chapters V and VI.

More recently, however, studies have pointed out that anxiety (or the related emotion of shame) *can* indeed make actors capable of change.[280] This is because being in a state of ontological *in*security is intolerable – it constitutes a crisis pushing us to rectify it immediately.[281] When faced with the crisis of ontological insecurity, actors have one of two options: they can either change their behavior or change their self-conception. However, the demands of ontological security make it more likely that the actors will prefer to change their behavior rather than their self-image. In this case, discursive shifts are necessary to relate the change in behavior to a stable sense of self-identity. Steele, as highlighted earlier, makes this argument when he says that state actors monitor their behavior reflexively, enabling them to adjust it in accordance with their preferred biographical narrative.[282] Thus, behavioral changes in the form of foreign policy adaptation are a result of anxieties generated by ontological insecurities even though those changes are constrained by the existing identity narrative.[283]

Consequently, anxiety can cause a plethora of responses: from foreign policy rigidity; to discursive shifts within a dominant autobiographical narrative; to more profound behavioral adaptation. This "dual role" of anxiety seemingly both inhibits behavioral change and promotes

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[280] Jeremy Youde, "Shame, Ontological Insecurity and Intercountry Adoption," *Cambridge review of international affairs* 27, no. 3 (2014).
[281] John Cash, "Psychoanalysis, Cultures of Anarchy, and Ontological Insecurity," *International theory* 12, no. 2 (2020).
[282] Brent J Steele, "Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War," *Review of international studies* 31, no. 3 (2005). Similar arguments are made by Subotic and Karp. See, for instance, Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change."; Karp, "Identity and Anxiety: Germany's Struggle to Lead."
[283] Jakub Eberle and Vladimír Handl, "Ontological Security, Civilian Power, and German Foreign Policy toward Russia," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16, no. 1 (2020).

it.[284] While some studies have adopted anxiety and ontological insecurity as synonyms, I do not use that conceptualization. Rather, I differentiate the two in a similar manner to Karp, who notes that ontological insecurity only obtains when anxiety is not managed.[285] It can be managed, she argues, through adaptation of the self's narrative. Thus, I assume that anxiety and ontological insecurity exist on a spectrum with different levels of severity, with the latter being an escalation of the former. As a result, I presume ontological insecurity as being something that must be avoided at all costs. And I spend considerable effort in trying to determine at which point the threat of ontological insecurity (amongst actors) "kicks in", i.e., the point at which anxiety should be managed via behavioral change or narrative change. In other words, I not only assume that anxiety can both inhibit *and* promote behavioral change; I also assume that anxiety will promote behavioral change up until the point that ontological insecurity prohibits it. Identifying when that "point" manifests is also a concern of this dissertation.

In the case of France, I analyze the decisions to intervene in the context of France's proposed self-identity regarding African security, namely a disengaged power who relies on strict multilateralism. This proposed self-identity, I argue, created anxiety because it was contrary to a deeper-seated actor identity. Understanding the extent to which anxiety associated with being seen as a neocolonial power or relying on multilateral action in Africa influenced the decision-making process can help us shed light on identifying the "point" at which sticking to the 'old ways' of doing things – while at the same time changing the 'story' of why they are doing it – prevented ontological insecurity amongst French actors.

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[284] Kinnvall and Mitzen, "Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security in World Politics: Thinking with and Beyond Giddens."
[285] Karp, "Identity and Anxiety: Germany's Struggle to Lead."

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that narratives – which are tools used by policy makers to explain to themselves and others what they are doing – are a key component of establishing a sense of routine, which is critical for ontological security. As the review of the literature above shows, the shared presumption amongst OSS scholars is that what drives state action is the avoidance of ontological *in*security – or the disruption of routines that lead to anxiety and identity discontinuity. For a state to maintain agency it must bring order that allows for continuity of the 'self'. We can understand this order through studying the state's narrative, which is "the words used to describe how the nation views itself and how it aims to achieve what it wants to be known as".[286] But this narrative is not rigid; it is malleable enough to accommodate fluctuations to the environment. Studying the narrative and how it adapts (through an ontological lens) allows us to see how the changing environment stresses actors' self-identities and how they overcome those stressors through the foreign policy decision-making process.

Now, let us recall my objective of Chapter II, where I summarized the historical narrative(s) of French security policy in Africa. As I showed, the trend in contemporary French security policy in Africa reflects two conflicting self-images. First, as the region where France can show the world that it still matters, Africa presents itself as an area where French decision-makers can exercise independence and autonomy in security matters, which provides strong incentives for France to act unilaterally in its former *pré carré*. This, however, contradicts with the growing need for France to *multilateralize* its operations in order to retain legitimacy in international affairs (especially as a permanent member of the UNSC). Second, as the home of

[286] Ibid., 66.

human rights and republican values, France feels compelled to reach out its hand to those that need it, particular those former colonies that have close ties with their former colonial power. This, however, contradicts with the desire for France to no longer be seen as a neocolonial power, which has become especially sensitive given the strong need to prevent another Rwanda-like moment.

In the next chapter I outline the methodological tools used to evaluate these conflicting self-images and how they shaped the foreign policy choices. I also defend why a narrative analysis is best suited to understand how actors create meaning during foreign policy decision-making, and how it best serves to fill some of the gaps in the existing literature.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

As shown in the preceding two chapters, France's relations with the African continent have been studied from a variety of angles, with the focus on a series of outcomes – not the processes themselves – that usually fall under the researcher's spotlight. While the different approaches all contribute to our understanding of French policy-making in sub-Saharan Africa, I have also shown how an ontological security approach goes beyond the established canon of French security policy analyses and facilitates the task of unraveling the complex dynamics of decision-making processes. Attempts to understand the processes of foreign policy decision-making are not without their challenges, however, particularly when studied through the lens of ontological security. This chapter introduces the methodological tools used to make that analysis and overcome those challenges. Specifically, I will defend the methods used to capture ontological security-seeking behavior when conducting the empirical case studies.

Because I am interested in a process as opposed to an outcome, i.e., I want to know what actors perceive to be threats to identity rather than how they responded to those threats, discourse analysis (via the case-narrative approach) is used to interpret the decision-making processes in each of the cases. In the first section I will operationalize the research question and defend my choice of an interpretive analysis. In the second section, I will explain how narratives (on top of being important for establishing routines and ontological security) are also an important conceptual tool used to study foreign policy choices. This section will also defend why I have adopted elements from narrative research and justify why the case-narrative approach is appropriate for interpreting ontological security within the cases. In the third section, I will

summarize the methodology used to empirically analyze the case studies, defining who the units of analysis are (i.e., who the decision-makers and narrators of a state's biography were in the Hollande administration), where the data comes from, and how it is analyzed. Special attention is given to ontological security referents like critical situations and anxiety – which I defined in Chapter III – and suggest what would constitute evidence of each referent. This section also reviews my case selection and explains my analytical process for recreating the "story" of each case, specifically looking at three stages of the decision-making process: agenda-setting, debating the intervention, and justifying the decision. I end this chapter with a brief defense of these methods as being both rigorous and thorough enough to satisfy even the most positivist of scholars, as well as address some conceptual and methodological concerns (namely the 'scaling up' of the approach from people to states, as well as the structure-versus-agency debate in the subfield of foreign policy analysis).

Operationalizing the Research Question and Interpretivism

Having laid out the paradox surrounding France's rhetoric of disengagement and practices of intervention, as well as the gaps in the literature explaining French security policies in Africa, I will explain how I operationalize the research question. First, however, I will clearly restate it. *This dissertation will investigate how French leaders in the Hollande administration confronted identity anxieties during the crises in Mali and the CAR from 2012-2013, and how their perceptions and beliefs surrounding those anxieties influenced the decision-making process.* This means that my 'variable' of interest is the decision-making process itself (as opposed to the outcome), and the explanatory variables (or the things that shape the outcome of the decision-making process) are the actors' perceptions and beliefs regarding anxieties over

‘self’ and identity. My level of analysis rests with the individual actors, however, as is customary in some ontological security studies, I scale up the ontological needs of the individual to those of the state. This ‘scaling up’ is not without its problems, as scholars have pointed out, and I will address those in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

I hypothesize that the French decision-making process over interventions into sub-Saharan Africa is largely shaped by the need to maintain ontological security (or, by the need to overcome the anxieties associated with the threat of ontological *in*security). In other words, France is willing to disregard threats to the physical security of its soldiers and citizens in order to preserve its self-image as a regional security provider and influential power; it is engaging in ontological security-seeking behavior in order to affirm its sense of self-identity. Despite repeated promises by the Hollande administration to refrain from intervening in Mali and the CAR, French policy makers chose intervention in order to overcome debilitating anxieties associated with doing nothing. Furthermore, I argue that French actors managed those anxieties – anxieties caused by the conflicting policies of African disengagement in the face France’s universalist impulses – by recasting their self-identity narrative in a manner that reconciled the decision to intervene with France’s biographical narrative regarding African security, which brought back routine and calm to its foreign policy practices.

How do I demonstrate my argument? Methodologically, this project starts from two outcomes, that is the two policy decisions to intervene, and asks how these decisions came about by deconstructing the processes leading to their materialization. Because I am interested in how actors created meaning for their actions (i.e., I am interested in what motivated the actions), and because I want to explicate the intentions of those actions, instead of what *caused* them, my

study is informed by the interpretivist approach to social science.[1] This approach assumes that facts and observations are not reducible to "law-like generalizations of the physical sciences" which always permit us to explain action through causal analysis.[2] Rather, it assumes that understanding the processes that motivated the action, i.e., to interpret the action, allows us to better understand the object of inquiry, without relying on a strict analysis of causal chains. The ontological security process – a process that deals with self-identity, creating meaning through biographical narratives, taking action to promote a desired vision of 'self' to others, overcoming insecurities regarding divided visions of 'self', and how all of this shapes the "place of the national self in an international context" – lends itself to an interpretative approach.[3]

Furthermore, this type of approach is mainly qualitative (as opposed to the quantitative tradition of positivist research). Qualitative research is non-numerical, in-depth research or data collection, and applies to small-sample studies or is limited to a few cases. [4] Qualitative methodologies are also best suited to understanding the processes involved in a critical situation and the beliefs and perceptions of those in it.[5] This type of research can generate in-depth knowledge of a small number of cases which might apply to more general real-world policy contexts, and is well suited to "investigate the causal mechanisms of established relationships", particularly those relationships that are essential for creating routines and security of identity.[6] However, one must properly evaluate the context in which the ontological security-seeking

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[1] Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs*, 42; Knotter, "Interpretivism in International Relations Research."
[2] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 6.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Akan Malici and Elizabeth Sue Smith, *Political Science Research in Practice* (Routledge New York, 2013), 20-22.
[5] William A Firestone, "Alternative Arguments for Generalizing from Data as Applied to Qualitative Research," *Educational researcher* 22, no. 4 (1993): 22.
[6] Malici and Smith, *Political Science Research in Practice*, 22.

behavior of states takes place. By adopting an interpretive approach, I recognize the subjective, context-sensitive nature of not only the social world but also the enterprise of research.

How, then, do I make knowledge claims using an interpretive approach? I follow the advice of Mervyn Frost who makes several noteworthy requirements for interpretivist research.[7] Among them are the following: first, my interpretations should be tested against the self-understandings of the subject of study;[8] second, I should stress the constitutive nature of the language of those same subjects (i.e., the interconnectedness of the actors, their actions, the social practices within which they perform those actions, and the language internal to those practices); third, I should take notice of the value systems of those I study, recognizing the extent to which those values influenced their decision. Armed with that advice, my aim is to reconstruct the motives behind the actions of French actors in each empirical case.

Interpretive approaches, however, have problems which arise out of the exact thing it uses to explain action – context and environment. Because of this, interpretations fall prey to relativity. If all actions are merely a product of their context and environment, then it becomes difficult to generalize about social behavior more broadly.[9] Consequently, in order to circumvent this problem, part of my research in this dissertation is not only about the context of the decision-making process but also the continuity that those decisions serve. I do this because I am studying the cases equipped with an ontological security interpretation, which views the security of identity as being achieved through a "sense of continuity and order in events".[10]

In line with the interpretivist approach, in order to *interpret* the impact anxieties had upon the interventionist decision-making processes surrounding the two crises (terrorist threat in Mali

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[7] Mervyn Frost, "Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory," (1996): 26-28.
[8] More details regarding the subject of study will be explained in the section *Units of Analysis* below.
[9] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*.
[10] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 243.

and humanitarian catastrophe in CAR) I need to reconstruct the motives behind the actions of French decision-makers. To do this, I propose a case-narrative approach to resurrect, in each case, meaning as it relates to agents' perceptions and beliefs of an event. A narrative approach reconstructs a particular 'story' in each case, looking for moments where continuity is disrupted and the actor's self-image changes or comes into question during the decision-making process. As I have already highlighted, the biographical narrative is important for ontological security because, as Giddens says, it is the "narrative of the self" that guides and is used to justify all actions.[11] However, in addition to being important for establishing routines necessary for ontological security, narrative is also an important conceptual tool used in studying foreign policy choices. Before explaining the case-narrative method in greater detail, I now turn to explaining how narrative research has become a trending topic in international studies and why I have adopted it for this project.

Narratives in International Studies Research

Narrative research has become a trending topic in international studies, with a growing body of research adopting methods and insights from the fields of sociology, narratology, linguistics, and related fields to better explain international relations (IR). Since the early 2000s, the growth of studies using "narrative" in international studies research has become widespread and can be seen as a continuation of the "linguistic turn" in IR, which saw a rise in scholarship addressing the role of language and discourse in politics in the late 1980s.[12] Broadly, the research agenda is mostly focused on answering questions about how narratives can be used to shape

[11] Ibid.
[12] Behar Sadriu, "Narratives in International Studies Research," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2021).

future policy courses, or how they impact the identity of agents and actors. The recent growth of the use of narrative theory in IR research has indicated a need to begin taking narratives – and methodologies used to study them – more seriously. This, in turn, has motivated other questions in the field, including: How important is it for scholars to focus on what actors say rather than what they do? Does that distinction even matter? What is the causal significance of narratives, if any, and what is the best way to study them? Or more simply, how do narratives "work"; what forms can they take and what are their functions? The first part of this section will begin with an introduction to narrative theory, i.e., what it is, where it came from, and the insights it offers to this study. It will then move on to a discussion of its applications to the broader field of international studies, with special attention paid to the various ways narratives have been studied to explain the politics of security and defense. It will end with a brief summary and defense of why the case-narrative approach is appropriate for interpreting ontological security within the cases.

Narrative Theory and Narratology

So, what exactly is a narrative, and what does it do? To narrate means to tell or to speak, and at its most basic, a narrative is a story; or, as the Cambridge English Dictionary (2022) defines it, "a description of a series of events". These descriptions can occur in materials such as films, novels, textbooks, or other sites of discourse production (i.e., news media). Or they may occur in the speeches of leaders, in the conversations of a group or community, or the telling of a life story. But narratives are not merely a chronological recollection of facts and events. Conceptually, narratives are frameworks that allow humans to make sense of the world and

create their own identities.[13] They are how "human beings order disordered experience and impart meaning to themselves and their world."[14] As such, narratives are critical for political life, and are important for understanding various phenomena in international politics. This is why more and more scholars have attempted to adopt insights from narratology (the branch of knowledge that studies the structure of narrative and its purpose) and related fields of linguistics and sociology into the field of international studies. In international studies, narrative theory (or the narrative method/narrative analysis) is used to denote a concern for the effects that narratives have over time and how they normalize and create modes of behavior, thinking, and policy making.[15] In particular, variants of the theory have been used to investigate important political puzzles.[16] For example, it has been used in the analysis of national identity,[17] security,[18] foreign policy,[19] violent non-state actors,[20] and public opinion.[21] As such, narrative has become a preferred scholarly mode of analysis.[22]

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[13] Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," 606.
[14] Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138, 2.
[15] Sadriu, "Narratives in International Studies Research," 1.
[16] Miskimmon, O'loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*.
[17] See, for instance David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia* (U of Minnesota Press, 1998); Geir Hønneland, *Borderland Russians: Identity, Narrative and International Relations* (Springer, 2010); Matthew Moran and Heather W Williams, "Keeping up Appearances: National Narratives and Nuclear Policy in France and Russia," *Defence Studies* 13, no. 2 (2013).
[18] See, for instance Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (Routledge, 2013); Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.
[19] See, for instance Christopher S Browning, *Constructivism, Narrative and Foreign Policy Analysis: A Case Study of Finland* (Peter Lang, 2008); Erik Ringmar, *Identity, Interest and Action: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Intervention in the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change."
[20] See, for instance Alexander Spencer, *Romantic Narratives in International Politics: Pirates, Rebels and Mercenaries* (Manchester University Press, 2016).
[21] See, for instance Beatrice De Graaf, George Dimitriu, and Jens Ringsmose, *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War: Winning Domestic Support for the Afghan War* (Routledge, 2015); Gordon D. Cumming, Roel Van Der Velde, and Tony Chafer, "Understanding the Public Response: A Strategic Narrative Perspective on France's Sahelian Operations," *European Security* (2022).
[22] See, for instance, Robert H Bates et al., *Analytic Narratives* (Princeton University Press, 1998); Alexander L George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (MIT Press, 2005); Audie Klotz and Cecelia Lynch, *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations* (ME Sharpe, 2007), 45-51; James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The rise in interest in narrative can be partly attributed to the broader "linguistic turn" in social sciences that focused research on the role language plays in our interpretation of the world around us.[23] Arising out of debates in the 1980s about the future of the discipline of IR, the linguistic turn was mostly focused on the dominant role of realism. Constructivist approaches came to challenge realism's focus on the state and its overlooking of the role identity plays in shaping that state's preferences and actions.[24] Critical approaches suggested that it was the (realist) scholarship itself which maintained a hierarchy that valued research of some states over others while at the same time excluding the role of women, race, and class in discussions of international politics.[25] And most importantly, the debate was about the methodological preferences for the field, which largely fell into two camps. In one camp, a "scientific" (positivist) approach was favored, while the other camp favored a "critical" (postpositivist) approach emphasizing the role of the observer and scholar in shaping the world around us.[26] The common theme of this "critical" camp is that "language and how we speak (or write) about something is linked to other spheres of life, such as culture, politics, values, and norms".[27] As a result, studying discourse became in vogue from the 1990s and researching narratives has become increasingly popular since the 2000s. Many fields of scholarship, such as history, literary criticism, anthropology, political science, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies have come to see narratives as the 'raw data' of their studies.

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[23] Francois Debrix, *Language, Agency, and Politics in a Constructed World* (Routledge, 2015); Karin M Fierke, "Links across the Abyss: Language and Logic in International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2002).
[24] See, most prominently, Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[25] Robert W Cox and Timothy J Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[26] Fierke, "Links across the Abyss: Language and Logic in International Relations."
[27] Sadriu, "Narratives in International Studies Research," 3.

Just as discourse benefitted from innovations in linguistics, so did narrative research. As such, it is worth briefly describing these innovations so that we can understand why thinking about how language works in the social sciences has become increasingly important. In linguistic studies, early scholarship began to appreciate that language does not merely help humans communicate ideas and facts; rather, it *does* things.[28] This, in turn, led to assertions (supported by political philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Searle) that language can actually influence what you perceive, how you think, and, in some cases, how you behave.[29] This also had methodological implications: the innovations in linguistics influenced a move away from the traditional positivist thinking – which viewed language merely as a means to convey facts – towards a way of thinking that sought to expose the multiple functioning layers of language (such as what words can actually achieve).[30] While there are sceptics, mostly from the realist camp of IR, who doubt the importance of language and insist that what politicians do is more important that what they say,[31] the importance of narratives have caught on in IR and the field has adopted many practices from research on narratology. As part of the broader linguistic turn in IR, it has contributed to our understanding of how international politics works by relying on the tried and tested ideas from other disciplines.

As mentioned before, narratology is the branch of knowledge that studies the structure of narrative and its purpose. In the classic study of narratives, Barthes and Duisit posit that the yearning for narrative is universal, across humankind and human history; they are essential to

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[28] See, for instance, John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford university press, 1975).
[29] Janet Holmes and Nick Wilson, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Routledge, 2017).
[30] Behar Sadriu, "Legitimation Strategies and Turkey's Post-Cold War Engagement: The Case of Its Role in the Albanian Parts of the Balkans" (SOAS University of London, 2018).
[31] Realists tend to consider that what a state presents to the outside world in its dealings with other states is less important than the foundational issues of international politics, such as balancing, security, and alliances. Rhetoric (and narratives) is unimportant; only what is practiced should count. See John J Mearsheimer and Glenn Alterman, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (WW Norton & Company, 2001), 25.

how human beings make meaning, and how they make order of disorderly experiences.[32] Referring to narratives, they note: "Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural."[33] Barthes and Dusuit were among the early scholars seeking to decipher the significance of narratives, concerning themselves mostly with narrative order and forms, as well as uncovering common patterns, themes, and typologies. This approach to the study of language can be seen as a continuation of a preoccupation that goes all the way back to the time of Aristotle, who explicitly related man's nature as a 'political' animal to his distinctive capacity for speech. While all other animals communicate, it is only humans who can give voice to morality, who can articulate "what is useful and what is harmful, and so also what is just and what is unjust."[34]

Barthes was also aware of the underlying structure of a narrative that made certain premises unquestioned. Resentful "of the 'naturalness' with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history", he devoted himself to demystifying this 'naturalness'.[35] Naturalness, or what Barthes called a myth, had the effect of producing a social order that was inevitable and timeless, of concealing its origins, and legitimating the hierarchy of the order.[36]

Interdisciplinary research linking cognitive science and narratology have also produced insight for scholars of international studies. One line of research has sought to identify the relationship between the mind and storytelling, and to highlight the structures that underlie the production and understanding of narratives. For example, Jean Mandler developed the idea of a

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[32] Roland Barthes and Lionel Duisit, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," *New literary history* 6, no. 2 (1975): 237.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1253a7, as interpreted by and cited in Paul Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice* (routledge, 2004).
[35] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).
[36] Ibid.

system of narrative rules that are inherent in all people. He calls this narrative grammar, which is a system of six nodes that compose a base structure for all stories: the setting, beginning, reaction, attempt, outcome, and ending information.[37] This approach offers a general schema that is universal to all individuals as they attempt to encode, organize, and retrieve information that they get from stories. In international studies, it is important, as it provides insight as to how states conceive of their place in the world and communicate their policies to the outside.[38]

Another insight comes from research on how narratives interact with memories. This type of research suggests that people can make very complex interpretations of a story based on very few textual or discourse cues, which in turn informs how particular features of a narrative enable particular processing strategies.[39] Theorists argue that experiential repertoires, stored in the form of "scripts", enable interpreters to "fill in the blanks" when they receive these limited cues.[40] For example, a politician who is running a campaign might offer a slogan that makes some sort of moral claim about the world (such as *America First* or *Europe Puissance*). Preexisting memories or patterns of thought people have about those particular situations will influence how they interpret those claims (an American might interpret *Europe Puissance* as '*we don't need the USA*'; just as a European might interpret *America First* as '*Europe isn't important anymore'*). Similarly, it has been argued that in any political moment, leaders follow scripts according to normal roles and situations, and that these scripts provide the "building blocks of storylines for them to follow".[41] James Wertsch has done work on collective memory, organized around narratives, and how states use them to foster cohesion.[42] This is similar to work done in

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[37] Jean Matter Mandler, *Stories, Scripts, and Scenes: Aspects of Schema Theory* (Psychology Press, 2014).
[38] Sadriu, "Narratives in International Studies Research."
[39] David Herman, "Cognitive Narratology," http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Gearóid ÓTuathail, "Theorizing Practical Geopolitical Reasoning: The Case of the United States' Response to the War in Bosnia," *Political Geography* 21, no. 5 (2002).
[42] James V Wertsch, "The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory," *Ethos* 36, no. 1 (2008).

ontological security. For instance, Berenskoetter discusses the ways in which national biographical narratives bound the community of a nation-state. Highlighting the relevance of an experienced space (which gives meaning to the past) and an envisioned space (which gives meaning to the future), he discusses the ways a state uses its national narrative as a source of group feeling. Exploring this narrative, he argues, sheds light on how a particular community comes to understand "how it perceives and evaluates the world and others within it".[43] I quote David Herman, who summarizes the insight studying narratives provides:

> To reiterate, stories do not merely evoke a world, and thereby constitute a target for interpretation; they also afford resources for sense making by intervening in a field of discourses, a range of representational strategies, a constellation of ways of seeing - and sometimes a set of competing narratives, as in a courtroom trial, a political campaign, or a family dispute.[44]

This idea of intervening into the world suggests that narratives can become building blocks for the creation of future narratives since, as shown above, memory plays an important role in how we understand narratives and how – or what – information we recall. This, in turn, affects how people orient their actions.[45]

Similarly, scientists from the fields of psychology have studied why – and how – humans rely on narratives to make meaning of the world. Some have documented that the human mind really is not comfortable with disorder and that it readily imposes a narrative framework in order to interpret dissimilar pieces of information.[46] Others have found evidence that narratives affect

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[43] Berenskoetter, "Parameters of a National Biography," 282. See, relatedly, A Lang, "Conflicting Narratives, Conflicting Moralities: The United Nations and the Failure of Humanitarian Intervention'," *Language, Agency, and Politics in a Constructed World, London: ME Sharpe* (2003); Nicholas Onuf, "Parsing Personal Identity: Self, Other, Agent," *Language, agency, and politics in a constructed world* (2003).
[44] Herman, "Cognitive Narratology".
[45] Ibid.
[46] For relevant studies of the human mind's desire for cognitive order, see Arie W Kruglanski, *The Psychology of Closed Mindedness* (Psychology Press, 2013); Thomas Gilovich, *How We Know What Isn't So* (Simon and Schuster, 2008), 9-28.

how people organize their ideas, what they remember, and even what solutions they find most attractive.[47] Narratives shape what we define as our reality, helping us to cope with uncertainty by making rational decision-making possible.[48] Furthermore, as Krebs writes, "[t]hey are the vehicle through which human beings formulate understandings of self and other (identity) and of what self and other want (interest)".[49]

Finally, insights gained from literary theorists have contributed to how a narrative can be defined more precisely. Most scholars adapt Kenneth Burke's dramatic "pentad", which are five key elements of a fully drawn narrative: act (identifies what is happening), scene (identifies where the action is taking place), agent (identifies who is acting), agency (identifies the means or instruments the agents deploy), and purpose (identifies the agents' motives or intentions).[50] Above all, a narrative must contain characters or actors. These are agents who act out roles, who are acted upon, and who react to their setting and environment, and are central to the structure of a narrative. They gain attributes based not only on their self-interpretation but also on how others interpret them. This, in turn, creates an actor's reputation. Miskimmon et al. note: "Actors work to frame their own character and that of others, by selecting and highlighting some facets of their history or actions in order to promote a particular interpretation and evaluation of their character".[51] Still, some have identified specific key features determining what should or should not be classified as a narrative. This "fuzzy set" of narrative inclusion includes three semantic and one formal and pragmatic dimension of a text, allowing for varying degrees of

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[47] For a review of these psychological findings, plus many more, see Phillip L Hammack and Andrew Pilecki, "Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Political Psychology," *Political Psychology* 33, no. 1 (2012).
[48] Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.
[49] Ibid., 10.
[50] Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 177.
[51] Miskimmon, O'loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*, 5.

membership.[52] For instance, a narrative must have a spatial and temporal dimension, and should suggest a causal chain leading the audience from some set of facts to some kind of closure.[53]

All this is to suggest the following three things: (1) narratives contain some kind of selective component, meaning that they are bounded and should be willing to leave some things out of the story; (2) narratives are temporally ordered; (3) narratives cast that temporal structure as being meaningful.[54] Together, these elements combine to get a narrative from plot to *emplotment*, which is another word for explaining how a messy reality is turned into a coherent story.[55] In other words, the events of a narrative do not stand on their own; they must be placed in relation to each other in order to create a story, with the plot serving as the connecting function between events (hence, emplotment). As Ricoeur notes: "A story is *made out of* events to the extent that plot *makes* events *into* a story" (emphasis in original).[56] Emplotment allows a narrator to weigh and explain events rather than simply enumerate them, which is to say, "to turn a set of propositions into an intelligible sequence of connected events about which we can form an opinion and attribute responsibility".[57]

It is this temporal dimension, and the linking of past and present towards a future conclusion, that distinguishes narrative from discourse and frames. Where discourse in social science research focuses on how knowledge and language are translated into power[58] – creating rules about what is say-able and know-able and creating roles for actors to fill – narrative

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[52] Marie-Laure Ryan, "Toward a Definition of Narrative," *The Cambridge companion to narrative* 22 (2007): 29.
[53] Ibid.
[54] For the seminal work on narrative and time, see Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," *Critical inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980).
[55] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (JHU Press, 1990).
[56] Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," 171.
[57] Kai Oppermann and Alexander Spencer, "Narrating Success and Failure: Congressional Debates on the 'Iran Nuclear Deal'," *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 2 (2018).
[58] See, for instance, Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse. Language and Politics (Readings in Social and Political Theory). M. Shapiro," (New York, New York University Press, 1984); Antonio Gramsci, "Prison Notebooks, Volumes 1-3," (2011).

research is more narrowly focused on how *stories* are used to push policy preferences and expand political influence. I adopt the stance that discourse alone does not create a causal transformation, taking actors from one status quo to another; only narratives can do that. However, discourse is the raw material of communication, structuring the content of the narrative and the effect that narrative has on its intended audience. As such, it is a critical component of my data collection. As Ronald Krebs notes: "[Political actors] seek not only to fit their programs into the prevailing language [i.e., discourse], but to fix the terms in which debate is conducted, policy legitimated, and events interpreted."[59] As such, political actors use the linguistic and knowledge terrain of political debate that they aim to shape. This is done through the use of narrative.[60]

Frames differ from narratives, too, as they also lack temporal and causal features. According to Robert Entman, framing refers to the act of "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution".[61] Much scholarly work has been done on how frames in news reports and political speeches on foreign policy have correlated with changes in public opinion or policy.[62] However, just because a news report or speech frames an event in a particular way doesn't mean the audience automatically makes connections with past causes or future outcomes. Only narratives can do that. However, since components of a narrative must be framed a certain way, framing must be considered. Studying narratives helps us learn how framing actually works.

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[59] Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138, 9.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Robert M Entman, "Projections of Power," in *Projections of Power* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).
[62] See, for instance Michael Smith, "The Framing of European Foreign and Security Policy: Towards a Post-Modern Policy Framework?," *Journal of European Public Policy* 10, no. 4 (2003); Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and the Path to Peace* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Derek Miller, *Media Pressure on Foreign Policy: The Evolving Theoretical Framework* (Springer, 2007).

Now that I have shown the foundations of narrative theory, and the insights gained from its use in multiple disciplines, I will move on to its applications in the field of international studies. At the heart of narrative approaches to international studies is the predominant concern for analyzing how the structure of language and stories interact with "the *range* of possibilities open to actors in the international arena" (emphasis in original).[63] The application of narrative theory can be broadly broken down into three major approaches: narratives as a tool, narratives as a structuring force, and narratives as a conceptual framework.[64]

Narratives as a Tool

In policy analysis, the focus of research is on the stories told by states (or statespeople) in an attempt to analyze such things as legitimation, security, identity, conflict, and policy debate. Scholars here treat narratives as a *tool* to be wielded, such as Ronald Krebs does in *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*. Here, the author shows how dominant narratives have come to shape national security policy, while at the same time offering a theory for how dominant narratives come to rise, how they survive, and how they fall. In studying the Cold War narrative in US national security debates, he argues that public narratives set the boundaries of what is considered a legitimate policy, constraining policy makers in what they can argue for and achieve.[65] In particular, Krebs focuses on presidential rhetoric as a means of constructing a dominant narrative of national security by applying Burke's pentad to analyze the content of their speeches. Specifically, Krebs argues that different answers to those five elements of a narrative (act, agent, scene, agency, purpose) will yield different narratives of national security.

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[63] Sadriu, "Narratives in International Studies Research," 8.
[64] Here, I adopt the classification suggested by Sadriu but change the categorization slightly. See ibid.
[65] Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.

For example, when identifying in a narrative who the *agents* are, you get a sense of who are perceived to be the major players in global politics, how unified they are, what resources they possess, and how useful an ally they might be. Different answers yield different stories. What sets national security narratives apart from other narratives, he argues, is that they "weave together past, present, and future, offering a forecast based on the lessons they draw from signal past events".[66] Krebs goes on to relate narratives to grand strategy, arguing that national security narratives are constitutive of grand strategy. Grand strategy is, according to Barry Posen's definition, "a state's theory about how it can best cause security for itself."[67] This, of course, requires that a state defines its national interest, identifies threats, and offers appropriate policy responses, all of which relies on a national security narrative.[68] Just like grand strategy, national security narratives set the contours for policy and boundaries for legitimation. Whether the narratives are clearly articulated, or simply implied, they are the reason why some ideas regarding a state's security seem naïve, why others seem realistic, and why some are continually debated.[69]

A process-tracing method is employed by Jackson to explore the construction of ideas in the narratives surrounding Germany's rehabilitation after World War II.[70] His focus is on narratives of belonging to Western civilization as a rhetorical tool used to legitimize particular political configurations and courses of action over others. His critical observation rests on the assumption that people have ultimate agency in the creation of their reality, and he traces this through public rhetoric that were used to shape the limits of argumentation and policy

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[66] Ibid., 13.
[67] Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Cornell University Press, 1984), 13.
[68] Stacie E Goddard and Ronald R Krebs, "Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy," (Taylor & Francis, 2015).
[69] Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.
[70] Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West* (University of Michigan Press, 2006).

preferences. In other work, Jackson coins the term “eventing”, which is a concept whereby contours of events are constantly reshaped by agents looking to reframe them in a way that is advantageous to them. Here he leverages work done on the role memories play in storing data in the form of narratives to be used in some future situation.[71]

Other work in policy analysis has focused on the role narratives have played on whether a policy is a success or failure. Chowdhury and Krebs, for example, look at the war of language (i.e., the rhetorical projects) between counterterrorist state forces and terrorist insurgents. Defeating terrorism, they argue, will require a war of words, and only by delegitimizing political violence will state forces be able to open up space for less violent but still legitimate politics.[72] Similarly, Oppermann and Spencer consider the strength of a narrative by analyzing the debate over the fate of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Congress and how the discourse was contested. Their focus is on: understanding how policies either survive or fail when debated; how the definition of survival or failure depends on the meaning imbued to the policies during its political discourse and contestation; and identifying the essential elements in structuring a successful narrative.[73] At the base of their argument is that foreign policy successes and failures are socially constructed through narratives, suggesting that a narrative analysis can trace the origins of such constructions. In doing so, the authors identify that a successfully constructed narrative contains three critical elements (which set it apart from mere rhetoric): a particular setting; a negative/positive characterization of individual and collective decision-makers; and an emplotment of success or failure through the attribution of credit/blame and

[71] "The Present as History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis* (2006).
[72] Arjun Chowdhury and Ronald R Krebs, "Talking About Terror: Counterterrorist Campaigns and the Logic of Representation," *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 1 (2010).
[73] Oppermann and Spencer, "Narrating Success and Failure: Congressional Debates on the ‘Iran Nuclear Deal’."

responsibility. *How* a story is told is just as important as (or more important than) *what* that story is when explaining the dominance or marginality of narratives in political discourse.[74]

Although the authors recognize that they are truly unable to stand outside the discursive formation of the objects which they seek to understand (making, perhaps, their analysis biased), they do provide a sound analytical framework for evaluating the narrative surrounding the implementation of the JCPOA – making a distinction between the Democrats who wished to label the agreement as a policy success and the Republicans who wished to label the agreement as a policy failure – and tease out how narratives can be used strategically. They propose a structure for analysis of narratives in IR focusing on three elements: "(1) the setting of the story; (2) the characterization of the actors; and (3) the causal and temporal emplotment of events".[75] Missing from their argument, however, is the preexisting cultural narratives of the audience (i.e., their anti-Islam or anti-Iranian 'memory') as cultural narratives and assumptions have been found to be important for successful argumentation.[76] Indeed, postcolonial scholarship has demonstrated the long history of negative portrayals of non-Western societies in the West, portraying them as inferior and irrational.[77] And more recent scholarship has shown that stereotyped representations of the Arab Middle East and the portrayal of the Iranian nuclear program in leading US Newspapers in line with the premises of "Oriental untrustworthiness and Islam as a threat".[78]

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 272.
[76] Goddard and Krebs, "Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy."
[77] For the seminal work, see Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979).
[78] Foad Izadi and Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria, "A Discourse Analysis of Elite American Newspaper Editorials: The Case of Iran's Nuclear Program," *Journal of communication inquiry* 31, no. 2 (2007): 151. See also Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and Us Interests in the Middle East Since1945*, vol. 6 (Univ of California Press, 2005).

In this dissertation, I adopt the three essential structural elements mentioned above – setting, characterization of actors, and emplotment – when analyzing how French actors activate and use elements of the biographical narrative to bring the crises in Mali and CAR to the security agenda in the first place. I also use those same elements to analyze how actors justify or legitimize their decision to intervene, as well as how they overcome anxieties over ontological insecurity.

Narratives as a Structuring Force

Unlike the policy analysis described above, some studies focus primarily on legitimation and identity and how narratives are used to structure those (as opposed to the narrative as a tool used to influence a policy outcome). First, it is assumed that legitimation – which is the act of justifying critical policies before key public audiences – is usually necessary, not just a courtesy, in politics, both domestic and foreign.[79] But not any policies can be legitimated effectively, particularly with respect to national security, because those "at odds with the underlying narratives strike audiences as illegitimate: they have few public advocates, and their few advocates are ignored or treated as beyond the pale".[80] There is a strand of literature that analyzes how narratives channel political contest, privileging certain policies while impeding the legitimation of others. For example, in her study of contested territories (such as in Ireland, Kosovo, Jerusalem, and Kashmir), Goddard argues that whether or not a territory appears indivisible rests on the legitimation strategies of actors at the negotiating table.[81] How a dispute

[79] For work on legitimation in general, see Mark C Suchman, "Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches," *Academy of management review* 20, no. 3 (1995).
[80] Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138, 15.
[81] Stacie E Goddard, "Uncommon Ground: Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy," *International Organization* 60, no. 1 (2006).

is spoken about by politicians affects how coalitions are formed, and thus on bargaining at higher levels. This approach also supports the idea that narratives cannot merely be created out of thin air; they must rest on a sound structure, something well-established and deep-seated. As Krebs notes: "Publicly sustainable narratives of national security rest on enduring identity narratives".

Borrowing from insights in narratology, which suggest that narratives are present in every culture and are essential to building community and common identity,[82] most scholarship on identity in IR "hold that humans comprehend the social world around them in the form of narratives from which they draw identities that guide their actions".[83] Narratives "do political work"[84] as they play an important role in the formation of norms, identities, and ideologies; and it is these identities which in turn shape political outcomes.[85] In Bially Mattern's book *Ordering International Politics: Identity, Crisis, and Representational Force* she examines how the special US-UK relationship (and the international order) broke down during the 1956 Suez Crisis and was subsequently rebuilt after. Drawing on the insight of French scholar Jean François Lyotard she develops an account of international identities as "power-laden narrative constructs".[86] And it is these constructs – a form of non-physical, representational power exercised through language – that serve to stabilize international identity and in turn international order. "Identity is nothing but narrative," she argues, "[lasting] only as long as authors keep authoring it, sharing it

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[82] See, for instance Astrid Erll, "Narratology and Cultural Memory Studies," in *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research* (De Gruyter, 2009).
[83] Oppermann and Spencer, "Narrating Success and Failure: Congressional Debates on the 'Iran Nuclear Deal'," 272.
[84] Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Sage, 2008), 8.
[85] See, for instance Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach."; Patricia Ewick and Susan S Silbey, "Subversive Stories and Hegemonic Tales: Toward a Sociology of Narrative," *Law & Soc'y Rev.* 29 (1995); Shaul R Shenhav, "Political Narratives and Political Reality," *International Political Science Review* 27, no. 3 (2006).
[86] Janice Bially Mattern, *Ordering International Politics: Identity, Crisis and Representational Force* (Routledge, 2005), 12.

with others, and collectively believing in it".[87] In her account, narratives about the Self (about identity) can be accessed strategically to make or break relationships at the international level. It's not just about actors narrating events, it is about them constructing them as they narrate them. "In this way, narratives create 'reality'".[88] This idea of a master narrative – or how a narrative constrains human behavior – was borrowed from Lyotard and has been explained by Michael Bamberg in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*.[89]

As I have already shown, studies on the importance of identity in IR have focused on how narratives help groups build their own autobiographies. This is done by creating a "compelling story of where did we come from, how did we come to be who we are, what brings us together in a group, what purpose and aspirations does our group have".[90] Having a firm grasp on your past is foundational to creating stability, which in turn allows you to move forward. These 'autobiographical narratives' are foundational in establishing and promoting specific collective values and encouraging a sense of solidarity[91]. In IR, these insights have been applied to studies that explore how foreign policy actors use the past to reason with issues in the present.[92] Saunders, in her study of the origins of military intervention strategies, argues that how policymakers develop perceptions of threats depends on their causal beliefs about the origin of those threats.[93] These perceptions manifest in one of two ways: leaders either believe that threats originate "internally", i.e., they are a factor of the internal organization of a state or regime type;

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 10.
[89] Michael Bamberg, "Master Narrative," *Routledge encyclopedia of narrative theory* (2005).
[90] Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change," 612.
[91] Henry L Roediger III and James V Wertsch, "Creating a New Discipline of Memory Studies," *Memory studies* 1, no. 1 (2008).
[92] See, for instance Jack S Levy, "Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *International organization* 48, no. 2 (1994).
[93] Elizabeth N Saunders, "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (2009).

or that they originate "externally", i.e., they are a factor of other states' foreign and security policies. These perceptions, she argues, are based on memory of their past policy experiences. Wittes also highlights the importance of previous experiences in shaping identity by demonstrating how collective memories of past traumas impact ongoing debates between Israelis and Palestinians. Historical legacies of the two nations, it is argued, lead to cultural predispositions that are hurdles to negotiation, creating situations where compromise is seen as unacceptable.[94] For instance, Israelis are sensitive to any proposal that compromises their right to exist as a predominantly Jewish state, thus the idea of returning Palestinian refugees creates an "irrational fear" just as issues of border and security "touches on the matter of the state's viability".[95] Barnett, for his part, argued that Israeli Prime Minister Rabin's proposed withdrawal from the occupied territories in the Oslo Accords was only seen as legitimate (and even desirable) because he situated it within particular narratives of Israeli identity and particular historical representations or 'frames'.[96] As a result, he was able to emphasize an emergent liberal democratic narrative of national identity while marginalizing the traditionally dominant Jewish-Zionist narrative. And finally, Kaufman argues that the intractable nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is fed by narratives of identity on both sides.[97] These narratives of identity are exclusionary and violent, limiting the extent to which political leaders on both sides of the conflict can find compromise without losing legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents.

Other scholars in IR have shown that not only do policymakers construct security narratives about their environment or perceived threats, but that these narratives enable or

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[94] Tamara Cofman Wittes, *How Israelis and Palestinians Negotiate: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Oslo Peace Process* (US Institute of Peace Press, 2005).
[95] Ibid.
[96] Michael Barnett, "Culture, Strategy and Foreign Policy Change: Israel's Road to Oslo," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 1 (1999).
[97] Stuart J Kaufman, "Narratives and Symbols in Violent Mobilization: The Palestinian-Israeli Case," *Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009).

constrain possible policy shifts in the face of crises.[98] The construction of a new narrative after an international shock, such as the end of the Cold War, enables policy makers to make sense of new strategic uncertainty; but that same uncertainty can also constrain the potential for significant change, biasing the construction of the narrative towards the cultural status quo.[99] Nevertheless, these constructed "national security cultures" are based on mythologies of past events and historical relationships with friends or foes,[100] and serve to influence how actors think about policy challenges, creating boundaries for what actions might be possible.

In this dissertation, I understand the French national autobiography with respect to African security as a structuring narrative. It determines and limits what can be said and what might be done. What is interesting in the two case studies is the extent to which the French "story" regarding its role in Africa has contradicting constraints. On the one hand it supports France's unilateral impulses in its former colonies. On the other hand, the desire to avoid the shame of another Rwanda-like moment compels intervention even when France would rather not.

Narratives as a Conceptual Framework

Still, a growing number of scholars have adopted the use of narrative analysis with little focus on the cognitive or theoretical assumptions of narratology. Typically, such research uses "narrative" simply as a byword for discourse analysis,[101] focusing primarily on communicative

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[98] Alexandra Homolar, "Rebels without a Conscience: The Evolution of the Rogue States Narrative in Us Security Policy," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 4 (2011).
[99] Ibid.
[100] For more work on national security culture, see Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (Columbia University Press, 1996); Thomas U Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (JHU Press, 1998); Emil Kirchner and James Sperling, "National Security Cultures," *Patterns of global governance, London–New York* (2010).
[101] See, for instance Berenskoetter, "Parameters of a National Biography."; David Campbell, *Politics without Principle: Sovereignty, Ethics, and the Narratives of the Gulf War* (Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder, 1993);

action – or the way cooperative action is taken by individuals based upon mutual deliberation and argumentation – as a way to understand international affairs. While conceptually simpler than the previously discussed approaches, they are nonetheless central to explaining the importance of narratives in IR. For example, Risse adopts Habermas' concept of communicative action as a way to usefully conceptualize the logic of arguing in an attempt to better understand world politics.[102] Others have investigated the way in which norms have been transformed in negotiations and adopted into policies and practices.[103]

Another important line of research – that on strategic narratives – takes as given that communication is central to how we understand international affairs, that it shapes global politics. The research agenda, as developed by Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, has developed a systematic framework to understand how political actors seek to shape order through narrative projection, particularly in a new media environment which is characterized by internet access to information, social media, and the transformation of who can communicate and how.[104] For these scholars, "[s]trategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors. Strategic narratives are a tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate".[105] While their research relies somewhat on insights from cognitive science – mainly on

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Charlotte Epstein, *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse* (Mit Press, 2008); Fierke, "Links across the Abyss: Language and Logic in International Relations."

[102] For Habermas's theory of communicative action, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, vol. 1 (Beacon press, 1985). Also, Thomas Risse, "'Let's Argue!": Communicative Action in World Politics," *International organization* 54, no. 1 (2000).

[103] See, for instance Harald Müller, "Arguing, Bargaining and All That: Communicative Action, Rationalist Theory and the Logic of Appropriateness in International Relations," *European journal of international relations* 10, no. 3 (2004); Frank Schimmelfennig, *The Eu, NATO and the Integration of Europe: Rules and Rhetoric* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[104] Miskimmon, O'loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*.

[105] Ibid., 2.

discussion of how structures of narratives regulate shared meanings of identity[106] – their focus leverages predominantly on the larger constructivist framework in international studies such that language should be taken seriously and that it can be used as a "practical research tool" to identify how leaders "filter identity discourses".[107]

Most importantly, the application of narrative theory as a conceptual framework highlights the importance of *how* the study of narratives has become paramount. One well-established method is through discourse analysis, which has its goal to "illustrate how . . .textual and social processes are intrinsically connected and to describe . . . the implications of this connection for the way we think and act in the contemporary world".[108] In other words, in discourse analysis, "one would … consider how it is that what actors say is related to the world around them and how they construct narratives about the world".[109] This typically would come in the form of content analysis of text and speech,[110] but can also come in the form of an ethnographic study that takes into account peoples' lived experiences to understand how they see the world.[111]

Another popular method among scholars interested in documenting the stability (or not) of narratives over time is process-tracing. This is a method for making causal claims whereby an event is analyzed in an attempt to identify key variables that might explain when, if, or how they

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[106] They reference work done by the following: Daniel Leonard Bernardi et al., *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extremism, and the Struggle for Strategic Influence* (Rutgers University Press, 2012); Jeffry Halverson, Steven Corman, and H Lloyd Goodall, *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (Springer, 2011); ÓTuathail, "Theorizing Practical Geopolitical Reasoning: The Case of the United States' Response to the War in Bosnia."
[107] Jeffrey T Checkel, "Social Constructivisms in Global and European Politics: A Review Essay," *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 234.
[108] J. George (1994), 191, quoted in Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European journal of international relations* 5, no. 2 (1999): 225.Milliken "the study of discourses in international relations 1999.
[109] Sadriu, "Narratives in International Studies Research," 15.
[110] See, for instance Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138; Laura Roselle, "Strategic Narratives and Great Power Identity," *Forging the world: Strategic narratives and international relations* (2017).
[111] Christine Sylvester, "War Experiences/War Practices/War Theory," *Millennium* 40, no. 3 (2012).

influenced the outcome of said event.[112] This approach is well-suited to narrative studies because of their inherent interest in temporality and how events unfold in sequence (which are insights adopted from previously mentioned works on narratology). Bially Mattern, for example, relies heavily on the notion of narratives as processes that should be documented to determine causal pathways.[113]

Finally, content analysis is another method that can be used to study narratives. This is done by measuring the frequency with which particular words or phrases are used in a given set of texts, or by measuring the centrality of words in a rhetorical network. Ronald Krebs uses these methods to augment his examination of how the rhetorical mode of a speaker can contribute to the rise of a dominant narrative during "unsettled times".[114] Such approaches can help "quantify assertions about what language is used in discussions of a particular issue as part of a wider narrative-building endeavor".[115] When used in conjunction with discourse analysis, it can provide a quantitative supplement to what is otherwise a largely qualitative endeavor, despite some who believe that the two are "fundamentally incompatible".[116]

So, what does this all mean? The purpose here is to justify narrative analysis as a suitable method to understanding how meaning is made throughout the decision-making process. Remember, interpreting meaning is how I will explicate the security-seeking behavior of French actors during the crises in Mali and the CAR, and this will be done through a case-narrative approach. As a review, narratives are conceptual frameworks that allow humans to make sense of

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[112] Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T Checkel, *Process Tracing* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[113] Mattern, *Ordering International Politics: Identity, Crisis and Representational Force*.
[114] Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.
[115] Sadriu, "Narratives in International Studies Research," 15.
[116] Ted Hopf, "Discourse and Content Analysis: Some Fundamental Incompatibilities," *Qualitative methods* 2, no. 1 (2004). On the compatibility of content and discourse analysis, see Kimberly A Neuendorf, "Content Analysis: A Contrast and Complement to Discourse Analysis," ibid.

the world and create their own identities.[117] They are how "human beings order disordered experience and impart meaning to themselves and their world."[118] Actions do not speak for themselves; they are only given meaning through the language used to describe it. And I assume – in line with the ontological approach – that actors must create meanings for their actions to be logically consistent with their identities. This means that state agents must explain and justify what a policy would mean about their sense of self-identity. We can only understand that process by doing narrative analysis.

Narratives, however, can also be seen as either a structuring force (i.e., shaping the policy terrain where choices are made influencing what is sayable, let alone doable) or as a tool to be wielded by policy makers (to impose certainty to uncertain situations, or as a rhetorical device to influence perceptions or understanding of a crisis). As such, this dissertation considers narratives from all three aspects: a structuring force, a tool, and as a conceptual framework.

Case-Narrative Method

The case-narrative approach does more than just restate observations. It reconstructs a particular "story", looking for critical junctures and important "plot" points, evaluating the "scene" of action, or the "characterization of the actors". [119] A narrative approach, therefore, seeks to uncover points at which ontological security is interrupted, where disjuncture in the narrative of the self is created, and how anxiety is overcome.

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[117] Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," 606.
[118] Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138, 2.
[119] "Plot", "setting", "characterization of actors"; these are part of what is known as Burke's dramatic pentad – the five key elements of a fully drawn narrative (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose) - and are the focus of analysis in studies doing narrative research. See, for instance, Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 177; Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.

How, specifically, do I perform a case-narrative analysis? In the first part of this section, I will define whose identity and narratives I am interested in studying. I argue that the units of analysis for decisions regarding foreign military interventions resides with a 'decisional group' that consists of the French President and his advisers, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Defense. While the institutional make-up of French foreign policy decision-making gives the President exceptional autonomy in security policy, I argue that the group of ministers and advisors around him are important state agents and played a consequential role in the decision to intervene. Furthermore, I adopt a position taken by some in ontological security studies: "because they represent their state, state agents 'are the state' because they have the moral burden of making policy choices *and* the capacity to implement those decisions" (emphasis in original).[120] In the subsequent part, I summarize where the data comes from, how it is analyzed, and my analytical process for recreating "the story" of each intervention. I conclude with a defense of my case selections.

Units of Analysis

France's Fifth Republic is a semi-presidential system with a dual executive and shared powers between the president and the prime minister.[121] Nevertheless, there is a de facto hierarchy which makes the president "the main political actor in the regime".[122] This hierarchy is particularly prominent in the realms of foreign and defense policy. The final decision on whether to intervene militarily in another country rests with the president alone. As commander of the armed forces, the president can make such a decision without the authorization of any other

[120] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 18.
[121] Robert Elgie and Emiliano Grossman, "Executive Politics in France," *The Oxford Handbook of French Politics* (2016).
[122] John Gaffney, *Political Leadership in France: From Charles De Gaulle to Nicolas Sarkozy* (Springer, 2010), 5.

constitutional body.[123] However, this concentration of power in the hands of a single person is less a product of the Constitution itself; rather, it can be best explained as a product of de Gaulle's legacy.[124] In particular, this legacy was solidified during the wars in Indochina and Algeria, where a perception developed that rapid decision-making should be prioritized over democratic deliberation in order to avoid the repetition of past military setbacks.[125] Consequently, subsequent presidents have enjoyed a high degree of decisional autonomy in foreign affairs. This *domaine réservé* – which has no legal basis in neither the Constitution nor any subsequent laws – has become an essential component of French presidential leadership style. Originally intended to be a decisional mechanism reserved for potential nuclear war, the notion of *domaine réservé* has given the French president a high degree of autonomy, undisputed decision-making authority, and the ability to make decisions within the shortest time possible.[126]

The President's decisional authority is further strengthened by the illusion that there is national consensus on all matters regarding national defense.[127] While it is true that Parliament rarely challenges the presidential war prerogative, and that they have little say in the decision-making process on military interventions, the attitudes of parliamentarians are considered a reliable indicator of public opinion. As a democratically elected leader, the president is rather attentive to the electorate, thus, by default, he is attentive to the reactions of Parliament.[128]

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[123] In 2008, a constitutional reform mandated that the government shall *inform* Parliament within three days after having decided on a military operation. A debate can take place, but it does not mean that the operation requires parliamentary approval; approval is only required if the operation exceeds the duration of four months. See Constitution de la République française, art.35

[124] Bastien Irondelle, "Defence and Armed Forces: The End of the Nuclear Monarchy?," in *The French Fifth Republic at Fifty: Beyond Stereotypes*, ed. Sylvain Brouard, Andrew M. Appleton, and Amy Muzar (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 121.

[125] Samy Cohen, *La Monarchie Nucléaire: Les Coulisses De La Politique Étrangère Sous La Ve République* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), 16.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Irondelle, "Defence and Armed Forces: The End of the Nuclear Monarchy?."; Falk Ostermann, "France's Reluctant Parliamentarisation of Military Deployments: The 2008 Constitutional Reform in Practice," *West European Politics* 40, no. 1 (2017).

[128] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.

Presidential power is more constrained, however, during periods of *cohabitation*, but it is largely concluded that those periods do little to affect the president's decision-making authority in the *domaines réservés*.[129] Moreover, François Hollande did not have to cope with the constraints of political *cohabitation* when deciding to intervene in Mali and the CAR.

Consequently, the French president is an important unit of analysis for this dissertation. However, his dominant role in the French political system does not imply that we should only focus on his discourses and practices.[130] Decision-making is never the product of a single actor but is always attributed to interaction between multiple actors.[131] Some of these actors include the president's personal advisors. In the realm of African security policy, there are three advisory bodies close to the president: the diplomatic advisor, the advisor on African affairs, and the chief of military staff of the president.[132] It is argued that Hollande, who was initially portrayed as an indecisive president who waited for crises to ebb away, and then demonstrated strong leadership in the Malian and Central African crises, was still a leader who was likely willing use a team approach to decision-making.[133]

In addition to the president and his advisors, the president's Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense also contribute to formulating decisions regarding foreign policy. Traditionally, the foreign minister does not design, but rather executes, foreign policy; however, during the Hollande presidency, "the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs … recovered a major role in shaping France's approach to African relationships, rather than simply implementing a policy set

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[129] Irondelle, "Defence and Armed Forces: The End of the Nuclear Monarchy?."
[130] Maryann E Gallagher and Susan H Allen, "Presidential Personality: Not Just a Nuisance," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10, no. 1 (2014).
[131] Irondelle, *La Réforme Des Armées En France: Sociologie De La Décision*, 21.
[132] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 39.
[133] Grégoire Biseau, "François Hollande Est Avant Tout En Cohérence Avec Sa Diplomatie," *Libération*, 28 August 2013.

in the Élysée palace".[134] Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius managed to handle his role as mediator between president, prime minister, and minister of defense quite well, becoming a prominent advisor to the president during the preparation and execution of decisional task forces during the crises in Mali and CAR.[135] Despite the fact that the Foreign Minister's mandate grants him a rather ambivalent role in the policy realms of security and defense, he still possesses a global view on most issues, making him a crucial source of information during foreign policy decision-making.[136]

The minister whose mandate *is* to officially direct and connect the efforts between the military and the government with regards to security and defense policy is the Minister of Defense. His role is to mediate between civilian and military perspectives, and the minister's public appearances has become a barometer for the level of involvement with decisions regarding military operations.[137] As such, from the very first day of *Operation Serval*, Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian publicly commented on the conduct of the mission and was an early commentator on the events as they unfolded during *Operation Sangaris*.[138]

Furthermore, Le Drian was reported by *Le Monde* to be a close friend to the president, one that he had known for at least 30 years.[139] In contrast to Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, who had previously opposed Hollande on several occasions, Le Drian enjoyed the president's full confidence, which was amplified by the minister's reportedly high levels of technical expertise. Consequently, the Minister of Defense is another person who I consider as a unit of analysis.

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[134] Melly and Darracq, *A New Way to Engage?: French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande*.
[135] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 42.
[136] Cohen, *La Monarchie Nucléaire: Les Coulisses De La Politique Étrangère Sous La Ve République*.
[137] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 43.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.

All together, these three decision-makers constitute what I am calling the 'decisional group'. Erforth, who did a series of high-level interviews with the president's ministers and their advisors during the Hollande administration, concluded that at any given stage of a decision-making process, one or several of these decision-makers may have the "upper hand", suggesting that all three have significant influence over the outcomes of decision-making.[140] While confirming the French president's exceptional autonomy in the realm of defense policy, the previous discussion has made it clear that the president does not make decisions in a vacuum. The decision to deploy French troops to a foreign country is made by the president, but only after intensive discussion with the ministers of defense, foreign affairs, and their military and diplomatic advisors. In fact, as Laurent Fabius declared in front of the National Assembly in the months after the intervention in Mali, it was not the president alone who made the decision to deploy troops. It was made in conjunction with himself and his "colleague and friend", Jean-Yves Le Drian (the Minister of Defense), and that this decision equated to "the decision of France".[141]

Sources and Discourse Analysis

As this research is focused on the decision-making process of political actors, and since there is no direct access to a policy maker's mind, I rely on substitute data for reconstructing their beliefs and perceptions. All sources examined are language based – either written or oral – and include policy documents, official statements, speeches, press conferences, media interviews, press releases, and national security strategy documents (a.k.a. White Papers). I also

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[140] Ibid.
[141] Assemblée Nationale, "Compte Rendu Intégral. Session Ordinaire De 2012-2013; 224° Séance: Déclaration Du Gouvernement Sur L'autorisation De La Prolongation De L'intervention Des Forces Françaises Au Mali, Débat Et Vote Sur Cette Déclaration," (2013).

consider the minutes of weekly hearings of the foreign minister and the defense minister in front of parliamentary committees as well as governmental declarations made in Parliament (both in front of the Senate and the National Assembly).[142] Finally, I analyze the discourse surrounding the events, using scholarly journals and news reports to contextualize the environment within which the decisions to intervene were made. Using tools from discourse analysis – with an ontological security interpretation – I seek to understand the intentions of actors, not the outcomes of their actions.

This process is complemented by content analysis, which focuses on the coding of texts, in order to assess measures of frequency of particular words (or phrases) that exist within the discourse. Content analysis has been criticized for removing the examined texts from their context; in other words, it is nothing more than counting words without interpreting them. Furthermore, it has been criticized for focusing mostly on that has been said over *not* said. Using content analysis as a supplement to (as opposed to a substitution for) discourse analysis is how I overcome this criticism. Discourse analysis via the case-narrative approach not only asks what has been said, but analyzes how, to whom and with what purpose it was said. When analyzing the data, I remained mindful of the context within which a specific narrative was pronounced and the audience towards which it was directed. This approach also helps overcome what is known as the 'credibility gap' when researching people and the things that they say.[143] Information may be distorted or biased, causing the researcher to question the reliability of the source. Political leaders, diplomats, and civil servants – for political, diplomatic, or professional reasons – may

[142] These minutes and declarations can be accessed via the website for the Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, "Basedoc: Déclarations officielles et points de presse", http://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr
[143] Kalevi J Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International studies quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1970).

not always say exactly what they think; they may even think things that they never say.[144] As Prunier argued when studying France's reaction to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, "whether the French government really believed its own fabrications, and whether its fantasies were convenient decoys or deeply-held beliefs, is hard to say".[145]

In light of this constraint, it is difficult to discern between the two at times. However, in this dissertation I assume that the functions of discourse (that it can be representational and instrumental) cannot be disconnected. In fact, I acknowledge that the two are inextricably intertwined; discourse is instrumental and constitutive at the same time, constituting social practice while at the same time being constituted by it.[146] A purely instrumental use of rhetoric is impossible since the language people use cannot exist outside the realm of social practices that shape and determines it. In other words, even a lie in the realm of politics contains elements that tells us something about the social context and the motivation it is trying to cover.[147]

In order to overcome getting caught interpreting deliberately false statements and rhetoric, I use several control strategies. First, I use a wide range of sources (as opposed to only one kind of data) in order to facilitate crosschecking. Second, official statements and primary sources are checked against secondary literature in order to estimate the extent to which they align or not. And third, at all times special attention was paid to specific French cultural and social contexts within which each text was produced. This has been difficult, given that I am not a native French speaker nor was I raised in a francophone family. I am an American with a keen

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[144] Jack S Levy, "Political Psychology and Foreign Policy," in *Handbook of Political Psychology*, ed. David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[145] Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*.
[146] Ruth Wodak, *Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009).
[147] For example, the official French discourse surrounding the intervention in Mali insisted that it was unrelated to uranium mining interests in neighboring Niger. If we assume that French policy-makers lied to their audience, while it doesn't tell us exactly what each decision-maker's belief system was regarding intervention, it does tell us that collectively French policy-makers view "mining interests" as an illegitimate justification for intervention.

interest in the French language and culture. While this is a limitation at times, I also see it as a strength; what better way to strengthen the Franco-American relationship than by encouraging non-indigenous scholarship between the two countries.

While I have shown that content analysis has been criticized for being both presumptive about stability of meaning and prioritizing what is said over what is *not* said, I argue that it is still a productive complement to discourse analysis. Yoshikoder,[148] a multilingual text-analysis platform, is used to list all words, with their given frequency and proportion, in a given text or series of texts (by the same author). It allows for easy comparison of categorical frequencies across texts and can facilitate the search for key words that reflect an actor's desire for ontological security, such as 'biography', 'routine', 'self-identity', 'shame', or 'anxiety' (and their French-equivalent synonyms). While I coded certain categories prior to the analysis, I also paid attention to those categories that emerged naturally in the text, even ones that seemed (initially) unrelated to an actor's desire for ontological security.[149] The intent was to avoid an excessive pre-structuration of the texts that could arise from my own biases. The coding concentrated on concepts and phrases, as well as single words. This was done at the preliminary stage, where I equaled frequency with importance. However, I probed this assumption during the qualitative interpretation of the data.

What I look for precisely (i.e., the evidence I use to make my argument) are data that suggests actors are driven to intervene in Africa by their desire to satisfy their ontological security. To do that, I specifically look for instances where actors *1) link justification for a policy with a description or understanding of their state's "self" or "biographical" narrative, 2)*

[148] Available at www.yoshikoder.org
[149] This includes the unexpected high frequency of words relating to "family" and "responsibility", terms not necessarily associated with the emotions of ontological insecurity, but important nonetheless for understanding the actors' self-image and their role on the African continent.

exhibit the willingness and capacity to overcome a critical situation so that it no longer threatens their identity, and 3) exhibit emotions related to anxiety, and that those emotions enabled or constrained policy change. But how do I know that there is evidence of these three things? In the first case, finding evidence that the justification to intervene is linked with an understanding of an actor's or state's "self", I have already described how this can be done through discourse and narrative analysis. Analyzing the narrative – or how actors create meaning to justify their decisions – is how I understand self-identity to constrain or enable France to pursue certain actions over others. And the actors' self-identifications are revealed when specifically expressed in the text (for instance, when they say "this is who we are") or if made in reference to the historical narrative used to legitimate France's African security policy I covered in Chapter II (for instance, when they say "this is who we have always been"). In the second case, finding evidence that there is a critical situation threatening a state's ontological security, I look for instances where the actors themselves (not just me) evaluate the crisis as a situation that disturbs the "institutionalized routine". Fearing the shame of inaction in the face of a terrorist threat in Mali or fearing the shame of another Rwanda if they do not intervene in the CAR; these things are vocalized by French agents and as such constitute situations that threaten the stability of self-identity. Which brings me to the third piece of evidence, anxiety.

Emotion, let alone anxiety, is difficult to measure at the state level. However, we can measure the effects of that emotion. As a reminder, anxiety exists when states cannot reconcile past or prospective actions with the biographical narratives they use to justify their behavior. In this dissertation, I operationalize anxiety as being indicated by two forms of discursive expression. First, it is evidenced when actors express uncertainty about what course of action should be taken and whether the outcomes of that action can be predicted. Not knowing how to

respond or choosing a course of action that is different from what is proposed can create anxiety. Second, it is evidenced when there is a significant shift in the narrative used to justify (in)action. In order to evade anxiety, and ontological insecurity, state agents reinterpret events in a manner that makes them seem familiar. In each of the case studies, there is a period leading up to the intervention where military action is not possible, but then it suddenly becomes a palatable course of action. Analyzing the narrative shift in the "story" of why France must intervene reveals two things: first, that the story must change indicates there is anxiety with the existing story; second, that there are ways for decision-makers to tie-in the new story with the existing dominant narrative in order to smooth out anxieties.

For analytical purposes, in order to re-create the intentions of decision-makers, I break the process into three distinct steps: *1) how the crisis made its way onto the security agenda, 2) how the decision is discursively debated, and 3) how the decision itself is justified*.[150] Using a narrative approach to interpret actions I seek to understand how actors appropriate the proximity of Africa into their biographical narrative and how that contributes to keeping African crises on the French security agenda.[151] Specifically, a narrative re-telling of how actors "emplot" the continent into their stories, how they "characterize" the actors as having a cultural similarity, and how they set the "scene" of their stories in geographical proximity to France and Europe reveals that French policy makers have a connection with Africa and that it is a large part of the French self-identity. Beyond establishing consistent self-narratives and everyday routines to achieve

[150] These three stages are adopted from Laswell's policy cycle, who examined the decision-making process for public policy in five stages: agenda-setting, policy formulation, public policy decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. Of these, the three most crucial are agenda-setting, formulation, and implementation. See Savard and Banville, "Policy Cycles."

[151] The concept of *Eurafrique* best captures the importance of African 'proximity' to Europe. Primarily, a synonym for complementary growth, reciprocity, and solidarity, some scholars have found proximity to be important for explaining why francophone Africa holds special importance for French decision-makers. See, for instance, Erforth, "Mental Maps and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Eurafrique and the French Military Intervention in Mali."

ontological security, the idea of proximity is another way individuals and collectives can cope with existential anxieties of nonbeing. As Browning points out, vicariously identifying with broader communities (such as those in former colonies) and living through their everyday activities, or designating a place of "home" as a place with the aura of permanence where identities are constructed, can help with bracketing out existential threats or overcoming them.[152]

When applied to the two cases, the methodology gives rise to the following questions:

1) What contributes to French actors' self-identity narratives when considering interventions in Mali and the CAR and how did those narratives shape the meaning of the crises?
2) What were the conflicting self-identity needs present in the decision-making and to what extend did they create anxiety amongst the actors? What were, if any, other sources of anxiety amongst the actors?
3) How did that anxiety generate insecurity and what role did shame play, if any?
4) What justifications were advanced to overcome those anxieties?
5) What do these cases reveal about the nature of threats to French self-identity that come from francophone Africa?
6) What do these cases say about France's relationship between interventions in francophone Africa and its self-image of its role in the world?

Defense of Cases

The two cases, as mentioned before, are *Operation Serval* in Mali and *Operation Sangaris* in the CAR. They have been chosen for a variety of reasons. First, they represent what I have defined as critical situations. In ontological security studies, critical situations are situations

[152] Browning, "'Je Suis En Terrasse': Political Violence, Civilizational Politics, and the Everyday Courage to Be."

which disturb the "institutionalized routines" of states and threaten their identity; as such, agents perceive that something can be done to eliminate them, or to get themselves out of these critical situations.[153] Therefore, as the two cases forced actors to contemplate and debate competing meanings of self (multilateralism versus independence/autonomy, or neocolonialism versus disengagement), they are a rich hunting ground for determining the extent to which the identity-seeking needs of state actors shaped the decision-making process. Second, because both interventions occurred in former French colonies, I argue that they can shed light on contemporary views towards francophone Africa. Third, the two cases represent the dominant normative justifications for Western-led interventions in the 21st century: the Global War On Terrorism and humanitarianism. Studying these two cases side by side allows me to understand how actors interpreted the two as 'threats' and how they shaped their sense of self. This can, in turn, help explain why France chose two similar solutions regarding two very different threats. Fourth, the cases are chosen because they provide important puzzles for the traditional security literature, which assumes "survival" as the primary (and perhaps only) motive nations seek to satisfy. Interventions by definition are wars of choice; and as such, represent decisions that are costly (both financially and physically) and made in the face of crises that do not threaten the physical survival of the state. Why, then, does France choose to risk life and limb to fight in these wars? These cases are chosen with the purpose to advance the scholarship that considers states to be driven by needs other than survival. In other words, they have a desire to satisfy *both* physical and ontological security needs.

[153] Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*.

Methodological and Conceptual Concerns

I have just laid out the approach I see as appropriate for using an ontological security account to interpret foreign policy decision-making. I use discourse analysis and the case-narrative method to explicate the intentions of actors, not the outcomes of their actions. I do not use large-N statistical methods to accomplish this, yet it is still possible for other scholars to replicate my analysis. While they may be able to use the same sources, extract the same expressions in the discourse, yet interpret a different meaning behind the actions of the Hollande administration, I do not see this as a problem. If there is logical consistency with such an alternative understanding, then it can only add to our interpretations of these cases.

Still, there are a couple conceptual concerns that I must address before moving on. The first deals with choosing state agents as my 'level-of-analysis' and the second deals with concern over causation in ontological security studies. In other words, concerns surrounding the agent-structure debate in IR. I briefly address those concerns below.

State Agents as Unit of Analysis

This dissertation is based on a concept that is used to understand individual psychology. However, I 'scale-up' the concept and apply it to the level of the state. This of course brings up the problem of "level of analysis". In keeping with the tradition in IR scholarship, I must address this concern. While it has been customary for some scholars to defend their scaling up based on the fact that "everyone does it", I do not simply use that as an escape hatch.[154] Instead I adopt a defense that is proposed by McSweeney who, like me, concedes the argument that states are not like people, but consider it necessary (for both ontological and methodological reasons) to

[154] Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma."

consider them *as if* they are people.[155] While states cannot express emotion, their leaders can. And although states may be the functional units of IR, it is state leaders who decide certain policies. So, it is logically acceptable to analyze the 'state' through its 'leaders'. This view is, according to Steele, a narrow version of the position taken by Anthony Lang, and the one I take in this dissertation.[156] Simply, I presume that because they represent the state, state agents "are the state because they have the moral burden of making policy choices *and* the capacity to implement those decisions".[157] While each state agent will have different views of what they consider their own ontological security, collectively they are committed to state self-identity. This approach assumes that anxiety over how each individual feels about their state's place in the world will still be evident no matter how each feel about their own personal insecurities.

In the case of France, a strong executive and centralized decision-making structure regarding military operations make it a suitable candidate for analyzing the ontological security needs of the state through the decision-making processes of the 'decisional group' (President, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Foreign Affairs). But this brings up another concern in ontological security studies: whose ontological security matters? For this project, the referent object of study is from the French perspective. As I am interested in contributing to the broad scholarship of why states use military force, and why states may choose to do so for reasons other than protecting their physical security, my point of view is relegated to the French one. Although analyzing the decision-making process through the lens of African ontological security needs would contribute greatly to these cases, it is outside the scope of this project.

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[155] Bill McSweeney, William McSweeney, and McSweeney Bill, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 151.
[156] Anthony F Lang Jr, *Agency and Ethics: The Politics of Military Intervention* (Albany, NY: SUNY press, 2012).
[157] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 18.

Agent-Structure Debate and this Project

The fact that this project is agent-centered requires me to also address concerns of the agent-structure debate in IR, and more specifically in foreign policy analysis. At the heart of this concern is seeking to answer the question: "does who we are cause what we do, or does what we do cause who we are?" The premise of ontological security is largely based on answering affirmatively to the first. Most of the existing literature starts with a given actor (or collective) with a set of predefined ontological security demands (based on biographical narrative, identity conceptions, etc.) and then discusses how those demands affect foreign policy choices. For example, as Mitzen argues, states see themselves in a certain way and can become internationally recognized as such.[158] Consequently, this self-perception creates certain ontological security demands. Adopting political strategies that are consistent with these ontological security demands serves to reinforce the narratives and identities that produced those demands in the first place.

However, recently, some scholarship has introduced the idea that manipulation of identity narratives can flip this consensus around. In other words, it may be possible that "what we do causes who we are". For example, Subotic highlights that Serbian elites selectively activated particular elements of Serbian national identity to convince the public that a given foreign policy was acceptable. Pursuing that foreign policy, it is argued, can reinforce the narratives that Serbians embody over time, potentially altering the demands that ontological security will make in the future.[159] Nonetheless, before this conclusion can be made, it is essential to empirically mark a point in time, say T1, where there is the dominant underlying identity narrative. Only then can you methodically evaluate changes to that structuring narrative and state identity.

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[158] Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma."
[159] Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change."

In this dissertation, I have laid out the underlying narrative of French security identity in Chapter II. This biographical narrative serves as a structuring force; in other words, I assume, at first, that "who we are causes what we do". However, because the Hollande administration is attempting to pursue a security policy towards Africa that is multilateral, disengaged, and avoids the appearance of neo-colonialism, it is an interesting case to see the extent to which elite manipulation of narratives manages this proposed policy shift. While actors are at the center of the approach of this study, and they are assumed to have rational agency, they cannot be completely separated from their social environment. France's colonial experience and Gaullist foreign policy are shared knowledge structures amongst the 'decisional group' and serve as the backdrop against which the Hollande administration's decision-making took place.

In the following portion of this dissertation, the methodological and theoretical framework laid out in this and the previous chapter will be applied to two cases. The analysis begins with the Malian crisis and the French response to it before it then examines the decision to deploy a peacekeeping force to the CAR. Chapters V and VI trace the processes in both cases and identify the ontological security-seeking needs of the decision-makers and how those demands shaped the two decisions.

CHAPTER V

CRISIS IN MALI: ANXIETY, THE MEANING OF THE THREAT, AND THE DECISION TO INTERVENE

In 2012, the political and humanitarian crisis that had developed in Mali throughout he preceding decade began to reach a new dimension. The presence of Islamist extremist groups in the north transformed what was largely a domestic political conflict into a regional insurgent movement with global security implications. The French led the international response to the deteriorating situation, supporting the interim government in the capital Bamako and becoming a strong proponent (through the UN Security Council) of an African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). Throughout, French foreign policy-makers described their country's role as that of a "facilitator" only; the motto "African solutions to African security problems" ran through many official declarations.[1] Despite the resolute commitments to stand beside the interim government in Bamako, there were no official mentions of French soldiers intervening directly in the conflict until events in early January 2013 provoked a major shift in the French position. Following a terrorist-led offensive toward the government-controlled south, Mali's interim President Dioncounda Traoré issued a written request for French military intervention. On January 11, 2013, President Hollande announced the counter-offensive to fight the Islamist fighters and criminal groups that threatened the existence of the Malian state, code-named *Operation Serval*. This intervention would be justified in the name of French interests, with the President arguing that the Mali crisis posed a wider threat to West African and international

[1] Laurent Fabius, "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Le Quotidien "Paris-Normandie" Le 18 Mai 2012 À Paris, Sur Sa Fonction De Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères Et Les Dossiers Prioritaires De Politique Étrangère," news release, 2012; "Extraits D'un Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Bfm Tv Le 27 Septembre 2012, Notamment Sur La Situation Au Mali."

security because it might enhance the capacity of Islamist terrorists to stage attacks in France and the rest of Europe.[2] The drastic shift from a non-interventionist stance to the largest French military intervention since the Algerian War is puzzling, to say the least, as some commentators have noticed.[3] How and why did French decision-makers make this shift in policy?

This chapter assesses whether the *Ansar ad-Din*-led offensive in early January 2013 towards Mali's capital, amidst the growing concern that Mali would become a terrorist safe haven, prevented French decision-makers from keeping their promise to stay out of Africa's problems and maintain a no-boots-on-the-ground policy. I show how the offensive changed the meaning of the Malian conflict for French leaders, thus clarifying why France undertook its largest military intervention since the Algerian War despite no realized threat to France's (or Europe's) territory, and whose involvement might have dire consequences for France's status as a country trying to move on from the neocolonial images of *Françafrique*. By focusing on the discourse and debate amongst the 'decisional group' before, during, and after the offensive, I assess its impact on France's decision to intervene in the conflict. I argue that the offensive increased French decision-makers' anxiety over the meaning of the conflict in Mali, as well as over their desire to continue to normalize their relationship with former colonies since the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide,[4] to the point that it eventually altered their perceptions of why the crisis in Mali was a critical situation relevant to French self-identity. This anxiety – coupled with contradictory state impulses to pursue both multilateralism as well as independence

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[2] See François Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Communauté Internationale Notamment De L'onu, À New York Le 24 Septembre 2013.," news release, 2013; Melly and Darracq, *A New Way to Engage?: French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande*; ibid.
[3] Notin, *La Guerre De La France Au Mali*, 123-48.
[4] As part of the normalization process, French policy-makers have vowed to refrain from getting involved in domestic political contestations of power. Under the label *ni ingérence ni indifférence* French officials reviewed their strategy towards Africa, hoping to create the perception that they might create stability when required while avoiding accusations that they are infringing upon sovereignty rights. See Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 78.

in foreign affairs – dislodged the strong non-interventionist stance that had been cemented since the early days of the conflict (and in the early days of the Hollande presidency) and thus resulted in France intervening militarily in January 2013.

This case study is important for ontological security studies for two reasons. First, by using an ontological security interpretation it is an example of how what we might interpret as moral action (an intervention by one nation made for the sake of *all* nations) actually represents egoistic, self-help behavior because it is a form of identity reinforcement. Second, and more importantly, it helps us understand how leaders confront identity anxieties during a critical situation, how those anxieties shape the decision-making process, and how those anxieties are overcome. How, in the case of France, did the Hollande administration confront anxieties associated with ontological insecurity and how did those anxieties shape the decision to intervene?

In order to answer that question, this chapter introduces the case by providing a background note on the political and security situation in Mali on the eve of the intervention. The remaining sections, in accordance with the plan laid out in Chapter IV, uses an ontological security account to analyze the three stages of the decision-making process – agenda-setting, debating the intervention, and justifying the decision – to interpret the French decision regarding unilateral intervention in the Malian conflict. I reconstruct the context of the crisis, focusing on the crucial period leading up to the intervention and the months that followed. Together, these sections show the impact the terrorist-led offensive towards Mali's capital had on French decision-making which ultimately shifted the proposed solution from 'supporting a multilateral force' to a 'unilateral intervention in the name of the international community'.

The empirical findings suggest two things. First, when the conflict morphed from a largely political and domestic dispute into a terrorist security threat that could impact France and the rest of Europe, the anxiety associated with doing nothing became unbearable. In the end, France could not stand by and await a multinational coalition to develop in response to the developing threat. Mali could not be allowed to become a terrorist safe haven. France's identity, especially in Africa, is one of a security guarantor; aside from Britain, it is the only other European nation with the means and desire to operate militarily outside of its own borders. France has a strong desire to matter on the world stage and intervening in another nation to guarantee the safety of the international community from an existential terrorist threat fulfills that desire; more than the desire to remain committed to a multilateral operation and more than the desire to avoid the stigma of neocolonial behavior.

Second, the decision to intervene was not a quick, ad hoc choice (as some have argued)[5] based simply on changing situations on the ground. Throughout the three stages of the decision-making process, anxiety was generated gradually by two contradictory principles of French security. On the one hand, French policy makers were committed to a European and African solution to the problem, right up to the very end. And on the other hand, they maintained the possibility that it might be their county's responsibility (alone, if needed) to solve the crisis in Mali. While both doctrines speak to the very core principles of French identity – multilateralism and independence – the anxiety between these two principles created a paradox. They might feel shame if they did nothing, just as they might feel shame if they acted without legitimate approval. Nevertheless, the principle of unilateral intervention won, but the 'story' of why they

[5] For a review of those who have viewed France's security position as being in a state of confusion see, for instance Cumming, "Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa Policy: Change, Continuity or Confusion?."; Chafer, "From Confidence to Confusion: Franco-African Relations in the Era of Globalisation."; Bovcon, "Françafrique and Regime Theory."

did it maintained its multilateral rhetoric. France justified the intervention as one made in the name of the international community for the sake of Mali. In doing so, French policy makers activated elements of proximity, kinship, and responsibility to their former African colonies. This framing spoke to the core values of French policy-makers' identity and were consistent with their commitment to a multilateral security policy. It also prevented France from being accused of satisfying its neocolonial appetite by turning a foreign policy decision from one that was ontologically unacceptable into one that was palatable.

Figure 1. Map of Mali

Source: CIA World Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mali/, accessed on 3 Jan 2023

The Evolving Crisis in Mali

The crisis that prompted the intervention in January 2013 did not emerge overnight. It was simply a newly intensified crisis that has burdened the region since the mid-2000s. There are

three important things to know about Mali in order to contextualize the evolving crisis: first, it is an impoverished and divided country – socially, economically, politically; second, since the early 1990s, it has been a democracy in crisis; and third, it had fallen victim to Islamic radicalization in the years leading up to the intervention.

Geographic, Socio-Economic and Political Factors

First, Mali – although a large country (nearly twice the size of France) – is small in population, with roughly 15 million people living in a territory over 1.2 million square kilometers.[6] It is a landlocked state whose climate varies from subtropical to arid. As such, the state does not have direct access to international waterways and trade routes and the country is mostly dependent on agriculture revenues; however, the geography and unreliable farming climate (exacerbated through increased 'desertification' – the expansion of the Sahara towards the south, abetted by climate change) have made that industry susceptible to price swings.[7] Furthermore, although Mali is rich in rare resources (such as gold and other mined ores), those commodities are also subject to large price fluctuations, making steady income from those businesses less than reliable.[8] Nevertheless, Mali sustains itself on small-scale, rainfed subsistence agriculture and pastoralism, with the predominance of cotton as a cash crop and coarse grains (maize, millet, and sorghum) as a food crop.[9] Periodic drought means that a large portion of the population faces regular food shortages, even famine. As a result, Mali regularly

[6] That population is accurate as of January 2013. Today it is roughly 20 million people. See World Bank info at https://data.worldbank.org/country/mali.
[7] Claire Felter and Nathalie Bussemaker, "What to Know About the Crisis in Mali," Council on Foreign Relations, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/what-know-about-crisis-mali.
[8] Ibid.
[9] United Nations, "Fact Sheet on Food and Agriculture Trends of Mali," ed. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (United Nations, 2017).

appeals the UN for famine relief in the Sahel.[10] Between 1990 and 2012, Official Development Assistance (ODA) accounted for an average of nine percent of the country's gross national income (GNI), with the highest inflow happening in 2011 (12.6 percent of GNI) which was almost 50 percent of the national budget.[11]

Consequently, the country is desperately poor, with nearly half of its population living in extreme poverty. The UN Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) categorizes Mali as one of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) in the world, which is a description reserved for the poorest and weakest states of the international community; they are states which are "highly disadvantaged in their development process for historical, structural, and geographical reasons".[12] Also, Mali is one of the 32 Landlocked Developing Countries, rounding out a list of nations that highlights every imaginable disadvantage a country can have.

The north of the country, which is mostly desert and sparsely populated, is dominated by the Tuareg people, a minority who regard themselves as apart from and "perhaps superior to" the rest of the population.[13] The north is also site to many of the great monuments of African Islamic civilization, such as Timbuktu. The south, on the other hand, dominates the economy and the politics of the country. Northern resentment of this southern domination is long standing. Recently, in 2010, a devastating drought ravaged the Saharan region causing major famine and forcing many northerners into temporary exile. The absence of Malian assistance from the government in the south served to reinforce the prevailing perception that they were not only neglected by the state but that the government's non-intervention was also part of a planned

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[10] Jaimie Bleck and Kristin Michelitch, "The 2012 Crisis in Mali: Ongoing Empirical State Failure," *African Affairs* 114, no. 457 (2015).
[11] Joe Penney, "Mali's Model Democracy Myth" (paper presented at the Global Policy Forum, 2013).
[12] United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone," ed. United Nations Development Programme (United Nations2016).
[13] John Campbell, 16 January 2013, 2013, https://www.cfr.org/video/mali-conflict-three-things-know.

strike against northern regions.[14] As a result, the Tuareg feel marginalized within a state they do not consider their own. They have repeatedly claimed more autonomy for themselves and denounced the inequalities between the divided regions of Mali.[15] Government promises of increased local autonomy over the past several decades have regularly been made and broken, only fueling the resentment and rebellions.

In fact, prior to the violent clashes between government forces and rebels from 2006-2009, there were two other Tuareg rebellions since Mali gained independence from France. The first occurred in the early 1960s, and the second took place in the late 1980s and extended into the early 1990s. The fight for an autonomous region, however, predates these clashes by many more years. In 1916, the Tuareg engaged in a revolt against the French colonial administration after promises to allocate an autonomous region for them, known as the Azawad, were broken. The French violently repressed the revolt, confiscating important grazing lands and fragmenting the Tuareg society by drawing arbitrary borders that cut through their traditional homeland.[16] Since this traditional land extends over five Saharan nations – Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, and Niger – the struggle between Tuareg and government forces has become a regional question. In fact, the most recent round of clashes leading up to the 2013 intervention in Mali was mediated with the assistance of Algeria, who negotiated peace by having the Malian government promise "greater regional autonomy, the integration of Tuareg combatants into the military, and more state aid for the impoverished north".[17] However, like previous development aid programs for the north, the agreements were never fully implemented.[18]

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[14] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 53.
[15] Douglas-Bowers Devon, "The Crisis in Mali: A Historical Perspective on the Tuareg People," *Global Research* 1 (2013).
[16] Ibid.
[17] Alexis Arieff, "Crisis in Mali," ed. CRS Report for Congress (2013).
[18] Campbell Mali Conflict; Arieff, "Crisis in Mali."

Shortcomings of a "Model Democracy"

Second, Mali has been considered by many a "model democracy".[19] One of the most positive examples of the third wave of democratization,[20] Mali has had regular elections and the transfer of authority from one elected political leader to his successor since the 1990s. This has resulted in a glorification by the international community, securing Mali considerable amounts of aid money while simultaneously ignoring many of the country's most effective needs. International donors have perpetuated an overly positive image of Mali's democracy which, in reality, has been suffering from serious shortcomings for two decades.[21] Under the Presidency of Amadou Toumani Touré (Mali's second democratically elected president from 2002-2012), the literacy rate among young adults remained low, political participation almost non-existent, and corruption, nepotism, and patronage among the ruling elites was high.[22] Furthermore, the Touré administration did nothing to reconcile north and south tensions. Repressive policies against the populations in the north, combined with poor socio-economic performance, served to enhance a feeling of political isolation, social marginalization, and economic strangling among populations of the Azawad region.[23] More importantly, human rights violations and extrajudicial killings at the hands of Malian soldiers heightened the dread and misery felt at the time.

Exacerbating the tension in Mali was the fall of Libya's Colonel al-Gadhafi in October 2011 and the numerous Tuareg militia who had previously fought on the side of his regime returning to Mali. They brough with them weapons and new momentum for the most recent

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[19] Laurent Bigot, "Les Défis Du Sahel: Focus Sur La Crise Au Mali," *Le Sahel en 2012: Évolutions et développement* (2012).
[20] For a review of democratic transitions in the 1990s, see Elias Papaioannou and Gregorios Siourounis, "Economic and Social Factors Driving the Third Wave of Democratization," *Journal of comparative Economics* 36, no. 3 (2008).
[21] Bigot, "Les Défis Du Sahel: Focus Sur La Crise Au Mali."; Penney, "Mali's Model Democracy Myth."
[22] Arieff, "Crisis in Mali."
[23] Ougasstan Ag Ahmed, "50 Ans De Colonisation Et D'invasion De L'azawad," *News Release* (2010), http://www.mnlamov.net/actualites/34-actualites/46-2010.html.

Tuareg rebellion. Shortly after, the *Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA) was formed, which was composed of Tuareg, Songhaïs, Arab, and Fulani members. After five decades of grievances between north and south, and repeated demands for more autonomy, the MNLA was the first group to formally strive for complete independence from the Malian state.[24]

In early 2012, the MNLA took up arms in an attempt to gain its independence, winning several victories that put them in control of most of the northern territory of Mali. In April of that same year, they declared the independence of Azawad, but neither the central government in Bamako nor any other state acknowledged this claim. Not only did Bamako invalidate their claims but the capital also accused the MNLA of collaborating with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an Islamist militant organization with aims to establish an Islamic state in the Maghreb and Sahel regions. The MNLA vehemently denied these accusations, describing them as propaganda by the Malian government, and citing numerous violent skirmishes between their own forces and AQIM battalions as proof. In their own official declarations, the MNLA highlighted the dilemma of the Tuareg as being considered "cooperative accomplices of Islamists" by the Malian authorities on the one hand, while also being labeled by AQIM as "nothing else than allies of the central government".[25] The reciprocity of accusations highlights the extent to which Malian society had become divided.

The MNLA offensive in early January 2012 inflicted heavy losses against President Touré's military, including the massacre of 80 soldiers in the city of Adjelhoc. [26] The feeble response to the insurgency, coupled with preexisting resent among southerners of the

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[24] Dona J Stewart, *What Is Next for Mali?: The Roots of Conflict and Challenges to Stability* (Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2013).
[25] Ag Ahmed, "50 Ans De Colonisation Et D'invasion De L'azawad".
[26] Ironically, the almost immediate defeat of the Malian Army by the hands of militants was facilitated by the Touré administration's insistence on keeping the army small in order to reduce the risk of a military coup. Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.

government, prompted a series of protests – initiated by the widows of the soldiers who had lost their lives in the attack – all across the country.[27] The protests continued through March of that year, during which demonstrators voiced their discontent with the government's course of action against the insurgents and the weak state of the army. The army, although significantly funded through military aid, was in fact under-equipped; much of the aid that Malian troops had received had been misappropriated by senior military staff before it could reach the troops who needed it.[28]

Then, in March 2012, this ostensibly "model democratic government" was overthrown by an American-trained colonel named Amadou Haya Sanogo and a group of his junior military officers. The coup was not just a response to the appalling conditions in which the soldiers were fighting the armed groups in the north but the result of a more general frustration amongst the populace with the current government.[29] There was no popular outcry to defend the democratically elected president. On the contrary, a survey conducted in the summer of 2012 showed that a majority of residents in Bamako actually supported the military coup that ousted President Touré.[30] Many had hoped that the coup would put an end to the political excesses of the previous twenty years and create the conditions for the emergence of a new political class, showing how superficial the connection was between the country's elites that managed elections and the people that they governed.[31]

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[27] Julien Gavelle, Johanna Siméant-Germanos, and Laure Traoré, "Le Court Terme De La Légitimité: Prises De Position, Rumeurs Et Perceptions Entre Janvier Et Septembre 2012 À Bamako," *Politique africaine* 130, no. 2 (2013): 26-29.
[28] Martin Theodoor van Vliet, *Beyond Institutional Blueprints: Hybrid Security Provision and Democratic Practice in Mali* (Leiden University, 2021).
[29] Ibid.
[30] Bruce Whitehouse, "Public Perceptions of Violent Extremism in Mali," in *African Border Disorders* (Routledge, 2017).
[31] Campbell Mali Conflict.

In the wake of the putsch, the insurrectionists attempted to establish a legitimate government known as the *Comité National pour le Redressement de la Démocratie et la Restauration de l'État* (CNRDR), which failed to obtain UN recognition.[32] Meanwhile, political pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), combined with the inability of the junta to stop the massacres committed by militants in the north, forced Sanogo to agree to the formation of an interim government under the new President Dioncounda Traoré. However, like the government before it, this one continued to suffer from "internal divisions and military interference".[33] The dramatic collapse of the "model democracy" sharply contrasted with Mali's international reputation as a beacon of democracy in Africa and a relatively stable state in an otherwise troubled region. But this alone did not draw the attention of the international community. What transformed the regional crisis into an issue of global interest was the presence and activities of militant Islamist groups.

Islamic Radicalization and Organized Crime

Finally, the third important thing to know in order to contextualize the events leading up to the 2013 French intervention is that at the same time all this is happening in the south, the rebellion in the north continued. What started as a low-level, long-term insurrection based on regional and ethnic grievances was transformed by the recent influx of Gadhafi's former mercenaries and their weapons. They also brought with them a radical vision of Islam. With this new weaponry, they rapidly overran the Malian army. As mentioned before, the Bamako government's failure to put down this insurgency was the cause of the coup in 2012.

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[32] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 57.
[33] Arieff, "Crisis in Mali."

Gadhafi's men, often called Arabs due to the north African origins of many of them, and the quasi-criminal/quasi-radical Islamic group called AQIM that I introduced previously quickly outmaneuvered the local rebels (the MNLA) whose aim was to merely establish an independent state. By 2012 AQIM had come to dominate an area that reached from Sudan in the east to Mauritania in the west. Their activities benefitted from and contributed to the general instability of the region and they supported themselves through criminal activity. Lying at the crossroads of global trafficking routes, the porous borders of the Sahara desert became a sanctuary for the organization, allowing them to participate in many illicit and illegal activities, ranging from cigarette smuggling to arms trading, kidnappings, and human and narcotic trafficking.[34] By establishing themselves as a protection force to traffickers, AQIM was able to earn a stable source of revenue and, with the aid of the readily available arms, implemented itself as a local power.[35]

In power, they imposed a radical Islamic regime, complete with the Sharia punishments of amputation and stoning.[36] It also remains unclear whether AQIM was part of the larger international Jihadist movement, although numerous radical training camps and other such facilities began to appear.[37] At a minimum, they were propagators of the jihadist idea and benefitted from the impoverished local population.[38] Also, their ultimate goals were less clear as a result of internal divisions and multiple parties claiming the organization's leadership.[39] While

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[34] Campbell Mali Conflict.
[35] Wolfram Lacher, "Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region," *Carnegie Papers Middle East* September (2012): 8-9.
[36] Campbell Mali Conflict.
[37] AQIM reportedly relied on financial support from Al Qaeda to strengthen its position in and control over the region. However, the extent of cooperation between the two groups is not exactly known. Some have spoken of considerable support, while others describe the connection between the two as being nominal as opposed to operational. See International Crisis Group, "Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?," *Africa Report* 92 (2005).
[38] Lacher, "Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region."
[39] Arieff, "Crisis in Mali."

there were several splinter groups that emerged from AQIM, one militant group became particularly strong. This group was named Ansar ad-Din and was led by Iyad ag Ghaly who was a leader of the rebellion in the 1990s, a hostage mediator, and the Malian diplomat to Saudi Arabia from 2005-2008. Initially Ansar ad-Din cooperated with the MNLA in their fight against the Malian army. In May 2012, the two groups coordinated to conquer strategic points in the Kidal region. However, shortly after their success, the two began fighting each other and the groups disunited. By mid-2012, Ansar ad-Din evicted the MNLA from Kidal and Timbuktu, two regions which lie north of the Niger river.[40]

But it wasn't just the turmoil in 2012 that gained world attention. The international community had already begun to take stock of the developing terrorist threat in the Sahel from the early 2000s onward. After assessing that the terrorist and criminal groups had become a non-contained threat with direct implications beyond the region, the United States asserted that it was now a transnational threat which required a transnational solution. In 2003, the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) was launched, the goal of which was to help create rapid reaction capacities in Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. In 2005, the TSCTP (Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership) replaced the PSI and included the nations of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria, and Senegal.[41] France, too, became especially interested in the growing threat emanating from the region. Several factors contributed to this growing concern, including their previous experience with Algerian extremist groups,[42] the establishment of closer links between AQIM and Al Qaeda in Iraq in 2005, the growing concern over Western kidnappings (most notably French citizens), and AQIM's increasing verbal attacks against France, which included calling

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[40] Steve Metcalf, "Iyad Ag Ghaly: Mali's Islamist Leader.'," *BBC News* 17 (2012).
[41] Jeremy Keenan, *The Dying Sahara: U.S. Imperialism and Terror in Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 14-27.
[42] Jeremy Shapiro and Benedicte Suzan, "The French Experience Of," *Survival* 45, no. 1 (2003).

her the "mother of all evils".[43] This furthered the perception among successive French decision-makers of the existence of a global threat. While the Saharan terrorist threat became an item of interest on the security agendas of many Western and African nations, transnational efforts to eradicate AQIM did not succeed. The failure of the Bamako government to completely remove the terrorist cells from its territory was also criticized as a choice to preserve the south of the country while sacrificing the north.[44]

In sum, the core factors that need to be taken into consideration when analyzing the crisis in Mali are: the high levels of corruption, poverty, and civil unrest; the schisms between north and south; and the inability of an under-equipped military to counter the rise of extremist and criminal organizations.

An Ontological Security Interpretation of French Decision-Making

I argue in the rest of this chapter that the changed meaning of the situation on the ground leading up to and following the Ansar ad-Din offensive changed the costs non-intervention would entail to French self-identity. At the core of my argument is the assumption that non-intervention prior to the rise of an existential terrorist threat and potential terrorist safe haven could have still been consistent with French self-identity regarding African security in the 21st century, but non-intervention *following* the acknowledged terrorist threat would have not. Thus, the changed meaning of the conflict from 'domestic political and civil dispute' to 'existential terrorist threat' meant that non-intervention would threaten French identity, and ostensibly French ontological security. What drove France's decision to intervene was not merely – as the

[43] Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghrib: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?," (2009).
[44] Assemblée Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 2 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Dédense," news release, 2012.

politicians proclaimed – an affinity for moral action, or the desire to do good for good's sake. Rather, it was a rationally chosen policy that would serve France's ontological security needs.

As I stated before, François Hollande's decision to launch *Operation Serval* in January 2013 is surprising given that he and the majority of actors in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initially had been opposed to a military intervention altogether.[45] However, in the years leading up to the Islamist offensive in 2013, precautionary steps were taken by the French government to prepare for potential conflict. For example, after a series of kidnappings of mainly European citizens on the borders of Algeria, Mali, and Mauritania committed by AQIM, Paris offered the Malian government technical assistance to restore the security in the north. Around that time, the French military developed its first operational plans for a possible intervention.[46] Then, in 2012, the *Centre de Planification et Contrôle des Opérations (CPCO)* began making plans for the liberation of a region under AQIM control near the Algerian border. That same year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs began making plans based on the assumption of a collapsed Malian state.[47] Nevertheless, these measures alone don't explain why French decision-makers ultimately decided to intervene in Mali. How did the growing threat, and subsequent terrorist offensive, help bring about French intervention in the Mali conflict? Discourse analysis, as mentioned in Chapter IV, is most useful in the case of French security policy, where (again, as I mentioned in Chapter II) competing explanations seem plausible. In order to understand how the meaning of the conflict evolved, and how it came to shape the decision-making process, I turn first to a narrative interpretation of how the Malian crisis was first included on the French security

[45] Notin, *La Guerre De La France Au Mali*, 144.
[46] Information from a policy officer at the French Ministry of Defense, from Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 60.
[47] Information from a civil servant at the Foreign Ministry in Paris, quoted in ibid., 61.

agenda.[48] In doing so, I pay particular attention to who the characters of the narrative were and how they were characterized (actors), where the story took place (scene and setting), and how the narrative moved through time (emplotment).[49]

Narrating Mali onto the Security Agenda

A recurring theme in the narrative leading up to the crisis in Mali was the idea of proximity: cultural and linguistic proximity in the way the actors were characterized; geographic proximity in descriptions of the scene (or setting); and temporal proximity in the way the actors were emplotted into the events of the story. Each of these imparted meaning to the unfolding crisis in Mali, paving a way for the conflict to make it onto the political and security agenda of the 'decisional group'. It should be noted, however, that the idea of proximity does not apply exclusively to the Malian case but can be used to define the "French perception of the Franco-African relationship in general".[50] Also, while the 'closeness' of the actors was important in the early stages of the Malian crisis, its role also ties into the wider debate on the impact the 'African factor' plays on French-decision making, including the discourse surrounding the choice and the rhetoric used in the justification phase.

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[48] As a reminder, in this dissertation I analyze three essential structural elements – setting, characterization of actors, and emplotment – when analyzing how French actors activate and use elements of the biographical narrative to bring the crises in Mali and CAR to the security agenda in the first place. I also use those same elements to analyze how actors justify or legitimate their decision to intervene, as well as how they overcome anxieties over ontological insecurity.

[49] "Plot", "setting", "characterization of actors"; these are part of what is known as Burke's dramatic pentad – the five key elements of a fully drawn narrative (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose) - and are the focus of analysis in studies doing narrative research. See Chapter IV of this dissertation. Also see Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 177; Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.

[50] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 62. How proximity was narrated into the story of the conflict in the CAR will also be analyzed in Chapter VI.

Characterization of the Actors

In the months leading up to the intervention, there were no lack of arguments referring to a shared Franco-African culture as to why France became initially perceptive and subsequently involved in the crisis in Mali. For French elites and their francophone counterparts, characterizing each other as having a shared culture does two important things. It simultaneously explains France's continued interest in Africa while at the same time justifying its role as security actor in the region.[51] According to Erforth, "cultural relations are considered a realm where France can exercise considerable influence largely without being accused of neo-colonial aspirations."[52] For most of the francophone world, France remains a legitimate and accepted cultural reference, largely shaping the trajectory and path of French-speaking nations. At the same time, French decision-makers are themselves shaped by their co-actors in Africa. A personal advisor to the Foreign Minister in 2014 was quoted as saying "Africa is not a continent like any other. We have a historic relationship that remains very strong. When I say 'historic', I do not imply that this is a relationship of the past, it is the cultural relationship which is very strong. Culture understood as linguistic ties, the number of Africans that live in France, who have the double nationality. France and francophone Africa are coming ever closer."[53] Sharing a culture, specifically through the common language in French-speaking Africa, is how French and African actors create a sentiment of relatedness. The definition of what it means to be French thus expands to actors well beyond the national boundaries and comprises other societies that share French culture and language.

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[51] Charbonneau, *France and the New Imperialism: Security Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa*.
[52] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 65-66.
[53] As quoted in ibid., 66.

The narrative of cultural proximity was not particularly novel to the events leading up to the decision to intervene. In fact, cultural proximity has long served as an instrument of foreign policy, not just in France but in other nations. The concept of soft power – which is about influencing or controlling others to get them to do what you want through attraction rather than coercion – was coined by Joseph Nye and is largely based on the universalist nature of a country's culture.[54] In this sense, France has used its cultural proximity to African actors as a purposefully constructed instrument to enhance its interests and to increase its power in the region. As such, French elites have continued to attach great importance to the role cultural policies play in France's external relations, investing considerable amounts of material, human, and ideational capacity in this policy realm. As Ager puts it, when referring to the development and economic aid aspect of foreign policy:

> Since decolonization, France's cultural policy towards Africa has been an infallible indicator of the particularity and complexity of Franco-African relations. Indeed, it is one of the most characteristic features of what is often referred to as *l'exception française* in international relations, for whereas other former colonial nations see development assistance as a remit which is limited to socio-economic concerns over health, education and welfare, France's aid programme has always contained a mainstream of budgets for, among other things, French language teaching, francophone cinema and sponsorships to French universities.[55]

It is no surprise then that Laurent Fabius, the Foreign Minister, included *rayonnement culturel* (cultural influence/standing) as one of the eight principles that make France a *puissance d'influence* (influential power) when he took office in May 2012, just months after the coup that deposed President Touré.[56] Similarly, President Hollande, equating France's cultural standing

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[54] Joseph S Nye Jr, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Public affairs, 2004).
[55] Dennis E Ager, "French Cultural, Languages and Telecommunications Policy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa," *Modern & Contemporary France* 13, no. 1 (2005): 57.
[56] See, for instance Laurent Fabius, "Déclaration De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur La Francophonie, À Paris Le 10 Octobre 2012," news release, 2012. For a more detailed description of how *rayonnement culturel* contributes to making France an influential power, see "Déclaration De M. Laurent Fabius,

with the promotion and diffusion of the French language, is quoted in 2012 saying, "language…is a means [for France] to be bigger than it is".[57] Hollande, like his many predecessors and successors, is convinced that the French language is the way France can ensure their influence abroad, particularly in francophone Africa.

Being a member of *La Francophonie* – an intergovernmental organization that promotes language, cultures, and norms – also serves two other purposes. First, it is a way to build and sustain coalitions outside the traditional international security framework, such as through the UN Security Council. Second, it is a way that norms and values are shared. President Hollande himself referred to these values during his famous speech in Dakar in October 2012, where he pledged the end to *la Françafrique*, declaring that French "is a language of values and principles and among these principles there are democracy, good governance, and the fight against corruption".[58] In other words, promoting the French language is a way that French elites feel they can promote their *own* values and interests abroad. But sharing values isn't the only thing that Francophonie permits. It also allows France to *protect* its values. This is evidenced by an increasing number of studies conducted on peacekeeping operations in francophone settings, with one study in particular arguing for an increased 'francophonization' of peace operations in French-speaking countries.[59] Aware of this dual ability of the shared language between French and African actors to both promote and protect French values, Hollande announced during a conference with his ambassadors in August 2012 that "finally, when I mention our identity, when

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Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 27 Mars 2013," news release, 2013.

[57] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 27 Août 2012."

[58] "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Entre La France Et L'afrique, À Dakar Le 12 Octobre 2012."

[59] David Morin, Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni, and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "When Peacekeeping Intersects with La Francophonie: Scope, Significance and Implications," *International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 3 (2012).

I speak of our values, of our place in the world, of our attachment to the rule of law, I don't forget the asset that our language and our culture constitute. Language, it is a way of thinking just as it is a way of acting".[60] In the context of the Malian crisis, a parliamentary report considered it vital to support the Francophonie (through media and education) in order to prevent AQIM from spreading their ideology throughout the northern territories.[61]

During the early days of the crisis in Mali (the first half of 2012), French decision-makers characterized the relationship between themselves and the Malians as one that was close due to a shared culture and language. This sentiment of relatedness or belonging created a sense of responsibility among elites and thus facilitated their growing anxiety over whether the administration's desire to remain committed to non-interference was in line with their identity (both personal and national). Furthermore, characterizing the relationship as one that is close was employed as a narrative tool used by French foreign policy makers in order to get the issue onto the security agenda in the first place.

Scene and Setting of the Story

Closely related to a shared language is the shared setting that both French (European) and African actors occupy. The geographic vicinity of the two continents requires that France should pay particular attention to its neighbors across the Mediterranean. When deliberating possible solutions to overcome the instability in Mali, French policy makers routinely argued that the distance between the two countries was less than it actually was, turning the scene of action into a shared space. One personal advisor to Foreign Minister Fabius at the time summed up how the

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[60] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 27 Août 2012."
[61] Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 2 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Dédense."

shared setting of the two influenced the narrative in the months leading up to the intervention in the following quote:

> France in its approach towards Africa – whatever else one may say – is influenced more by geography than by history. Africa is our neighbor, more than other continents that are farther away. It is a neighbor with many problems . . . if things get on the wrong course, this will have an impact on us.[62]

Specific figures of speech in the French discourse also emphasized the shared setting of the two regions by discursively reducing the distance between them. For example, French politicians began to use phrases that described the Malian state as a place where "the constitution of a terrorist base…heavily armed on Europe's doorsteps" could begin to form.[63] The fact that politicians believed that the crisis was unfolding a mere few hundred miles away (despite Bamako actually being 3,813 miles away from Paris) also explains why politicians felt that a terrorist threat emanating from the Sahel should receive higher ranking than equal threats from Afghanistan or Syria.[64] President Hollande made a direct reference to the shared setting of the conflict (a space shared by Africans and Europeans) when referring to the instability in the Sahel in front of the Senegalese National Assembly in October 2012. There, he said, "Not only your security is threatened [by the Malian crisis], but also ours, the security of Europe, a Europe which knows the invaluable importance of peace…this Europe that made and still makes peace,

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[62] Quote taken from Erforth, "Mental Maps and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Eurafrique and the French Military Intervention in Mali," 50.

[63] Nationale, "Compte Rendu Intégral. Session Ordinaire De 2012-2013; 224° Séance: Déclaration Du Gouvernement Sur L'autorisation De La Prolongation De L'intervention Des Forces Françaises Au Mali, Débat Et Vote Sur Cette Déclaration."

[64] Erforth, "Mental Maps and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Eurafrique and the French Military Intervention in Mali," 50-51. One should also note that using geographic proximity as a justification for why the French should care more about events is Bamako as opposed to the growing humanitarian crisis in Syria at the time is also riddled with holes. Damascus is actually only 2,720 miles from Paris, much closer than the 3,813 miles to Bamako.

this Europe also needs to make and want peace in Africa every time there is a conflict or terrorism".[65]

But Hollande wasn't the only one who noted that the setting of the conflict in Mali was one that could affect both African and European security. As early as June 2012, Laurent Fabius started elevating the rhetoric of the crisis as "a danger not only to Mali, but to the whole of Africa and Europe", warning his European counterparts of the severity of the situation and encouraging them to participate in the conflict resolution.[66] He was resolute in his efforts to remind his colleagues of the deteriorating situation which was occurring "only a few hundred kilometers from us".[67] The setting of the crisis in Africa drew the Sahel region and the European continent closely together, to a point that the two became one.

Migration also contributed to the shared setting of the story. The presence and active role of the Malian community in France reinforced the visibility of the crisis, elevating it to the security agenda of French decision-makers. In fact, it was estimated that there were approximately 80,000 to 120,000 Malians living in France, most of whom resided in a Parisian suburb (Montreuil) which has earned the nick name *la deuxième ville malienne* (Mali's second city).[68] According to one study, the presence of a Malian diaspora reinforced the conviction that an intervention was appropriate, supporting the need for France to play a more active role in the crisis.[69] This, of course, reinforces an old Gaullist notion that there is no distinction between what is considered foreign and domestic when it comes to policy regarding former French

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[65] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Entre La France Et L'afrique, À Dakar Le 12 Octobre 2012."
[66] Laurent Fabius, "Déclaration À La Presse De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur La Situation Au Mali Et En Syrie, À New York Le 24 Septembre 2012," news release, 2012.
[67] "Conférence De Presse De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Notamment Sur La Position De L'union Européenne Concernant La Situation En Syrie, À Luxembourg Le 25 Juin 2012.," news release, 2012.
[68] Patrick Gonin and Nathalie Kotlok, "Migrations Et Pauvreté: Essai Sur La Situation Malienne," (2012).
[69] Ibid.

colonies.[70] In fact, the 2008 White Book (*Livre Blanc*) comments on the significance foreign crises may have on French security, arguing for a doctrine that emphasizes any foreign policy should consider the *retour en sécurité intérieure* (impact on domestic security). This doctrine postulates two things. First, that any action abroad needs to strengthen the nation's domestic security; and second, that the maintenance of France's domestic security might require military actions abroad.[71]

French decision-makers narrated the crisis in Mali as one that co-occupied both European and African settings. This speaks to the reason why the crisis emerged on the security agenda in the first place. It also shows why French actors had a hard time dismissing their potential role in any possible solution. Geographic proximity, on top of the previously mentioned cultural proximity, contributed to growing French anxiety over their ontological security, leading to the cognizance that a radicalization of the Malian state could not remain without consequences for France. Allowing Africans to solve their own security problems seemed harder and harder to make happen.

Emplotment of Events and their Meaning

As a reminder, the events of a story (or narrative) do not stand on their own. They must be placed in relation to each other in order to create a story, with the plot serving as the connecting function between past and future events. Next, I turn to how the sequences of action were emplotted by the 'decisional group' into a coherent story, and what it reveals about the meaning of the crisis as it made its way onto the French security agenda.

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[70] Châtaigner, "Principes Et Réalités De La Politique Africaine De La France ".
[71] Blanc, "Défense Et Sécurité Nationale," 57.

Decision-makers often refer to France's past and future when describing the events of the Malian crisis (in particular) as well as many other African crises (in general). The past is often used – in the form of the longstanding special relationship between the two – to justify why France often remains Africa's first partner.[72] Through the colonial and post-colonial years, "a space of common identity that brought together Franco-Africans" was created and remains integral to the self-identity of French political elites today.[73] This shared past shapes and influences decision-makers, whose identities and motives for action are inextricably connected with this historical relationship.[74] It explains, for instance, why it was not so difficult for politicians to readily consider an intervention in Mali, as opposed to Syria or Afghanistan; with those places there are no remnants of a long history.[75]

The future, however, is deliberately free of nostalgia. It pictures the relationship as pragmatic and mainly concentrates on the economic benefits of a close partnership. This, in turn, constrains decision-makers' discourse and practices. For example, French policy-makers today, while cherishing the cultural and geographic proximity between them and their African counterparts, continually depict France's present and future policies as "the antipode of the colonial past".[76] Nevertheless, President Hollande defended the necessity to engage with France's colonial past and recognize the past misdeeds, especially when considering how to build partnerships for the future. "[What counts is] the truth about the past," he says, "truth about the war [referring to the Algerian War, 1954-1962] with all its tragedies, truth about hurt memories. At the same time, however, [we need to avoid] the past impeding us from working

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[72] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 62-62.
[73] Bruno Charbonneau, "The Imperial Legacy of International Peacebuilding: The Case of Francophone Africa," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 3 (2014).
[74] Alison Brysk, Craig Parsons, and Wayne Sandholtz, "After Empire: National Identity and Post-Colonial Families of Nations," *European Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 2 (2002).
[75] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.
[76] Ibid., 63.

towards the future. The past – once recognized – must allow us to go faster and further in preparing the future".[77]

Elsewhere, the President saw revoking the past as a "form of recrimination", something he felt should be avoided.[78] In order to overcome that risk, French security policy has gradually shifted its strategy to being legitimate based on a clearly defined, forward-looking discourse of modernization (as opposed to being legitimate based on some historic notion of *grandeur*). The "rise of Africa" has become the new catch phrase describing the debate over how France should define its relationship with the continent.[79] The emphasis has been to focus on the rapid growth African countries have experienced over the past decades, and on the young populations that will lead the economic and social development that will make Africa a future center of economic and political power. It is Africa's time, writes Severino, and French elites have embraced this story – a story which has come to be known as afro-positivism.[80] Affirming strategic and economic interests has become an accepted motivation and helps justify French involvement in the region.[81] "Looking to the future", as Hollande put it in late 2012, and the potential for economic opportunities in Africa's emergence, explains French actors' insistence on keeping their interest in the region.

But this does not mean that economic interests alone explain French policy-making in Africa. While France today still imports some 30 percent of its gas and hydrocarbon resources from Africa, most of Mali's below-ground resources (which included gas and oil, uranium, phosphates, and manganese) are not profitable for extraction. It is largely accepted, therefore,

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[77] François Hollande, "Conférence De Presse De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Notamment Sur Les Relations Franco-Algériennes, À Alger Le 19 Décembre 2012," news release, 2012.
[78] "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Franco Algériennes, À Alger Le 20 Décembre 2012."
[79] Ellis, *Season of Rains: Africa in the World*.
[80] Michael Severino, *Africa's Moment* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
[81] Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*.

that economic interests do not appear to have been a significant factor when it came to the decision to intervene. It was, however, a significant factor for why the French remained interested in events as they unfolded in Mali.[82]

Another way French actors emplotted the events of the crisis into a coherent narrative was by reminding themselves (and others) of the unique military experience and expertise the French army enjoys as a result of their unique history, shared experiences, and continuous military presence in Africa. Charbonneau calls this Franco-African militarism a legacy of colonial times but still something that remains influential in shaping the decision-making of the French military and many of their francophone African counterparts.[83] French officers at the time stressed their shared experience with their African colleagues, perpetuating the idea of a shared destiny.[84] In fact, in an interview with the vice chief of staff of the Army, Erforth records him saying, "the majority of French military operations took place in Africa. We, the military, we all went to Africa when we were young. There is a sort of blending. We went to the same schools with the Africans. Many [African] officers visited schools in France. We have no problem understanding each other. We speak the same language. We feel connected".[85] Moreover, all three actors studied in this dissertation – Laurent Fabius, Jean-Yves Le Drian, and François Hollande – had served in the armed forces (although none actually saw combat). Hollande is even known to describe his military services as his 'school of life' in speeches leading up to *Operation Serval*.[86] The military expertise and continuous presence (via the so-called *forces prépositionnées* – or standing forces) also provided detailed intelligence on the evolving

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[82] See ibid.
[83] Charbonneau, "The Imperial Legacy of International Peacebuilding: The Case of Francophone Africa."
[84] Jean Fleury, *La France En Guerre Au Mali: Les Combats D'a.Q.M.I. Et La Révolte Des Touareg* (Paris: Jean Picollec, 2013).
[85] Cited in Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 71.
[86] Sylvain Courage, "Quand Hollande Était Bidasse," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 28 January 2013.

situation, contributing to France's ability to make a timely response once the decision to intervene was made.

However, as I have suggested elsewhere, the Hollande administration sought to renew the debate on whether the standing forces were too reminiscent of a colonial relic. On the one hand there were proponents who considered the presence of French forces on African soil to be "an undeniable [strategic] leverage for [their] country.[87] On the other hand, skeptics suggested that they Europeanize the gap, with other Western nations filling the void created when the standing forces are removed.[88] Still, despite Hollande's continuous advocation of a withdrawal of French forces from Africa, his administration found a middle ground in the first year of his presidency. While the total number of troops permanently stationed in Africa would be reduced, it would be done at the same time that new smaller bases would be opened. The idea was that instead of having a few big bases, there would be smaller bases but in more countries. In 2013, therefore, the French maintained several points of entry that allowed French forces to be deployed to the majority of African states within hours.[89] This satisfied both those who desired a reduced presence as well as those who thought maintaining a presence was vital for national security. As it turned out, the *forces prépositionnées* turned out to be why the French had such great success in the early days of *Operation Serval*.

While it seemed in 2012 that France was willing to end its unilateral interventions, it also seemed that France was more likely to intervene than any other major power. However, rather than directly acting in Mali, the French tried to impress upon African states to take the lead on the crisis, insisting on the need for an 'African solution' to this African problem. While the

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[87] Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 2 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Dédense."
[88] Mélonio, "Quelle Politique Africaine Pour La France En 2012," 28-33.
[89] Ibid.

military may have been eager and ready to solve the crisis with a military solution, Hollande and his government were hardly eager to take military action in the first half of 2012. As Foreign Minister Fabius put it, while a military solution in Mali was becoming likely, "France, for obvious reasons, cannot be in the lead."[90] Hollande also remained concerned that if it looked like France was preparing for military action on its own, then it could dissipate any momentum gained on keeping with a multinational, African approach. What emerged in the early days of the agenda-setting, according to Chivvis, was akin to the strategy the United States had used to press France and other European allies to tackle the problem in Libya a year earlier, a strategy dubbed 'leading from behind' in Washington.[91] Military intervention had to be up to the Africans – Africa would have to take responsibility for African problems.

Taken together, the special relationship and the shared story between France and the sub-Saharan African region help explain why France was at the forefront of the solution to the Malian crisis from the beginning. It is against this backdrop that French policy-makers' increased awareness and increasing calls for a multilateral intervention need to be understood. It is also against this backdrop that one can witness the evolving nature of France's anxiety over the self-image they want to project to themselves and the rest of the world.

Now that the crisis in Mali was treated as a high-level risk whose implications would affect not only the region itself but also Europe, in the next part I turn to an analysis of the discursive activity surrounding the debate to intervene up until the moment the intervention took place. Up until now, you can see how trying to stick to a 'disengaged' or 'multilateral approach' had started to cause anxiety. However, non-intervention was still in line with the new 'narrative' of French security policy in Africa since the dawn of the 21st century. Anxiety over being

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[90] Tanguy Berthemet, "Mali: Fabius Juge Probable L'usage Do La Force," *Le Figaro*, July 13 2012.
[91] Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*.

perceived as a neocolonial nation prevented French actors from wanting to resort to their former unilateralist instincts.

My temporal parameters in the next section are bracketed around the Ansar ad-Din offensive in early January 2013 which I argue as the turning point where anxiety over doing nothing became unbearable, creating the conditions where a previously unacceptable solution (i.e., intervening in African security matters) became a palatable one. This is because doing nothing at this point was no longer in line with changing French ontological security needs. I perform a narrative analysis again, focusing on how France came to characterize the enemy (actors), how the threat would come to affect Europe (setting and scene), and how they contributed to changing the meaning of the conflict such that not intervening became a threat to France's ontological security.

Debating the Intervention

By the time Hollande took office in May 2012 there was little doubt of the potential threat emanating from the Malian crisis. A report published by the French Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee in March 2012 concluded that the "factors of instability that are presently coming together in the Sahel are of such exceptional severity that they justify this region of the African continent being one of our highest priorities".[92] At this point, the decision-making entered a phase at which executing an intervention seemed like a certainty. In fact, as early as two weeks after his election, President Hollande announced that an intervention would be

[92] Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 2 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Dédense."

necessary to solve the Malian crisis.[93] However, such an intervention would not be led by France, but should be led by a pan-African peacekeeping force under the backing of ECOWAS. This was in line with Hollande's desire to put an end to the old habits of the *gendarme de l'Afrique*, indicating that the days where the French military were the first in line were now over. Indeed, Hollande was explicit about his desire to not deploy French troops into combat, a position which he maintained until December 2012.

Still, the discourse surrounding the crisis up to that point prioritized a political solution to the conflict as its focus. This, of course, doesn't mean that only a political solution is desirable in Africa. It has long been a mantra of the European Union to pursue policies that link security to the development of a region.[94] The perspective among French officials is that development contributes towards increased security, just as increased security can contribute to development.[95] This was especially true in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the US and the subsequent GWOT, which advanced the view that failed states, if left unaddressed, are potential safe havens for terrorists.[96] Since the early 2000s, emphasizing the "links between development, good governance, and security" is how the EU and French officials have tackled the security-development nexus in regards to counter-terrorism.[97] The French vice-representative to the UN confirms this approach, insisting in 2012 that "the elimination of conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism requires the implementation not only of security policies but also of

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[93] François Hollande, "Conférence De Presse Conjointe: M. François Hollande Et M. Boni Yayi, Président De L'union Africaine, Sur Les Relations Franco-Africaines Et Sure La Situation Au Mali Et Syrie, Le 29 Mai 2012," news release, 2012.
[94] Frances Stewart, "Development and Security," *Conflict, Security & Development* 4, no. 3 (2004).
[95] Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, "Conclusion De Dernier Conseil Européen/L'europe De La Défense: Communiquédu Conseil Des Ministres – Extraits, Le 19 Décembre," news release, 2012.
[96] Ken Menkhaus, "Vicious Circles and the Security Development Nexus in Somalia," *Conflict, Security & Development* 4, no. 2 (2004).
[97] Niagalé Bagayoko, "Peace Operations and Security Sector Reform (Ssr) in Francophone Africa," in *Peace Operations in the Francophone World* (Routledge, 2014).

development and good-governance programs".[98] While it is clear that both political and military solutions were important for decision-makers to consider, what is important is that there was greater importance given to political factors up until December 2012, after which greater importance was given to security factors (and an ultimate military intervention).[99]

Nevertheless, France's role was to be a facilitator between the different national and international actors, a role which was compatible with the non-interventionist identity Hollande had chosen as a trademark of his (and his country's 21st century) African security policy. Both the determination to break with France's past military activity on the African continent and the desire to produce a foreign policy that would be in coherence with the complete withdrawal of French troops from Afghanistan forbade any references to a unilateral French intervention. In order to make an intervention possible, the meaning of the conflict would have to change such that it threatened a more deep-seated identity of France; an identity that demands it to be an important global player. How did that happen? The 'story' about the conflict in Mali changed and was framed as an issue whose key actors became a direct threat to international security and in particular to the security of Europe.

Characterizing the Enemy

While the Tuareg rebellion and the coup d'état in Bamako received great attention in the first half of 2012, those elements were quickly disregarded in the face of the rising prominence of the activities of AQIM and Ansar ad-Din. The President himself accepted the reality that terrorist groups in the north of Mali indicated a veritable threat, suggesting also that the terrorist

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[98] Martin Briens, "Security Council - Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorist Acts: Statement by Mr. Martin Briens, Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations.," news release, 2012.
[99] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 75.

threat needed to be overcome before any political solution could be imagined.[100] This, of course, contradicted the earlier narrative that considered the terrorism a consequence – rather than a cause – of the problem.[101] In other words, it became more and more clear, particularly by October 2012, that putting an end to the activities of AQIM and Ansar ad-Din would require some military action. On October 4, 2012, the French representative at the UN Gérard Araud began to securitize the Malian crisis, establishing a shift in the French position by giving priority to a potential terrorist threat, arguing that while "we need a political solution, […] we also need a military solution".[102]

Identifying terrorism in the Sahel region as both the cause and most (potentially) serious consequence of the conflict began to shift the French perception of the crisis in Mali. The definition of terrorist, as painted by the Hollande administration, was also a broad one. It encompassed not only the Islamist insurgents, but also any criminals and other fighting forces that did not explicitly distance themselves from the jihadist ideology. This, according to Erforth, allowed the French government to paint "a simple and straightforward picture of a ruthless enemy".[103] Fabius, for example, characterized the enemy as such: "Sometimes we call them kidnappers, which seems a neutral term. These are terrorists, people who do not hesitate to kill, who live off plunder and crime, who rape, who act outside all rules of humanity. This is what we are talking about. Thus, it is evident that when confronted with people of this kind, not only France but also the international community cannot accept their doings".[104]

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[100] François Hollande, "Conférence De Presse De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur La Situation Politique Au Mali, À New York Le 26 Septembre 2012," news release, 2012.
[101] Étrangères, "Conclusion De Dernier Conseil Européen/L'europe De La Défense: Communiquédu Conseil Des Ministres – Extraits, Le 19 Décembre."
[102] Gérard Araud, "Mali: Remarques À La Presse De Represéntant Permanent De La France Auprès Des Nations Unies, Le 5 Décembre," news release, 2012.
[103] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 77.
[104] Laurent Fabius, "Extraits D'un Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Rtl, Lci Et "Le Figaro" Le 9 Décembre 2012, Notamment Sur Les Otages Français Au Sahel, Le Terrorisme Au Mali, La

The French representative at the UN, when discussing the security situation in October 2012, argued that what was happening was the emergence of "a sanctuary for terrorist groups emerging in Mali, which subsequently can destabilize the whole of Africa. Thus, we need to act. We cannot wait any longer. But of course, it is up to the Malians to act, it is up to the Africans to act, and the Security Council must support them".[105] The President affirmed this determination to act when he explained to his audience in an interview with *France24* that by leaving AQIM to prosper in the Sahel it would equate to leaving his country in jeopardy "because terrorism can come from there . . . I can't accept this. We need to cut off the terrorists' route. Therefore, an international policy is needed".[106]

The President also explained that the rising Islamist threat was not the result of a domestic liberation movement. Rather, he described what was happening as an "external intervention that destabilizes a country…[which] concerns Africa and may even affect other regions".[107] This characterization of the enemy showed the first time that the President saw the conflict in terms of a hostile foreign intervention as opposed to a domestic conflict. This characterization was also important in so far as it set the stage of any potential intervention to be consistent with a longstanding normalization process in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. As part of that process, French policy-makers vowed to refrain from getting involved in the domestic political contestations of power. Under the motto *ni ingérence ni indifférence* (neither

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Construction Européenne, La Situation En Syrie, Le Dossier Mittal Et Sur La Diplomatie Française," news release, 2012.

[105] Araud, "Mali: Remarques À La Presse De Represéntant Permanent De La France Auprès Des Nations Unies, Le 5 Décembre."

[106] François Hollande, "Interview De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Par France 4, Tv5 Monde Et Rfi Le 11 Octobre 2012, Sur La Vie Politique En République Démocratique Du Congo, Les Relations Franco-Africaines, Le Terrorisme Au Mali, La Presence Économique Du Qatar En France Et Sur La Situation En Syrie.," news release, 2012.

[107] "Conférence De Presse Conjointe De Mm. François Hollande, Président De La République, Et Mahamadou Issoufou, Président De La République Du Niger, Sur Les Relations Franco-Nigériennes, L'aide Au Développement Et Sur La Situation Au Mali, À Paris Le 11 Juin 2012.," news release, 2012.

interference nor indifference) diplomats and the French military have sought to reform their security policies such that it would allow them to create stability without being seen as infringing upon the sovereignty claims of former colonies, defending the argument that Africa's security had to be established by African countries themselves or under an international mandate.[108] More importantly, since the beginning of the 21st century France has been determined to not get involved in, and in some cases legally bound to stay out of, conflicts over domestic political contestations of power. Thus, distinguishing the political movement of the MNLA and the terrorist activities of AQIM was a way for the President to change the narrative towards something that was still in line with previous policies. This way, it could be shown that France was not involved in safeguarding the incumbent government.

Adding to this new narrative was Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian who, at the European Council on September 26, urged his European colleagues to "establish a more European mission to support ECOWAS and the central government in Bamako in stabilizing Mali to avoid the creation of a sanctuary for terrorists".[109] He became even more explicit about the potential consequences of terrorism in October of that year saying, "their [the terrorists] aim is to take action beyond the borders of the Malian state to hit Europe. If we do not act, we will be the victims. Protecting Mali's sovereignty will guarantee Europe's security".[110] Taken together, these remarks seem to be inspired by a real fear that if Mali fell to terrorism it would lead to attacks on European soil.

Along with this shift to a security-oriented solution to the growing crisis in Mali was a shift in the narrative towards comparisons with Afghanistan. Fabius began to use the buzzword

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[108] Cumming, "Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa Policy: Change, Continuity or Confusion?."
[109] Jean-Yves Le Drian, "Entretien Du Ministre De La Défense, Monsieur Jean-Yves Le Drian, Avec Le Quotidien El Pais," news release, 2012.
[110] ibid.

Sahelistan in his official discourse in late 2012 when describing the Sahel.[111] By doing so, he inferred that it was a "region of general instability, vulnerable to drug trafficking and religious fanaticism".[112] "What is about to develop in the North of Mali represents a risk for everyone" he said. "I am frequently referring to *Sahelistan*, that is, the equivalent of Afghanistan in the Sahel".[113]

The analogies drawn between Afghanistan and the situation in Mali served two purposes. First, it reduced a rather complex situation into a cleaner and simpler narrative. As I showed in Chapter IV, narratives are used to make sense of an otherwise complicated reality. This *Sahelistan* narrative could be seen as a "script" which, based on experiential repertoires, could be used by actors to 'fill in the blanks' about how to interpret the crisis.[114] François Hollande's statement that "history teaches us always what we have to do tomorrow" reflects the importance he placed on analogies and narrative 'scripts' when making decisions.[115] In this case, the narrative identifies a very clear enemy: terrorism. And as history shows us, we knew very well what we had to do in Afghanistan to prevent another terrorist attack like 9/11 from happening again. In October Le Drian used the same analogy when arguing for some sort of military intervention: "When we intervened in Afghanistan in 2001, it was in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Let us not wait that such a tragedy repeats itself".[116] By characterizing the enemy as an

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[111] Romain Malejacq and Adam Sandor, "Sahelistan? Military Intervention and Patronage Politics in Afghanistan and Mali," *Civil Wars* 22, no. 4 (2020). See also Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "Boko Haram and "Sahelistan" Terrorism Narratives," *Afrique contemporaine* 255, no. 3 (2015).
[112] See, for instance Fabius, "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Europe 1 Le 6 Juillet 2012, Sur La Situation Politique En Syrie, Le Retrait Des Troupes Françaises D'afghanistan Et Sur La Présence Du Groupe Islamiste Aqmi Au Mali."
[113] Ibid.
[114] See, for instance Herman, "Cognitive Narratology"; ÓTuathail, "Theorizing Practical Geopolitical Reasoning: The Case of the United States' Response to the War in Bosnia."
[115] François Hollande, "Interview De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec France Inter Le 9 Décembre 2013, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, La Situation En Ukraine Et Sur Les Funérailles De Nelson Mandela.," news release, 2013.
[116] Jean-Yves Le Drian, "Entretien De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Défense, Dans "20 Minutes" Du 3 Octobre 2012, Sur La Situation Politique Au Mali," news release, 2012.

existential terrorist threat, decision-makers were implicitly transmitting the message: "we've seen this type of threat before and we know how to deal with it".

Second, the parallels between Afghanistan and Mali served to portray an environment that might have terrorist implications for the larger international community, in particular Europe. And this is where an ontological distinction between the two causes of crisis began to emerge. The interim government in Bamako went from a force dealing with civil and political unrest to one that was underprepared (and underequipped) to deal with a terrorist invasion. AQIM went from a regional/localized concern to a global security threat. A victory by the Islamist militants in Mali meant that France would be associated with supporting a terrorist stronghold on Europe's southern shores. In short, once the conflict in Mali became, in French eyes, about global terrorism, policy-makers' justifications for their policy shifted.[117] Before showing how those justifications shifted, in the next part I highlight how French actors began to feel anxiety over predictions about possible negative consequences of a non-intervention, and how that contributed to their shifting policy.

A Terrorist Threat on Europe's Doorstep

The Afghanistan analogy not only simplified the narrative of the crisis, but it also served to provide a prediction about what might happen if *no* action were taken. The president's advisors, at the time, were convinced that if Mali fell into the hands of the extremists, it would become a base from where European attacks would take place, similar to how the 9/11 attacks had been planned from Afghanistan.[118] Le Drian echoed that concern in October 2012 proclaiming that "if we do not act, we will be the victims. Protecting Mali's sovereignty will

[117] I will cover justifications of the decision to intervene in a subsequent section of this chapter.
[118] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 80-81.

guarantee Europe's security".[119] And a report published by the French Senate confirms that ahead of the French military intervention there was growing concern that an escalation of the crisis in Mali would have real implications on the security of France and Europe. "Africa is too close," the report said, "both in terms of geography and population, for Europe not to be concerned when observing the multiplication of 'fragile states' in that region".[120] This fear of terrorist attacks on French territory, coupled with their painful experience with terrorism during the Algerian civil war (combined with the geographic proximity) made French decision-makers feel particularly vulnerable, a sentiment that was also shared across French society.[121]

Accordingly, it became increasingly apparent that French policy-makers needed to convince their European counterparts of the strategic importance of stopping this menace from the African continent. The strategic importance of Africa, however, is not a novel concern that arose during the Hollande presidency. Previous governments have tried to convince their partners that their vision of Europe's involvement in Africa was best for them.[122] The typical pitch for encouraging the EU to take more interest in African affairs stems from a perception that the 'center of gravity' of economic and political power had been shifting towards Asia in recent decades, and that capitalizing on the demographic explosion in Africa might provide great benefits for Europeans. The French Senate confirms this by stating, "In a world where the center of gravity is shifting towards Asia, can Europe and France find the driving force of their future

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[119] Drian, "Entretien De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Défense, Dans "20 Minutes" Du 3 Octobre 2012, Sur La Situation Politique Au Mali."
[120] Sénat, "Rapport D'information Numéro 104 Au Nom De La Commission De Affaires Étrangères, De La Défense Et Des Forces Armées Par Le Groupe De Travial Sur La Présence De La France Dans Une Afrique Convoitée: Fait Par Jeanny Lorgeoux Et Jean-Marie Bockel," in *L'Afrique notre avenir* (2013).
[121] See, for instance Zaik Laïdi, "Mali Intervention Also Secures Europe," *Financial Times*2013; Isabelle Lasserre and Thierry Oberlé, *Notre Guerre Secrète Au Mali: Les Nouvelles Menaces Contre La France* (Fayard, 2013); Samuel Laurent, "Sahelistan. De La Libye Au Mali, Au Cœur Du Nouveau Jihad," *Revue Panafricaine de Stratégies et Prospectives* (2013).
[122] Treacher, *French Interventionism: Europe's Last Global Player?*

growth in Africa?"[123] Plus, in the wake of the European financial crisis, it was argued that Europe must unite itself with the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan African regions in order to safeguard prosperity and wealth. To avoid falling prey to the power struggles between the United States and China, Europe must build a Euro-Mediterranean and, in the long term, a Euro-African Union.[124]

François Hollande, like Nicolas Sarkozy before him, remained committed to a Eurafrican idea, despite promising a rupture with the colonial past. However, his commitment rested not on the exploitation of African resources and economic potential. Rather, it rested on the assumption that all Europeans must share responsibilities with its southern neighbors.[125] In that way, the President was promoting an idea which has long been a desire of Fifth Republic presidents, which is to move the European project towards one that meets the criteria of *Europe de la Défense* (European Defense). Based on the idea that Europe, just like France, is closely linked to Africa, French politicians continued to call upon Europe to adopt a more active position which might allow a quicker resolution to the conflict. French elites, in particular Foreign Minister Fabius, were convinced that their European partners needed to be pressed to provide military, humanitarian, and development assistance.[126] In fact, Fabius and Le Drian urged their colleagues at the European Council on December 13, 2012, to take the Malian threat seriously and to do their part. They concluded their speeches with the affirmation that "in a strategic context that is

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[123] Sénat, "Rapport D'information Numéro 104 Au Nom De La Commission De Affaires Étrangères, De La Défense Et Des Forces Armées Par Le Groupe De Travial Sur La Présence De La France Dans Une Afrique Convoitée: Fait Par Jeanny Lorgeoux Et Jean-Marie Bockel."
[124] Blanc, "Défense Et Sécurité Nationale."
[125] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Franco Algériennes, À Alger Le 20 Décembre 2012."
[126] Laurent Fabius, "Extraits D'une Déclaration De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur Les Relations Entre La France Et Les Pays-Bas Et Sur La Situation Au Mali Et En Syrie, La Haye Le 21 Mars 2013," news release, 2013.

characterized by the emergence of new threats, France is convinced that the European Union has to reinforce its contributions to international security in its neighborhood and beyond".[127]

However, their calls for action fell on deaf ears. Despite great expectations on the part of French diplomats regarding a European approach to the crisis resolution, none materialized. It's no surprise that French decision-makers became increasingly frustrated with Europe once they realized they could not convince other member states that the situation in Mali represented a considerable threat to Europe.[128] This frustration would become a crucial element in France's growing anxiety over what kind of response it should make.

Hopes of an African Solution

Since calls for European assistance created little movement, the Hollande administration continued their push for a multilateral solution on the African continent, which it had been stressing since the beginning of its mandate. Initiated by France, the UN drafted three resolutions (2056, 2071, and 2085) that provided the legal framework for the deployment of a multilateral peacekeeping force coordinated by ECOWAS. The resolutions demonstrated the efforts the French were willing to make in order to develop an African solution to an African security problem. But this idea, of course, was not new. As I mentioned in Chapter II, a gradual break with the colonial past, arguably as a result of France's involvement in the Rwandan genocide, occurred during the 1990s and it became increasingly imperative for the French political elite to avoid any sort of accusations that portrayed their country as a neocolonial power. Consequently, for both financial and legitimacy reasons, it became unthinkable for France to be seen as

[127] Laurent Fabius and Jean-Yves Le Drian, "Conclusions Du Dernier Conseil Européen/L'europe De La Défense: Communiqué Du Conseil Des Ministres – Extraits, 19 December," news release, 2012.
[128] Roland Marchal, "Briefing: Military (Mis)Adventures in Mali," *African Affairs* 112, no. 448 (2013).

continuing its unilateral interventions of the past to protect friendly regimes or overthrow dictators at their choosing. This policy continued during the Hollande administration. In fact, the 2008 French White Book on Defense institutionalized the multilateral approach towards security and interventions, stating that "with some exceptions, all our military operations are conducted within a multinational framework. This framework can take the form of an already existing coalition, as in the case of NATO and the European Union, or be ad hoc circumstantial coalition".[129]

Thus, the idea of African ownership of their security fell on "fertile ground" when it coincided with the government's foreign policy discourse.[130] Notably, Thomas Mélonio (the number two of the African desk at the Élysée) published a pamphlet promoting a human-rights-oriented discourse vis-à-vis Africa where he criticized France's past military interventionism in French-speaking Africa in the name of regime stability, called for a complete annulment of all existing defense treaties with African countries, and advocated for reduced military presence on the continent, a transfer of that responsibility to the European level, and more investments in African defense capabilities.[131] This discourse guided many of the principles in François Hollande's initial policy towards crisis management on the African continent, and was in line with the government's desire to mark a rupture with the colonial past.[132]

The president and his ministers, therefore, showed signs of commitment to building security and defense capacity in Africa. In October 2012, President Hollande explained that "the future of Africa will rest on African's increased capacity to handle the crises that the continent is

[129] Blanc, "Défense Et Sécurité Nationale."
[130] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 86.
[131] Mélonio, "Quelle Politique Africaine Pour La France En 2012."
[132] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.

going through by themselves".[133] Between June and October 2012, Foreign Minister Fabius continued to stress that the solution should be a *regional* intervention, and that France and the international community should continue to support the capacity building of African armies. He stressed that the security crisis in Mali was "an African problem, and therefore the solution needs to be first and foremost African.[134] While it was almost certain that an intervention would occur, the French signaled that they were ready to support but remained adamant that "there won't be any French forces on the ground".[135] Even on December 5, 2012, just 30 days prior to the Ansar ad-Din offensive, Hollande confirmed this view when commenting on a potential future military operation in Mali, which would "not only be decided but also executed by them [the Africans]".[136]

As I have shown, despite the growing concern and fears over a terrorist safe-haven developing in Europe's southern neighborhood, French decision-makers were resolute in their desire to avoid the accusations of neocolonial interference in African matters. The 'anxiety' about the potential *shame* was preventing a change in policy that would threaten the security of France's identity vis-à-vis Africa since the start of the 21st century. Up to this point, Hollande made it clear that non-intervention was not a matter of disinterest or indifference. Rather, it was consistent with the French self-identity of a nation trying to break with the inglorious unilateral interventionism of the past. Furthermore, it was consistent with the self-image of a nation whose legitimacy rests on multilateralism. "France" the President said, "is directly concerned [by the

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[133] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Entre La France Et L'afrique, À Dakar Le 12 Octobre 2012."
[134] Bernard Valero, "Mali: Entretien Du Porte-Parole Du Ministére Des Affaires Étrangères Avec *France24* 12 July," news release, 2012.
[135] Étrangères, "Conclusion De Dernier Conseil Européen/L'europe De La Défense: Communiquédu Conseil Des Ministres – Extraits, Le 19 Décembre."
[136] François Hollande, "Déclaration Conjointe De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Et Mme Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Premier Ministre Du Royaume Du Danemark, Notamment Sur Les Relations Franco-Danoises Et Sur Les Questions Européennes, À Paris Le 5 Décembre 2012," news release, 2012.

crisis in Mali], but not in the ways known from the past…in any case, we have to act, not by responding with yesterday's interventions – these times are over – our role consists of supporting the Africans. It is them who need to take the initiative, the decision, the responsibility…Our mission when the time comes will be to support their action within the United Nations and the Security council."[137]

In the final part of this chapter, I show where that consistency changes. Events on the ground, and the story of the offensive, resulted in such anxiety over how to respond that French decision-makers could no longer justify non-intervention because it contradicted their deep-seated identity as a *puissance d'influence*. Whereas in the previous section I show how anxiety prevented policy change (i.e., remaining committed to non-intervention), in the following section I show how anxiety in the face of unbearable ontological insecurity required change to both the policy and the story used to justify it. To do so, I perform a narrative analysis of how the decision to intervene was justified, paying particular attention to elements of France's biographical narrative that were activated by policy makers to legitimize their action; elements such as responsibility and kinship that are important for French identity in Africa. By doing so, they turned an otherwise ontologically unacceptable foreign policy choice into one that was ontologically palatable. This served to control their sense of ontological security by bringing back a consistent self-image and re-establishing a 'routine' that provided answers for French identity.

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Justifying the Decision

France's six-month attempt to 'lead the Africans from behind' into a military action against AQIM collapsed in a few short days in early January 2013. Several hundred jihadists from the northern regions (including the militant group Ansar ad-Din) began directing themselves southward in an effort to extend their traditional stronghold. They breached the Niger bend in an armed convoy and for three days sped south towards Bamako, capturing the town of Konna by January 10.[138] The French watched anxiously as this attack moved quickly, convening several special meetings with their representatives at the UN Security Council as well as with the president's Defense Council. Then, the French president decided to respond to the written request form Mali's interim President Dioncounda Traoré, and to deploy a unilateral intervention force. This marked the beginning of *Operation Serval*, and the start of the largest French military intervention since the Algerian War in1954-1962.

Up to this point, I have shown that prior to the Islamist offensive, non-intervention remained consistent with a French self-image vis-à-vis African security policy. After the offensive however – and a bit of debate – non-intervention was no longer consistent with the decision-makers' self-understanding and identity. In the remaining section, I argue the changed meaning of the Malian conflict after the Ansar ad-Din offensive (the meaning of which had already begun to change in the months leading up to it) changed the costs non-intervention would have had to French self-identity. Before the offensive, while the French were convinced that some military solution was necessary, they remained adamant that the French would have no troops in the ground. But once the conflict became more about global terror as opposed to a

[138] Konna is 373 miles northeast of Bamako. See Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*.

domestic political conflict, particularly when the Islamist group moved south of the Niger River, the decisional group's opinion moved away from non-intervention. Why was this so?

By looking at the immediate justification during and shortly after the initial days of *Operation Serval* we can trace elements of the narrative that highlight how it was that this new meaning of the conflict prompted the unilateral mission by the French. Initially, Hollande commissioned Foreign Minister Fabius to justify the motivations of the French military. Again, there were elements of the same story line, that this was a fight against a growing terrorist threat. When explaining why the President ordered the intervention, he said:

> However, for the last couple of days the situation has severely deteriorated, and the terrorist groups in the north – taking advantage of the delay between the moment of making international decisions and their application – have decided to go down to the south. All evidence suggests that their aim is to control the whole of Mali in order to put a terrorist state in place. Therefore, the Malian authorities addressed both the UN Security Council and France to ask for urgent intervention. The Security Council met yesterday and estimated in a declaration, which was passed by unanimity, that the threat is extremely serious and that action is needed…France also received a request for air and ground support. In light of this emergency and in accordance with international law, the President of the Republic, head of state, chief of the armies, took the decision to positively respond to the request by the Malian state and the international community.[139]

The difference between this statement and the discourse leading up to the intervention is that Fabius framed the threat in terms of the creation of a "terrorist state". Up until then, there was merely a *suggestion* that this might occur, and French elites simply employed notions of the 'presence and activities of terrorists.' Now, the justification made it seem as if there actually wasn't a choice, that the intervention was a necessity because the worst had come to pass. Also, the apparent suddenness of the offensive was emphasized as a motivating factor for the decision to intervene unilaterally with Fabius stressing that "the changing situation made this

[139] Laurent Fabius, "Conférence De Presse De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française Au Mali, À Paris Le 11 Janvier 2013," news release, 2013.

[intervention] necessary".[140] Araud echoed this sentiment by arguing that: "Suddenly, the terrorist armed groups launched an offensive. They took the city of Konna. At this point, our assessment was that they were very able to take Bamako. So, we decided that the existence of the state of Mali and, beyond Mali, the stability of West Africa was at stake. With determination but also with reluctance we decided that we had no other choice but to launch this military intervention".[141] Again, this necessity was linked to the potential consequences of a collapse of the Malian state. But what's interesting here about the apparent lack of choice, from an ontological security perspective, is how this was indeed felt as a critical situation by the actors themselves. Remember, critical situations must be interpreted by those involved as something that they had little control over (or something that came up unexpectedly). That is what makes critical situations so intriguing. Because it is during critical situations that states must decide who they are and then address whether their proposed course of action fits that desired self-image.

However, in this phase of the decision making, we can start to see a new story emerge, a new narrative of why the French were compelled to act despite their strong desire not to. In this new narrative, the 'decisional group' began to justify the choice to intervene based on how they perceive their role in the international system. Although *Operation Serval* resembled more France's past military excursions into Africa, it was framed as an intervention that France conducted in the name of the international community and Europe for the sake of Mali and the West African region. A spokesperson from the Hollande administration noted, "The fact that France did the work almost alone [with little aid from the United States or the United Kingdom] suited everyone…the world understood why France intervened. We did not intervene for

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[140] Ibid.
[141] Gérard Araud, "Mali: Remarques À La Presse Du Représentant Permanent De La France Auprès Des Nations Unies," news release, 2013.

ourselves; we did not intervene to defend French interests. We actually intervened to save a country from collapse".[142] As representatives of an influential power, French decision-makers believe that their actions must be greater than the mere "maximization of interests"; actions beyond its borders should serve to unite French interests with the greater common good.[143]

This, of course, stems from the perception that the legitimate way – the multilateral way – failed to materialize. Europe's unwillingness to answer France's calls for help reinforced the sentiment that a coherent and comprehensive European approach to Africa's security would not be feasible.[144] This general impression is evident in Le Drian's comment during a hearing in Parliament, where he said, "We stand in front of the necessity of reviving *l'Europe de la Défense*, which today is at a standstill. Despite the diminution of America's engagement in Europe, the risks – be it old risks or new risks – remain very high, in particular those coming from the Sahel. Unfortunately, not all our [European] partners share this point of view".[145]

Nevertheless, France was quick to remind the international audience of the threefold legitimacy of the intervention, despite being initiated unilaterally. In an effort to highlight the operation as an international intervention, Laurent Fabius used a rather lengthy justification that tied in the new policy stance to a previously established motive: multilateralism.

> I would like to underline that this intervention conforms to the strict framework set up by the international law. The intervention is a reaction to a formal request by the Malian president. It is conducted in compliance with the UN Charter, and is consistent with UN resolutions 2056, 2071, and 2085. The United Nations provide the framework, Mali requested the mission, the Africans and the International Community are our partners. Of course, we do not have any desire of acting alone. The international political support – I insist on that point – is almost unanimous. Our actions were transparent and we informed all our partners. Yesterday, UN Secretary-

[142] Quoted in Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 93.
[143] Ibid., 94.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 2 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Dédense."

> General Ban Ki-moon called me on the phone to confirm – and I quote – that we have the United Nations' full support.[146]

Here you can see the minister doing what Edjus refers to as "ontological self-help".[147] During times of great crisis, it is argued, states rely on biographical narratives to provide comfort and relief.[148] Traumas or profound ontological crises occur when external events cannot be clearly explained by the ontological security narrative because they represent a challenge to state identity. While some argue that states need to change their collective narratives in response to that trauma, this statement by Fabius shows that the state biographical narrative can remain essentially the same (i.e., that France requires multilateralism to legitimize its contemporary French security policy in Africa) but the policy change brought on by the crisis is narratively explained "by activating some elements of the broader narrative template and deactivating others".[149] In this case, a familiar narrative brings about a sense of well-being and routine. The intervention, therefore, did not eradicate the multilateral rhetoric from the French discourse. In contrast, *Operation Serval* (a unilateral operation) was framed as an intervention that France conducted in the name of the international community and for the sake of Mali. It is framed as a *moral*, *selfless* act, made in the interest of saving those in need.

Most importantly, one can trace new elements of the justification to elements of the familiar French identity narrative, one that reflects France's self-image as a *puissance d'influence*.[150] In particular, we see elites activating elements of responsibility and kinship as

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[146] Laurent Fabius, "Conférence De Presse De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur L'opération Militaire Française Au Mali, À Paris Le 14 Janvier 2013," news release, 2013.
[147] Ejdus, *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity*.
[148] Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security."
[149] Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change," 614.
[150] According to the foreign minister, there are eight things that make France an influential power in the world. Among these are: its permanent membership to the UNSC; its status as a nuclear power; its status as the world's 5th largest economy; the global reach of its Francophonie; its cultural *rayonnement*; the positive reception of French across the globe; the defense of a certain conception of human rights; and the country's unique history. See Laurent Fabius, "Extraits D'un Entretien Avec L'association De La Presse Étrangère De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des

justification for their action. President Hollande expressed these sentiments clearly when saying, "I am responsible, because I am at the head of a country that has a link with Africa, because we [are] connected with this continent…I have a particular responsibility, thus, I am keen that France takes the initiative".[151] On the day *Serval* was launched, he defended his decision in front of the diplomatic corps by saying that preventing the terrorists' offensive was a "question of solidarity and responsibility".[152] Even as early as October 2012, Hollande was eager to proclaim that "France, … will assume all its responsibilities while leaving the Africans the capacity and legitimacy to undertake this intervention".[153] This shows that the notion of responsibility had been a core element of French justification during both the pre- and post-intervention discourse. But, more importantly, the discourse around France being a nation who holds special responsibilities increased in frequency during the justification phase of the decision-making process.

Responsibility, in this case, has a multitude of meanings. It is used to describe France's historical connection with Africa, particularly during the Second World War. On the occasion of his first state visit to Mali after the intervention, Hollande affirmed "We might fight in fraternity, Malians, French, Africans, because I do not forget that when France was attacked [during the Second World War], when it was looking for help, for allies, when its territorial unity was threatened, who came to help? It was Africa, it was Mali. Thanks, thanks to Mali. Today, we are

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Affaires Étrangères, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 20 Novembre 2012," news release, 2012.

[151] François Hollande, "Conférence De Presse De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur La Crise Syrienne, La Situation Au Liban, Les Relations Franco-Iraniennes Et Sur L'afrique, À New York Le 24 Septembre 2013," news release, 2013.

[152] "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 11 Janvier 2013," news release, 2013.

[153] "Conférence De Presse De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur La Situation Politique Au Mali, À New York Le 26 Septembre 2012."

repaying our debt".[154] It is also used to describe France's role in the UN Security Council. Being one of the five permanent members of the body – whose primary responsibility is "the maintenance of international peace and security" – creates certain expectations among French actors. Moreover, the same logic applies to France's military capacities. It is argued that having a certain expertise in Africa, and the capacities and means to use it, was a central theme underpinning the decision-making process of the crisis.[155] Numerous advisors to the President admitted that France unites in itself the "institutional design and political will necessary to take action, [which] served as a principal justification of action once the decision was taken [in Mali]".[156] This shows how military capacity obliged France with a responsibility to act. And finally, French decision-makers repeatedly emphasized that France was a friend of Africa and a friend of Mali. Friendship "creates obligations", according to President Hollande.[157] By declaring themselves friends with their African counterparts, French actors became directly concerned and felt obliged to assist in the solution to the crisis.[158] In other words, the perceived friendship served to facilitate the intervention by making it tantamount to the only moral action possible. As Hollande put it, "For us, it is not about conquering a territory, increasing our influence, or seeking whatever commercial or economic interest. These times are over. In contrast, our country – because it is France – must help a friend".[159] Again, French policy-makers framed the

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[154] "Déclarations De Mm. François Hollande, Président De La République, Et Dioncounda Traoré, Président De La République Du Mali, Sur Les Relations Franco-Maliennes Et Sur L'intervention Militaire Française Au Mali, À Bamako Le 2 Février 2013," news release, 2013.
[155] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.
[156] Ibid., 103-04.
[157] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Entre La France Et L'afrique, À Dakar Le 12 Octobre 2012."
[158] Laurent Fabius, "Déclaration De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur Les Relations Franco-Nigériennes, La Situation Au Mali Et Sur Son Déplacement En Algérie, À Niamey Le 27 Juillet 2012," news release, 2012.
[159] François Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française Au Mali, À Tulle Le 19 Janvier 2013," news release, 2013.

intervention as an act that was rationally moral but void of any self-interest, as if it couldn't be both at the same time. But why can't an act be both in the rational self-interest of a nation-state (defined by traditional security terms) and in the moral interest of helping a friend? I argue that it *can* be both because moral action in this case serves the rational interest of France to protect its vision of 'self'. Allowing the crisis to continue without a response from the French would be equivalent to an identity threat and intervening in this case served to ward off that threat. Therefore, despite the President's assertion that the intervention wasn't serving any of France's 'interests' or 'desire for influence', I argue that this was exactly what it was doing – just not in traditional physical/material security terms.

Even though the French enjoyed overwhelming success in the first two weeks of the operation, the outcome of their success was uncertain at the time of the decision.[160] Yet, despite the uncertainty of the outcome, I argue that there was no uncertainty about the meaning of the conflict with respect to the French self-image. While *Serval* was launched to save Malian sovereignty and put an end to the insurgent movement, it also served to safeguard France's own identity. This becomes especially clear when we look at what Hollande said on the evening of his decision to intervene.

> France is an active and engaged power, which has this ambition of being useful in the world that surrounds it. This ambition is not new, but derives from our history, which makes us hold a series of principles and values, which we have not invented exclusively for ourselves, but which we share with the entire world: democracy, human rights, a balance of power, the will to avoid any hegemony or power, and the intention to always resort to international organizations to allow for peace and security.[161]

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[160] Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*.
[161] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 11 Janvier 2013."

This idea of being an influential power explains why France, once it was aware that Mali would become a 'terrorist state' could not afford to stand by and watch but had to act. In this regard, it is interesting to note that this could have happened in any of France's former African colonies and would have provoked a similar reaction by French decision-makers.[162]

To connect this with an ontological security interpretation, states seek to maintain consistent self-concepts, and the self is constituted and maintained through routines that affect other states. These routines, and the stories states use to explain them, must consistently provide answers that states have about themselves and others. As Hollande's statement above (and other statements in this section) shows, it is not only the shifting effects that the terrorist threat had on French decision-making, but also the determination to maintain a routine which had provided answers for what it means to be a "French security actor". In this case, the act of intervening is itself the routine.

This does not mean, however, that a single true French identity "clicked in" and caused the decision to intervene. In fact, in the weeks that followed the intervention, there was still debate about whether the decision truly reflected French identity. On *France24*, former foreign minister Alain Juppé argued that while the intervention was needed, he warned that sending in more French forces was potentially a big mistake: "The presence of French soldiers in a region where our country was a colonizer . . . was perhaps not the best thing to be considering."[163] Another harsh critique came from Dominique de Villepin, the former foreign minister who famously opposed the US decision to invade Iraq, who wrote a sharp opinion in the *Journal du Dimanche*. "Let us not give way to the reflex for war's sake," he wrote, "this is not the French

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[162] Fabius, "Extraits D'un Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Rtl, Lci Et "Le Figaro" Le 9 Décembre 2012, Notamment Sur Les Otages Français Au Sahel, Le Terrorisme Au Mali, La Construction Européenne, La Situation En Syrie, Le Dossier Mittal Et Sur La Diplomatie Française."
[163] "Politiques," *France24*, January 17 2013.

way."[164] As you see, there are a multitude of explanations of what might be considered "the French way", and it wasn't necessarily the 'true' French way that guided the decision-makers. Rather, identity was being negotiated throughout and even after the decision was made to intervene. Identity, therefore, is not given but has to be routinely created. In this case, the French were provided with an opportunity to affirm what they felt as the healthiest sense of self-identity. But the decision-makers had to first negotiate what that identity was. Did they want to continue to normalize its African relations even at the expense of being seen as a facilitator of a terrorist state? Or were they willing to ignore the stigma of neocolonialism and meddling in African affairs in order to be seen as an influential world power? I believe in the latter.

This, of course, came amidst a struggle, which we will see play out in the next chapter, between competing visions of self. On the one hand France wants to be seen as a legitimate force who enforces multilateral solutions to security threats. On the other hand, it is still a power that wants to play an important role in world affairs.

Conclusion

Does an ontological security interpretation assist our understanding of France's decision to intervene in Mali? I think it does. We can assume that French decision makers performed an at-the-time counter factual by assessing what the consequences would have been if they didn't recognize the crisis as a growing global security threat. The French may have been more physically secure if they stayed out of the conflict because they would not have had to risk the lives of French service men and women in combat.[165] However, they would have been less

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[164] Dominique de Villepin, "Non, La Guerre N'est Pas La France," *Journal du Dimanche*, January 12 2013.
[165] On a side note, it would later be argued by some pundits that the horrific terrorist attacks that killed over 180 Parisians in 2015 might have been triggered by French involvement in the abolition of the Islamic state in Iraq and

ontologically secure because they would have felt shame. Fabius' admission that France would have acted in this way to any state that was being overrun by jihadists suggests that France would have experienced shame if it did not act alone.[166] At the heart of this would-be shame is France's international self-image which is most strongly reinforced in Africa, a part of the world where it can still act like a great power. To return to the Giddensian sense of self, allowing a terrorist safe haven to develop in its legitimate sphere of influence became inconsistent with the integrity of the French 'self'. But as we can see, the integrity of the French self is under constant creation. It is not rigid and as stable as one might predict. It is discursively negotiated. On the one hand, the desire to be seen as the founding nation of universal republican values, that promotes multilateralism as a source of legitimacy emanating from its seat on the UN Security Council, caused French actors to feel anxiety over the potential shame and stigma associated with being labeled a neocolonial dominator that interferes in the domestic affairs of African states. On the other hand, France feels as if it is a country that can still matter in world politics, that has a role to play in international affairs, and that can generate self-esteem by projecting power in its traditional sphere of influence. Not abiding by this guiding identification can also create anxiety. In this case, we can trace the uncertainty moving across a spectrum as anxiety over not adhering to one identity (non-interference) gave way to anxieties over not adhering to another, deeper-seated identity of *puissance d'influence*. This shift happened when the Ansar ad-Din offensive changed the meaning of the conflict, moving it away from a domestic concern to one with global implications.

Syria. Seen this way, committing forces to fight overseas doesn't just place your soldiers abroad in harm's way, but also your citizens at home.

[166] See Fabius, "Extraits D'un Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Rtl, Lci Et "Le Figaro" Le 9 Décembre 2012, Notamment Sur Les Otages Français Au Sahel, Le Terrorisme Au Mali, La Construction Européenne, La Situation En Syrie, Le Dossier Mittal Et Sur La Diplomatie Française."

One important implication follows from this case. It shows that while forceful actions against one state might not have consequences for another (e.g., the terrorist advance was a physical threat to Mali, not France), the discourse surrounding those actions do. For instance, discursive representations of the Islamist offensive reconstituted the meaning of the Malian conflict not only for the French army, French citizens, and leaders, but for also for an international audience. In fact, shortly after the French had boots on the ground, the United States and several French EU partners lined up quickly with contributions. The fact that the target was an al-Qaeda franchise strengthened international support and made it less likely French allies would see the war as simply another instance of French neocolonialism.[167] The big take away is that these representations can be just as powerful as physical presentations of force – because they can compel actors to do something that they would not otherwise do. The possibility is that states will not only know what kinds of threats make them feel physically insecure, but what kinds of threats make them feel ontologically insecure as well. Thus, just as an arms buildup can trigger a strategic response, the threat of shame might trigger a similar one.

Exacerbating this, of course, is that France is materially more capable than any other European nation (due to its military expertise and prepositioned troops) to intervene in Africa, which creates a paradox; a paradox between having both the means to intervene autonomously and an identity that sometimes forbids it. France's material capability, and its history as a great power, stimulated anxiety among the French elite, creating the conditions that triggered the eventual response. In the case of France, however, conflicting self-images (an independent

[167] In the weeks that followed the intervention, domestic political support began waning as naysayer started asking "where are the others?" and criticize the unilateral decision to go to war. France's willingness to put its own soldiers at risk seemed to do the trick, especially when it became clear the threat was Islamist terrorism. The British, Canadians, Danish, and Belgians all promised transport air support, and the Americans pledged information, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). See Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*.

power versus a multilateral player) can complicate the response, and we are left to wonder two things: which self-image wins out and why, and what story do elites use to smooth out the contradictions. This will again be considered in the following chapter where I use an ontological security interpretation to help us understand the French decision to intervene in the crisis that unfolded in the CAR in late 2013.

CHAPTER VI

CRISIS IN THE CAR: SHAME, HONOR, AND THE DECISION TO INTERVENE

Just as the world watched French forces fight terrorist and criminal organizations in the Sahel, the Central African Republic (CAR) began to tumble into chaos. In the latter half of 2012, a rebel alliance known as Seleka started a revolt against the current government. By the end of 2012 and into January 2013, Seleka had taken over large parts of the country and subsequently ousted the then President François Bozizé (a Christian) in a military coup on March 24, 2013. The rebellion replaced him with their own leader Michel Djotodia (a Muslim) who promised to install an interim government that would permit a return of stability and democratic elections. However, over the following months, Djotodia increasingly lost control of his followers, and appeals to religious identities began to grow.[1] Despite desperate calls for restraint by Djotodia – which actually resulted in the dissolution of the Seleka alliance – uncontrolled combatants took advantage of their dominant position and began looting Christian neighborhoods and government strongholds outside the capital, Bangui.

Even though the alliance dissolved, the inter-ethnic clashes did not stop. In opposition, self-defense militias known as anti-balaka began to form and committed atrocities mainly against the country's Muslim minority. This gave way to a seemingly downhill spiral of reciprocal violence. Following a new wave of violence in late Fall 2013, the UN Security Council – headed by France – passed resolution 2127 on 5 December 2013, which gave the French government the legitimacy to launch *Operation Sangaris*. Within a few hours of the resolution, President Hollande – along with an administration that was adamant about Africanizing Africa's security –

[1] John Campbell, 17 January 2014, 2014, https://www.cfr.org/video/crisis-central-african-republic-three-things-know.

announced the deployment of a French peacekeeping operation. Less than twelve months after the beginning of *Operation Serval*, how did France find itself unable to stay out of yet another conflict in Africa?

This chapter, just as the previous one, reconstructs the decision-making process of the crisis through an ontological security interpretation. It explores the justifications and motivations of the 'decisional group', focusing specifically on the ontological security interests of the French and how anxiety over threats to self-identity shaped the decision-making process. In particular, I use the conceptual framework to interpret how the outcomes of past policy decisions, specifically vis-à-vis the Rwandan crisis of the 1990s, motivated French elites to intervene in the CAR in December 2013. Throughout, I fold together my argument which posits that the risk of another genocide in another former colony threatened France's self-identity and their sense of ontological security. The CAR crisis threatened France's sense of self-identity because doing nothing would amount to an affront to the special responsibility and obligation France feels it owes its African 'friends'. Doing nothing also created conditions that caused French leaders to question their role as a *puissance d'influence*.[2] Furthermore, I argue that French decision-makers experienced shame over their past 'failed' policy in Rwanda and that this contributed to their sense of ontological insecurity, particularly during the debate and justification phases of the decision-making process. In turn, these anxieties served to dislodge the strong non-interventionist stance the Hollande administration hoped to sustain – although much slower than

[2] According to the foreign minister, there are eight things that make France an influential power in the world. Among these are: its permanent membership to the UNSC; its status as a nuclear power; its status as the world's 5th largest economy; the global reach of its francophonie; its cultural *rayonnement*; the positive reception of French across the globe; the defense of a certain conception of human rights; and the country's unique history. See Fabius, "Extraits D'un Entretien Avec L'association De La Presse Étrangère De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 20 Novembre 2012."

it did in the case of Mali – resulting in France intervening militarily in a second African country in less than a year.

Again, the contribution of the analysis is that it helps us understand how leaders confront identity anxieties during critical situations, how those anxieties shape the decision-making process, and how those anxieties are overcome. How, in the case of France, did the Hollande administration confront anxieties associated with ontological insecurity and how did those anxieties shape the decision to intervene?

In order to answer that question, I follow the same structure I used in the previous chapter, beginning first with a background note on the 2012-2013 crisis in the CAR. Special attention is paid to the role religion and France's long-standing presence in the country played in the various causes of the conflict.[3] The remaining sections use an ontological security account to analyze the three stages of the decision-making process – agenda-setting, debating the intervention, and justifying the decision – to interpret the French choice. I reconstruct the context of the crisis, focusing on how the Rwandan genocide, empathy, and the actors' sense of self-identity as representatives of an influential power shaped the decision-making process. I do this while keeping an eye towards identifying a point at which the fear of ontological insecurity 'kicks in', that is to say, where French actors decided that the need to reaffirm their self-image as a nation of honor and standing outweighed the need to avoid the label of neocolonial power. Together, these sections show how the French government shifted from its initial reluctance to intervene toward an intervention made in the name of humanity.

[3] Although the French military withdrew from Mali at the time of independence, it has never truly left the CAR. Some have argued that this continuous presence had the most direct impact on the decision to intervene militarily in the CAR. See, for instance Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.

Figure 2. Map of the Central African Republic

Source: CIA World Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/central-african-republic/, accessed on 3 Jan 2023

CAR: A State in Crisis

In order to contextualize the crisis that unfolded in the CAR in 2013, the following section will provide a background note on the country's fall into the abyss. I do so by focusing on three key things. First, I briefly review how the county has been a crisis-ridden state with political instability ever since independence. Second, I show how religion became a key factor when used to describe the increasing violence. And third, I summarize France's deep involvement in the CAR's domestic politics and the extent to which that shaped the operational environment within which François Hollande and his administration were operating when they took the decision to launch *Operation Sangaris* on December 5, 2013.

Political Instability

The CAR, which is a land-locked country at the heart of the African continent, covering an area larger than France but only inhabited by 4.5 million people, has suffered from continuous political instability and has been considered a failed state for most of its post-independence existence.[4] Unable to escape the seemingly endless spiral of violence and atrocities that successive governments and warring factions have inflicted upon each other and its population, some have defined the history of the post-colonial experience of CAR as "one of the most tragic of the African continent".[5] Most notable of the tragic failed governments and unsuccessful leaders is the notorious excesses of the self-proclaimed Emperor Jean-Bédel Bokassa (1966-1967). But his reign was only the tip of the iceberg. Since the first successful democratic transition in the early 1990s, CAR has fallen victim to severe mismanagement, exacerbating the extreme poverty, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient education system which has plagued the state.[6] Thus, the country has become an ideal breeding ground for mutinies, coups, and rebellions.

In fact, all of the CAR's successive presidents (with the exception of three) were ousted from office by their political opponents in some form or fashion.[7] In particular, these struggles for leadership have come to define the past two decades of Central African presidencies, in particular that of François Bozizé who was in charge when the recent conflict arose. In addition to Bozizé's failure to contribute to economic and social development, he was unable to tackle the insecurity coming from armed factions that aimed to destabilize the government, in particular the

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[4] International Crisis Group, "Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State," *Africa Report* 136 (2007).
[5] Didier Niewiadowski, "La République Centrafricaine: Le Naufrage D'un État, L'agonie D'une Nation," *Afrilex, Université Montesquieu–Bordeaux IV* (2014).
[6] Andreas Mehler, "Rebels and Parties: The Impact of Armed Insurgency on Representation in the Central African Republic," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 49, no. 1 (2011): 118-22.
[7] The exceptions are: André-Dieudonné Kolingba, who lost in the 1993 elections to Ange-Félix Patassé; Catherine Samba-Panza, who served as interim president from 2014-2016; and current President Faustin-Archance Touadéra.

northeast of the country. Similar to Mali's Touré, Bozizé feared that a strong army might turn against him so he kept his forces (FACA – *forces armées centrafricaines*) undermanned, underequipped, and underprepared. This, exacerbated by his ethno-familial nepotistic style of governance, only aggravated the general discontent.[8]

Then, towards the end of 2012, a newly-formed Seleka movement engaged in combat with FACA. Their aim – just like most of the previous rebellions – was "to acquire control of the state to advance [their] own personal interests rather than any specific political agenda".[9] Bozizé, aware that his forces were ill-equipped to handle the rebels, appealed unsuccessfully to both France and Chad (his two major foreign allies) for military support.[10] A series of negotiations ensued, known as the Libreville II negotiations, between the ruling government and Seleka. An agreement was made, and a road map created for a peaceful political transition and ceasefire.[11] As part of the treaty, a unified government would be installed with Michel Djotodia, representing Seleka, serving as the vice prime minister and defense minister.[12] However, none of the parties involved in the peace agreement were interested in a solution or willing to compromise on a path that would save their country from civil war. In February 2013, new violence erupted, and on March 24, the Seleka advanced on the capital to oust the president. Bozizé fled to Cameroon however it did not put an end to the violence and unrest.

Soon after Djotodia's assumption of leadership he began to lose control of his group of supporters, which was a "heterogeneous coalition of Central African and foreign combatants", all

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[8] Group, "Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State."
[9] Ibid., 22.
[10] France and Chad had both supported Bozizé during his *own* takeover of the government in 2003. Reuters, "Paris Veut Faire En Rca La Preuve De La Fin De La 'Françafrique'," *Reuters*, July 16 2012.
[11] Lewis Mudge and Elsa Le Pennec, *'I Can Still Smell the Dead': The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic* (Washington DC: Human Rights Watch, 2013).
[12] Andreas Mehler, "Central African Republic," in *Africa Yearbook Volume 13* (Brill, 2017).

with disparate agendas.[13] Despite Djotodia's control of the country's capital, the Seleka fighters who helped get him to power as well as the anti-balaka movement that rose in response continued to take up arms against one another. Djotodian forces attacked Christian villages with impunity. In response, communities formed militias to protect themselves; they also targeted Muslim civilians. The CAR began to experience increased violence and the entire country fell into anarchy. Innocent civilians were being murdered, unarmed men were being mutilated, and children were being kidnapped and forced to serve in the opposing camp's forces.

Increasing Sectarianism

What began as a small conflict between rebel groups morphed into a full-blown civil war that "gained an increasingly sectarian dimension", something that was new for a state that had become accustomed to political crises, authoritarianism, and mutinies.[14] While the fight for power was mostly a political contest, the Seleka began to use references to their Muslim identity as the common denominator to unite the different factions within their movement, making Islam a principal identity-forging element of their rebel alliance.[15] The fact that Djotodia was the country's first Muslim president (despite only a small fraction of the country practicing Islam)[16] helped supercharge the political struggle such that it began to split the country along religious lines.[17] As a result, news of the civil war in the CAR being religiously motivated between Islam and Christianity began to spread rapidly.[18]

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[13] International Crisis Group, *Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition* (International Crisis Group, 2013).
[14] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 116.
[15] Thomas Flichy de La Neuville, Véronique Mézin-Bourgninaud, and Gregor Mathias, "Centrafrique, Pourquoi La Guerre?," (2014).
[16] A little less than 15% as of 2010.H. Clinton, "Central African Republic," *International Religious Freedom Report* (2012).
[17] Campbell Central African Republic Conflict.
[18] Cyril Bensimon and Nathalie Guibert, "Centrafrique: Le Risque D'un Conflit Confessionnel," *Le Monde* (2013).

In reality, however, religion only served to heighten already existing tensions between populations which were rooted in geographic, ethnic, and social cleavages.[19] It was used to emphasize the marginalization and neglect of northerners who constituted the majority of the Seleka's recruits. In other words, the sectarian divide between (mainly Muslim) Seleka and (mainly Christian) anti-balaka was layered onto a much older ethno-regional divide between the north and the south.[20] In the discourses of both factions there was a blending of social grievances with religious claims, such that they equated their religion with their indigenousness, using it to distinguish themselves from a foreign intruder. In fact, for many anti-balaka members, the Seleka fighters were characterized as "invaders of their country".[21]

Furthermore, when looking closer at how the members of the Seleka and anti-balaka practiced their religions, it became clear that neither group was necessarily devout in a strictly traditional, dogmatic sense. Most people in the CAR in general mix animist practices with one of their religious identities. The anti-balaka movement, who is often described as the "Christian militia" was actually composed of members from Christian, Muslim, and Fulani communities.[22]

Nevertheless, while the crisis was not entirely a religious conflict, it was not a strictly political one either. It was an inter-ethnic clash driven "more by hate and revenge than by any ideology grounded in religion".[23] In this way, one can see how the insurgency in the CAR differed fundamentally from the insurgency in Mali. Nevertheless, the Bozizé administration – inspired by the response to the growing terrorist threat in Mali – introduced references to Islam

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[19] Stephanie Burchard, January 22, 2014.
[20] Mehler, "Rebels and Parties: The Impact of Armed Insurgency on Representation in the Central African Republic."
[21] Andrea Ceriana Mayneri, "La Centrafrique: De La Rébellion Séléka Aux Groupes Anti-Balaka (2012-2014)," *Politique Africaine* 134, no. June (2014).
[22] Assemblée Nationale, "Compte Rendu N° 27 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Défense, Sur L'opération Sangaris En République Centrafricaine," news release, 2014.
[23] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 117.

in order to stigmatize the rebels and win support from the international community, including France, for its fight against the rebel fighters. This argument was also picked up by the different rebel factions themselves and, as you will see, by international actors, to try and bring the conflict in line with a dominant narrative of 21st century international security – the War on Terror.[24] It was from that point that the "simplistic presentation of this violence as combat between Christians and Muslims created a dynamic of self-fulfilling prophecy" that transformed the war into inter-religious conflict.[25]

France's Deep Ties

In this final part, I briefly review France's ties with the CAR and the long history of deep involvement with the former colony's domestic politics. The willingness of the French state and military to promote regime changes and the willingness of the CAR's ruling elites to entrust their own security to the French has repeatedly put into question the country's sovereignty. As "the 'hub' of French pre-positioned forces on the continent", every time French interests were concerned, Paris "amputated" the country's sovereignty, both before and after its independence.[26]

As in most parts of francophone Africa, France's main goal was regime stability in its 'back yard', which guided foreign policy up until the turn of the new millennium.[27] During that time, France supported both questionable leaders and repeatedly provoked regime changes by deploying forces to the CAR. While there was a defense agreement with the CAR in the 1960s,

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[24] See Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.
[25] Douglas A Yates, "French Military Interventions in Africa," *The Palgrave Handbook of Peacebuilding in Africa* (2018): 401.
[26] Géraldine Faes and Stephen Smith, *République Centrafricaine: La Solitude Et Le Chaos* (2000).
[27] Koepf, "France and the Fight against Terrorism in the Sahel: The History of a Difficult Leadership Role."

this was not necessarily a guarantee that any Central African elite would stay in power.[28] Once the self-proclaimed Emperor Bokassa became a liability in the French eyes, then President Giscard d'Estaing ordered a military operation to overthrow him on September 20, 1979.[29] In his place they installed David Dacko, the CAR's first president (who came to power thanks to his family ties with the leader of CAR's decolonization process, subsequently installed an autocratic and kleptocratic regime, and who had the full support of Paris), but he was too weak to survive without France's military and financial support. Thus, France increased its development support to the CAR, installed political advisors in all strategic positions of the state, and reoccupied the former French military base at Bouar.[30] The dependency of Central African elites on French assistance, and France's paternalist instincts, have been baked into state institutions since the earliest days of decolonization.

In the 1990s, a series of mutinies began to describe the country's political landscape. In response to these recurring outbreaks of violence, France periodically patrolled Bangui "to protect foreign nationals" and became repeatedly involved in "short, intense, and unpredictable operations".[31] Three subsequent operations were conducted in response to three succeeding mutinies form 1996-1997, marking a new degree of violence that drew "the French government deeper and deeper into the CAR's domestic politics".[32] Some of the combat during these operations were in response to the death of French soldiers at the hands of mutineers, the retaliation of which caused several civilian casualties. Up until that time there was general

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[28] Mehler, "Central African Republic."
[29] The name of the mission was Operation Barracuda. Subsequently, the policy of overthrowing a government and then installing one that became dependent on the former colonizer became known as the "Barracuda syndrome", which stands for "the infantilization of a people that were so dispossessed of their own history that they were not even responsible for deposing their own tyrant". See Group, "Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State."
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 119.

consensus among French politicians with regard to military operations in Africa that decisions could be made behind closed doors with little transparency, regardless of the impact on the African population. However, as the late 1990s was the beginning of France's normalization process with its former colonies in Africa, Lionel Jospin (France's Prime Minister, who served under President Jacques Chirac from 1997-2002) publicly criticized these operations and demanded to put an end to the opaque decision-making that had traditionally governed French diplomatic relations with the African continent.[33]

While these operations, and the public outcry against them, did not end French military interventionism in the CAR, it was a moment that began to reveal a shift in the framework that guided French decision-making. This left France with the paradox that it still struggles with today. Non-intervention in the CAR in the late 1990s would have helped rebels to seize power and contributed to long-term instability in the region; intervention, on the other hand, would have perpetuated the image of neocolonial domination, which was in direct opposition to the normalization process that was underway. This paradox re-emerged a decade later, when in 2007 French paratroopers helped secure the city of Birao, which was under attack by rebels with the Union of Democratic Forces Coalition (UDFR) who wanted to overthrow the Bozizé government.[34] While the intervention did result in a peace agreement between the rebels and the government, it also triggered heavy criticism against France's neocolonial approach to the region.[35] Nevertheless, the French military has remained on alert in the CAR ever since. Their anticipation of the need to intervene again in the near future is evident in their willingness to stay

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[33] Lionel Jospin, "Verbatim: Lionel Jospin Met En Garde Le Gouvernement Juppé Contre Le 'Risque D'un Engrenage Militaire'," *Le Monde* (1997).
[34] It is worth noting that France, at the time, still had a bilateral defense agreement with the CAR. Kari Barber, "French Forces Deployed against Renewed Attacks in Car," news release, 5 March, 2007.
[35]Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 120.

in order to "prevent the total collapse of the state", despite repeated appeals by successive French government to reduce their military presence in Africa.[36]

An Ontological Security Interpretation of French Decision-Making

I argue in the rest of this chapter that the risk of another genocide in another former colony threatened France's self-identity which led to the decision to intervene. The CAR crisis threatened France's sense of self because doing nothing caused French leaders to question their role as a *puissance d'influence* and as a country with special responsibilities to its former colonies. At the core of my argument is that French decision-makers experienced shame over their past 'failed' policy in Rwanda and that this contributed to their sense of ontological insecurity, particularly during the debate and justification phases of the decision-making process. In turn, these anxieties served to dislodge the strong non-interventionist stance the Hollande administration hoped to sustain. Non-intervention, in this case, was simply no longer tenable once it became apparent that the crisis appealed to the actors' self-understanding as representatives of a power of influence that had to honor its obligations. This becomes evident as I trace the narrative of justification from one that was based on (just as was done in Mali) the elimination of a potential terrorist safe haven to one that was based on humanitarianism. Who else could prevent another genocide in Africa but France, the founding nation of human rights?

As I stated before, François Hollande's decision to launch *Operation Sangaris* in December 2013 is surprising given that he and the majority of actors in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had initially been opposed to a military intervention altogether. While the shift from a non-interventionist policy to military intervention was less radical and less abrupt than in the

[36] Group, "Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State," 21.

case of Mali, the issue itself was not less contested. How did the growing threat and fear of genocide help bring about French intervention in the CAR conflict? Again, discourse analysis is most useful in the case of French security policy, where (as I mentioned in Chapter II) competing explanations seem plausible. In order to understand how the meaning of the conflict evolved, and how it came to shape the decision-making process, I turn – just as I did in the previous chapter – to a narrative interpretation of how the Central African crisis was first included on the French security agenda.[37] However, since it is happening in the shadows of *Operation Serval*, I first note some differences between the two situations, and then move on to discuss why the Hollande administration was so reluctant to move the crisis up onto the security agenda. Subsequently, I move to a narrative re-telling of how the crisis was promoted in importance, re-examining who the characters of the narrative were and how they were characterized (actors), where the story took place (scene and setting), and how the narrative moved through time (emplotment).[38] In each case, I reveal differences in the narratives that existed between the CAR and Mali.

France's Reluctance

Despite the heavily deteriorating situation in December 2012 and the subsequent coup in March 2013, France was reluctant to intervene earlier than it did. This is in large part due to the fact that issues in the CAR have long been described as part of a larger *regional* problem, where instability, political volatility, and conflicts were attributed to problems in Central Africa rather

[37] As a reminder, in this dissertation I analyze three essential structural elements – setting, characterization of actors, and emplotment – when analyzing how French actors activate and use elements of the biographical narrative to bring the crises in Mali and CAR to the security agenda in the first place. I also use those same elements to analyze how actors justify or legitimate their decision to intervene, as well as how they overcome anxieties over ontological insecurity.

[38] "Plot", "setting", "characterization of actors"; these are part of what is known as Burke's dramatic pentad – the five key elements of a fully drawn narrative (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose) - and are the focus of analysis in studies doing narrative research. See Chapter IV of this dissertation. Also see Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 177; Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138.

than to the Central African Republic itself.[39] Reinforcing this perception of regional dysfunction are several factors, including the rebellion in eastern Chad that was occurring at the time, the conflicts in South Sudan and Darfur, and the porous borders between these nations.[40]

Framing the CAR as a regional problem that France has regularly and repeatedly addressed was another way interest was kept low in the region. The fact that *Operation Serval* was a 'new' intervention (i.e., they had not deployed troops there yet) differed from *Sangaris* because by the time the Seleka ousted Bozizé in early 2013, the French already had upwards of 500 troops stationed near Bangui. At the discursive level, at least, the decision to launch *Sangaris* was in perfect continuity with previous troop reinforcements.[41] Troop reinforcements, as opposed to initial troop deployment, is believed to be less politicized, thus incurring less public attention.[42] These factors help explain why the increasing numbers of clashes between Seleka rebels, the attacks on government buildings and the French embassy in December 2012, and the putsch in March 2013 – while they clearly caught the attention of the Hollande administration – did not receive the same level of importance as the events in Mali, which were unfolding at the same time. As such, the crisis in the CAR was perceived as a minor risk to France's national security and France remained reluctant to intervene, at least until September 2013 (which I will show below), when concerns about humanitarian costs and the risk of genocide shifted the meaning of the conflict.

Another reason France was reluctant to get involved early on is because of the highly sensitive context where "almost any action could provoke uncontrollable and unwanted

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[39] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.
[40] Philippe Bertoux, "Security Council/Central African Region/Lra: Statement by the Political Counsellor of France to the United Nations," news release, December 18, 2012.
[41] France has maintained a continuous presence of troops in the CAR since *Operation Boali* in 2003.
[42] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 122-23.

reactions", especially since early French passivity brought protests near the country's capital in front of both the US and French embassies. Some of the protesters fired live ammunition and cried out over the ambiguous relationship between the two nations. As one protestor noted, "We are here at the French embassy, because France colonized us. But France also tends to abandon us. We don't need France anymore; France should take its embassy and leave".[43] This shows how French actors needed to control the narrative such that it would be interpreted as intended and avoid a repetition of the case in Cote d'Ivoire, where French troops were stuck between opposing camps and were accused by both sides of supporting the other.[44] So, in the meantime, the French government publicly deplored the outbreaks of violence and condemned the rebel's attack on the government but Hollande put his foot down when it came to prioritizing a military solution. Rather, his focus was on protecting the security of his diplomatic staff and the approximately 1,200 French expatriates (and Central Africans with dual citizenship) living and working near the capital of Bangui.[45] In response to Bozizé's request for military assistance, Hollande declared that he would not protect any regime against an advancing rebellion but simply protect French interests and citizens.[46]

Even as the CAR deteriorated, and regime stability came to the forefront of the discourse as Bozizé was replaced by the Seleka with Djotodia, the French government refused to act.

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[43] Benjamin Hue, "L'ambassade De France En Centrafrique Attaquée Par Des Manifestants Inquiets De L'avancée Des Rebelles," *Huffington Post*, December 26 2012.

[44] *Operation Licorne* was the name of the military deployment of French peacekeepers who served to support the UN in the Ivory Coast, stationed in the country since the outbreak of the Ivorian Civil War in September 2002. In 2011, a second civil war erupted into full-scale military conflict between forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, the President of the Ivory Coast since 2000, and supporters of the internationally recognized president-elect Alassane Ouattara. France, whose initial objective was to protect its own civilians and forces, eventually arrested Gbagbo at his residence in April 2011. Mike McGovern, *Making War in Côte D'ivoire* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[45] Élysée, "République Centrafricaine: Communiqué De La Présidence De La République," news release, December 26, 2012; "République Centrafricaine/Entretien Téléphonique Du Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, M. Laurent Fabius, Aves Le Président De La République Centrafricaine, M. François Bozizé: Déclaration Du Porte-Parole Adjoint De Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères," news release, December 27, 2012.

[46] Francetvinfo, "Centrafrique: Le Président François Bozizé Demande À Rencontrer François Hollande," (2012).

While the old bilateral defense agreements were largely gone by the time Hollande took office, there was still a reform of the existing agreement made in 2010 (under Sarkozy) which obliged France to intervene in the case of an external aggression. This, however, did not fit the description of the crises as political actors saw it. It is also clear, by the middle of 2012, that France did not believe regime stability – an argument they had invoked in the past – was applicable in this case. It shows how the concept was becoming obsolete and thus did not emerge as a motivation nor a justification in the French political discourse.[47]

More importantly, stalling an intervention, even as the crisis moved into 2013, was still in line with France's commitments to a renewed security policy toward the African continent. Supporting Bozizé would have been interpreted as the French government rescuing another undemocratic and unpopular African leader. Since the beginning of his term, Hollande had shown himself committed to putting an end to France's neocolonial image and military interventionism.[48] As the CAR had been a country where France had intervened more frequently than in any other colony, the 'decisional group' was sensitive to the fact that being seen as supporting an incumbent regime in its struggle for survival would not have only been in violation of the new defense agreement, but it would have also been a reminder of France's less than glorious involvement in Africa and undermined any ground gained on the efforts to mark a rupture with its past policies. An intervention by early 2013 was judged too risky.[49]

Nevertheless, even after refusing to commit more than a small troop contingent, the Hollande administration still had to defend itself against critics who wanted to portray France as the protector of the Bozizé regime. When asked whether additional French forces would be

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[47] Koepf, "France and the Fight against Terrorism in the Sahel: The History of a Difficult Leadership Role."
[48] Mélonio, "Quelle Politique Africaine Pour La France En 2012."
[49] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.

deployed to the CAR to save a defeated president, Fabius responded, “No, not at all. François Hollande said it clearly: we do not have to interfere in the domestic affairs of the CAR. However, we need to protect our citizens. This is what we are doing”.[50] Even so, a growing number of voices in France still doubted the official position, and Fabius had to reaffirm his government’s commitment to non-intervention well into the second half of 2013. In front of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs he defended the fragile narrative of normalization, saying, “M. Chandelier [French MP for the Communist Party], nonetheless, is right to highlight the necessity of putting an end to the interferences. Several speakers were surprised that France did not support Mr. Bozizé. In this respect, I would like to reaffirm our principled stance: France does not, or not anymore, give support to this or that government; it supports the Africans”.[51] The fact that the French government was criticized for supporting Bozizé despite having committed an insignificant amount of troops to protect French nationals showed that French actors would be uncertain (or *anxious*) about the consequences should they need to take a more pronounced stance in the crisis. When the former Delegate Minister in charge of French citizens living abroad was asked by a French journalist in early 2013 whether the commitment to *not* intervene should be interpreted as a desertion especially in light of the automaticity with which it used to do so, she replied, “No, not at all. [I am saying that] simply France cannot intervene in an independent country.”[52]When pressed about whether the days of interfering have passed, she said, “Absolutely. Of course, we have interests that we protect, we have French expatriates for whom we are responsible and should the security situation be changing, we will certainly be

[50] Laurent Fabius, "Extraits D'un Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Europe 1 Le 25 Mars 2013, Sur La Crisefinancière À Chypre, La Situation En Centrafrique, L'intervention Militaire Française Au Mali Et Sur La Question Syrienne.," news release, 2013.
[51] Assemblée Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 25 Commission Des Affaires Étrangères: Audition De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères," news release, 2013.
[52] Hélène Conway-Mouret, "Entretien De La Ministre Déléguée Chargée Des Français De L'étranger, Mme Hélène Conway-Mouret, Avec *Tv5 Monde*," news release, 1 January, 2013.

present to evacuate our expatriates, but today this is not an issue."[53] The fact that the Hollande administration stuck to its non-interventionist stance, even though people *expected* them to intervene, suggests that perhaps the new security identity France had forged in the 21st century was here to stay. Anxieties over straying form that identity might be enough to keep the French from changing course and reverting to its old unilateralist impulses.

Finally, the French military was reluctant to intervene because the situation on the ground required a policing operation as opposed to a military defense. The nature of the conflict made it nearly impossible to make a clear distinction or identification of an enemy, especially as many of the combatants began to shed their uniforms and remained in civilian clothing.[54] Operating among civilians would also inherently increase the risk of collateral damage and would ultimately risk exposing French forces to attacks from a nonidentifiable enemy. Furthermore, since this was initially narrated as a regional problem, any solution would – in order to gain legitimacy and stand a chance of success – need to be approved by the Chadian government, who was France's principal ally in Mali.[55] Michel Goya, a former colonel in the French army, sums up the delicacy of any potential military operation, saying, "Chad was an ally of the Seleka, but also our ally, and at the same time they were on our side in Mali. To intervene [at that time] would have been delicate. It is always delicate. We did not want to take sides because we did not want to turn Chad against us."[56]

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Campbell Central African Republic Conflict.
[55] There is a long-standing history of cooperation between Chadian and French militaries. French forces continue to this day to ensure Chad's stability as well as to protect French expatriates and economic interests, while at the same time, the base in Chad serves as a rear entrance for French troops deploying in the Sahel, particularly during *Operation Barkhane* (2014-2021). Moreover, France supports Chad with military logistics and provides twelve military advisors who are fully integrated into the Chadian forces. Assemblée Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 36 Commission Des Affaires Étrangères: Réunion, Conjointe Avec La Commission De La Défense Et Des Forces Armées, En Présence De Mgr. Dieudonné Nsapalainga, Archevêque De Bangui, Et De L'imam Oumar Kobine Layama, Président De La Communauté Islamique Centrafricaine," news release, 2014.
[56] Quote in Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 129.

This is all happening, of course, just as Hollande had given the green light to *Operation Serval* in Mali. A positive response to Bozizé in January of 2013 would have put French troops to their operational and logistical limits.[57] Also, the security narrative constructed around the crisis in the Sahel dwarfed the events in the CAR. When faced with two crises in francophone Africa, policy-makers had to prioritize where their attention went, as both mental and material resources for another intervention were scarce.[58] When Hollande sought to explain his country's initial reluctance to intervene, he was fully aware of the historical constraints weighing his decision. "…the Central African crisis", he said in December 2013, "began at the time we decided to support the Malian state…In that respect, this crisis fell in the background…For the past ten months, chaos has prevailed in Central Africa…One could argue that the crisis dates back to 1994, but those who have an understanding of history could go back even further, when France was very present in Central Africa, too present. This is why, today, we are reluctant."[59]

In the end, initial reluctance can be explained by the struggles between actors' need for stability and the avoidance of neocolonial references, the constraints imposed by limited resources, and the previous commitment to make a clear break from the past and establish a renewed relationship with the African continent. The conclusion was that it was better to abandon Bozizé in the early months of 2013, at a time when it might have still been possible to save the incumbent regime. While the desire for regime stability would have been sufficient cause for intervention in the past, this period shows that the concept had indeed been replaced by alternative solutions, ones centered on neutrality and non-interference. It seems French

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[57] Nationale, "Compte Rendu N° 27 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Défense, Sur L'opération Sangaris En République Centrafricaine."
[58] "Compte Rendu Numéro 1 Commission Des Affaires Étrangères: Audition De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères," news release, 2013.
[59] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, À Bangui Le 10 Décembre 2013."

interventionism had moved beyond the automaticity of its past. However, as I show in the next section, the reluctance to intervene waned once frames other than regime-stability gained importance and were advanced to justify the recourse to military action.

Narrating CAR onto the Security Agenda

Similar to the case in Mali, a recurring theme in the narrative leading to the shift of discourse form disengagement to intervention was the idea of proximity. As Hollande put it a day after he ordered *Operation Sangaris*, "France is aware of what is expected of it. It deduces from this proximity, which at once is geographic, sentimental, cultural, linguistic, [and] economic, a particular responsibility".[60] These references served to justify the issue being first introduced onto the security agenda and ultimately promoted, and thus deserve a brief re-examination in the case of the CAR. The narrative analysis suggests that the notion of proximity did not have as strong an influence and was understood in different terms, which is surprising given the long relationship between Paris and the former colony as well as the continuous French military presence. This difference also contributed to why it took so long to include the crisis in the CAR onto the security agenda and why there wasn't as abrupt a shift in the desires of French decision-makers as there was to save the Malian state from the clutches of terrorism.

Characterization of the Actors

Given the longstanding French military presence in the CAR, a "strong blending has occurred between French soldiers and their Central African counterparts".[61] Thus, it is no

[60] "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Franco-Africaines Dans Les Domaines Militaires, Économiques Et Environnementaux, À Paris Le 6 Décembre 2013," news release, 2013.
[61] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 135.

surprise that, as in the case of Mali, French leaders characterized their Central African counterparts as having a shared human and cultural dimension. However, the same level of characterization was not shared with civil society at large.

For one, the Central African community in France is much smaller than the Malian. The *Institut National d'Études Démographiques* does not list migrants from the CAR as a separate category, but groups them under the label "other African countries".[62] And second, Central Africans in France are far less connected and organized politically than their Malian equivalents.[63] Thus, it is no surprise that characterizing the actors in the CAR with references to Central Africans living in France was completely absent from the official discourse. Instead of narrating the crisis in the CAR as a conflict that touched on Africans who share a cultural and linguistic connection with people in France, it was "largely replaced by a more general compassion for suffering populations with whom France shares a long history and close friendship…[a narrative which] could have been applied to any former colony."[64] It was the safety and security of French nationals living abroad that was highest among the concerns of French decision-makers, and was the official justification for why the government increased troop presence early on in the conflict. Nevertheless, in terms of cultural similarities, no difference between the characterization of actors in the two cases could be observed among French decision-makers.

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[62] Institut national d'études démographiques., "Immigrés Par Pays De Naissance En 2010: Données Statistiques," (2010).
[63] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.
[64] Ibid., 135.

Scene and Setting of the Story

The most visible similarity between the two cases could be observed in how the setting of the story was narrated. Just as French actors cited Mali as an example of the geographic vicinity between Africa and Europe, they resorted to the same story when explaining that proximity justified the need for action in the CAR. The only difference was that instead of it being threats from a single country that might have implications for Europe, the conflict was framed as threats from a single country that might have implications for the African continent, a continent to which Europe is closely tied and with which it should be concerned. Hollande, for example, stated that the "situation concerns first of all your continent, Africa, but it also concerns our continent, Europe. Because our two continents constitute a common entity that is exposed to the same threats and confronted with the same dangers. Our two continents, which want to get even closer, thus need to stand together to ward off risks and prevail over threats."[65]

French actors focused on potential spillover effects that a breakdown in CAR would have for the entire African continent. Only then did the idea of stability become strong enough to get the attention of French policy-makers; once it became apparent that instability in the CAR's domestic affairs would have far greater implications than initially predicted, the desire for a military solution started to gain traction. In other words, in order to preserve Africa's stability, which was thought to be both in France's and Europe's interests, not the least because of the shared setting (via geographic proximity) between the two continents, order would need to be re-established in the CAR. Because "no country is completely sheltered from these problems," argued Fabius, "[and] because in this globalized Africa, in this globalized world, what affects one country affects another", the security of the CAR began to be framed as a necessary

[65] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Franco-Africaines Dans Les Domaines Militaires, Économiques Et Environnementaux, À Paris Le 6 Décembre 2013."

precondition for the stability of not only the African continent, but of the entire international community.[66]

Fabius went on to declare in front of the Senate that "it is a question of common sense: one cannot pretend to be interested in Africa, the continent of the future, if one does not show any interest in its center. This is exactly where the Central African Republic is located."[67] However therein lied the most visible difference between the two cases. Whereas the shared setting of events helped to move the Malian case to the French security agenda, in contrast the shared setting in the CAR (as a shared continental/regional space as opposed to a shared national space) prevented the crisis from sticking out as a distinctive issue that demanded special attention.

Emplotment of Events and their Meaning

When it came to describing the sequences of events unfolding in the CAR, and how they were emplotted to give the narrative meaning, French policy-makers were influenced more by experiences stemming from an inglorious past than by expectations of a prosperous future (as was the case in Mali). Just as in Mali, the Hollande administration was careful to point out that any present activism was distinctly different from past interventions. Given France's deep involvement as a maker of Central African leaders and despots, this was a difficult task to accomplish.

Consequently, when describing the plot of the narrative, the first official statements calling for military action were baked in a shell of remorse. When explaining his reluctance to

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[66] Laurent Fabius, "Déclaration De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères Et Du Développement International, Sur L'avenir De L'afrique, À Libreville Le 24 Mai 2014," news release, 2014.
[67] "Déclaration De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, En Réponse À Une Question Sur La Situation En République Centrafricaine, Au Sénat Le 17 Octobre 2013.," news release, 2013.

intervene, Hollande repeatedly apologized for the practices that belonged to a distant past, "…when France was very present in Central Africa, too present."[68] French elites wanted to be sure to tell a story that France was no longer intervening in the CAR to ensure its dependency on the *Hexagon*, but a nation "that acts in support of the African forces, with the blessing of the UN and for the sole purpose of defending human rights and saving lives."[69]

While it was the historical past that French leaders tried to distance themselves from, to give the crisis the meaning they desired, it was history that also anchored the French to a sense of responsibility. This, in turn, made the French feel empathy for the Central African state, elevating the crisis to a place where France might have to act in order to restore peace. Despite the genuine effort to break from the country's colonial past, the bonds of a shared history continued to tie into features of France's policy towards the CAR. When Fabius first outlined the possibility that his country might be interested in intervening, he was quick to point out that people were dying in a country that was "close to ours due to its history".[70]

Sticking to a storyline that viewed Africa's promising future as essential for the prosperity and security of Europe was made more difficult by the fact that the Central African's economy was one of the poorest in the world. Also, the estimated cost of military intervention far outweighed the potential return on investment from stabilizing the weak country. The total imports France had received from the CAR over the previous few years had never reached above

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[68] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, À Bangui Le 10 Décembre 2013."
[69] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 132.
[70] Hollande, "Interview De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec France Inter Le 9 Décembre 2013, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, La Situation En Ukraine Et Sur Les Funérailles De Nelson Mandela.."

10 million euros, and Fabius cautiously estimated that *Operation Sangaris* alone would cost an extra 100 million euros on top of the forecasted defense budget for 2014.[71]

Nevertheless, the Hollande administration continued to try and evoke the promise of Africa's future in order to justify why the violent conflict in the CAR deserved more international attention. Convinced that Africa's rise was imminent, and that France should remain one of the continent's preferred partners, French decision-makers considered insecurity as one of the major spoilers of this rise. Security, therefore, soon became the way France could contribute the most.[72] As Erforth notes, France's objective "was to make its European and international partners aware of the Central African crisis…[thus] referring to Africa's economic emergence was considered an effective means to accomplish this task".[73] It is worth noting, however, that while Africa's emergence was an effective means of gaining the interest of French policy-makers – along with the interest of other actors – the debate over whether to intervene also carried with it potential remorse about not responding to a humanitarian crisis, something I turn to in the following section.

The narrative of the threat in the CAR (which characterized the actors and setting as creating special ties between France and Africa) helped place the crisis on the French national security agenda. In contrast with the Malian crisis – which was perceived early on as having a direct threat to France – the nature of the Central African crisis appealed more to human compassion and responsibility. Decision-makers began to expose the seriousness of the humanitarian situation and began to advocate the need for a UN-mandated peacekeeping

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[71] Nationale, "Compte Rendu N° 27 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Défense, Sur L'opération Sangaris En République Centrafricaine."
[72] "Compte Rendu Numéro 2 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Dédense."
[73] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 134.

operation by June 2013.[74] Following the continuously shifting operational environment, and the alarm calls issued by several leading NGOs, a true shift in the narrative of the crisis occurred in August 2013. By then, the situation in Mali had started to become more stable and France was already considering withdrawing troops in the Sahel based on the apparent success of *Serval*. This allowed decision-makers to shift their attention towards the CAR, where they launched an awareness campaign in its favor and advocated a more proactive approach to the humanitarian and security crisis there.[75] In September of 2013, the CAR emerged as an "absolute priority" on the French security agenda.[76] The next step was to debate what sort of response France would take.

Debating the Intervention

At the 69th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2013, the French president addressed the international community, asking for a united response to the increasing violence in the CAR. "I would like to raise an alarm" he said, "as I did last year on the subject of Mali. The alarm concerns the Central Africa Republic, a small country that has been ravaged for too many years…Today, chaos took hold [and] once again, the civilian populations are the victims. We need to put an end to these acts of violence…That is why I wish that the Security Council would provide a mandate and the necessary logistical and financial means for an African force whose primary objective will be to re-establish stability in Central Africa."[77] His speech marked the

[74] Gérard Araud, "République Centrafricaine: Conférence De Presse Du Représentant Permanent De La France Aux Nations Unies," news release, 2013.
[75] Laurent Fabius, "Conférence De Presse De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Notamment Sur La Crise Syrienne Et Sur Les Relations Franco-Iraniennes, À New York Le 23 Septembre 2013," news release, 2013.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Communauté Internationale Notamment De L'onu, À New York Le 24 Septembre 2013.."

shift away from a reluctance to intervene toward a desire to promote and lead an international response.

While the official stance of the French government at this point was still to turn an African-led operation into a UN peacekeeping operation – and there was no mention of French military support – French decision-makers were already pondering the details of a potential intervention. For example, Laurent Fabius, by mid-October, announced that a second UN Security Council resolution would be presented at the end of November that would give "a mandate to the African *and* French forces to make further progress regarding the re-establishment of order" (emphasis added).[78] There was also growing conviction that the African forces did not possess the capacity or skill to act as an effective intervention force. Still, even as decision-makers considered it more and more likely that a military operation led by France might be necessary, they remained anxious because they knew a unilateral move or large intervention such as the one in Mali was unthinkable given the specific context of the crisis and the preceding narrative which rested on non-interference in the CAR's domestic affairs.

By October, the first official statements emerged that evoked the possibility of extending the mandate for *Operation Baoli* (the existing troop presence in the CAR, which had been in place since 2003).[79] Once again, the Hollande administration was forced to make calls for action which were in conflict with previous commitments to not interfere. Nevertheless, French actors were increasingly eager to intervene in a region where they had both the capacity and political will to provoke change. Despite the fact that the French felt there were obvious shortcomings in the African security mechanism, the underlying motivation for this shift is two-fold. First, it can

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[78] Laurent Fabius, "Déclaration De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur L'action De La France Et De La Communauté Internationale Face À La Situation En République Centrafricaine, À Bangui Le 13 Octobre 2013," news release, 2013. Emphasis added.
[79] Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, "Point De Presse: République Centrafricaine, October 1," news release, 2013.

be found in French actors' identity as leaders of a country that has a special role to play in the world, in particular Africa. This responsibility was made clear as unanswered calls to the international community left France feeling as if the CAR had been abandoned. Second, the suppression of the non-intervention principle began to occur while the idea of a humanitarian intervention became the dominant idea, with specific references and inferences to the Rwanda genocide 20 years earlier used to support that discourse. This, however, was sometimes blurred by references to the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), which I will show in the following part.

Abandonment and France's Responsibility

When the Hollande administration began calling for international support for a multilateral response, policy-makers at the Élysée found themselves confronted with general disinterest. In order for France to frame any military intervention as a multilateral effort and conform to the principle of 'African solutions to African problems', they needed the blessings of the international community. It is through this request for support that France found itself – along with its Central African counterparts – feeling abandoned. In search of an audience to respond to this shift in policy, Araud summed up the problem facing French actors when they tried to mobilize the international community. It was because "the Central African Republic is on the front page of no newspaper in the world apart from France and in Africa."[80] Emphasizing the lack of international awareness to the unfolding crisis, Fabius conveyed the same message when answering a question posed by the Senate in December 2013:

> The Central African Republic's three initials are CAR, and the problem today is that the A stands for 'Abandonment'…Nobody took an interest in this country, until it turned out that France – because it is its mission –

[80] Gérard Araud, "Interview of Mr. Gérard Araud, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, with France 24, October 10," news release, 2013.

> decided to alert the international community to [the situation] in this country.[81]

Between September 2013 and the adoption of UN Resolution 2127 authorizing the intervention on December 5, 2013, the French government "made it its principal task to draw their international partners' attention to the situation in the CAR".[82] Focusing on the 'legitimacy' of the UN as a sanctioning organization, France spent (as many other nations have) "considerable time and energy attempting to maintain the image that they are not the instrument of any great power [but rather] representatives of the 'international community' as embodied in the rules and resolutions of the UN".[83] Thus, the Hollande administration spent three months seeking the UN's approval before committing soldiers to the CAR.

By condemning the international community of ignoring the Central African crisis, the Hollande administration "portrayed itself as the defender and voice of the African continent" in order to guarantee the righteousness of a potential intervention.[84] Their aim was not only to gain legitimacy through the UN but to emerge as the initiator of an international alliance in support of the CAR. By telling a story that they were the advocates of an abandoned nation, France was able to add credibility to the argument that they were acting not against but together with African countries and only on their request. The lobbying efforts by French elites were guided by their perceived role as being a member of a country that is a *puissance d'influence*, a country with certain responsibilities.[85] France's policy was now one that rested "on its capacity to mobilize the

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[81] Laurent Fabius, "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Itélé Et Europe 1 Le 15 Décembre 2013, Notamment Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, La Lutte Contre Le Terrorisme Islamiste, La Construction Européenne Et Sur La Disparition De Nelson Mandela," news release, 2013.
[82] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 139.
[83] Michael N Barnett and Martha Finnemore, "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations," *International Organization* 53, no. 4 (1999): 709.
[84] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 141.
[85] Fabius, "Extraits D'un Entretien Avec L'association De La Presse Étrangère De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 20 Novembre 2012."

international community, rather than acting along" in order to guarantee international stability.[86] Gérard Araud expressed this feeling clearly when he stated that "the whole international community, which has heard the calls by the president of the Republic and Laurent Fabius, is mobilizing itself around France".[87]

The French government successfully convinced its international partners of the necessity to deploy a peacekeeping operation to the CAR. But this wasn't due to diplomatic skills alone. The deteriorating situation on the ground contributed to that momentum. As the number of reported killings, lootings, rapes, and other atrocities affecting the lives of Central Africans increased, references to the genocide in Rwanda became the most important narrative frame used by France and international audiences when considering military intervention. But the aspiration to prevent a possible genocide wasn't the only motivation that emerged during this phase of the decision-making; the possibility of the CAR becoming a safe haven for terrorists also appeared as a motive for intervention in the French discourse.

Another Rwanda, or a Terrorist Safe Haven?

While the debate over whether to intervene or not was being framed as one that was based on normative and humanitarian values, the fear of terrorism tried to creep into the narrative. Less than a year after the counterterrorist operation began in Mali, there was still fear that a failed state at the heart of the African continent was a potential security threat to the international community because it might become a "reservoir and exporter of terror".[88] Hinting

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[86] Assemblée Nationale, "Compte Rendu N° 2 Commission Des Affaires Étrangères: Audition De M. Jean-Christophe Belliard, Directeur D'afrique Et De L'océan Indien Au Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères Sur La Situation En République Centrafricaine, En République Démocratique Du Congo Et En Somalie, ," news release, 2013.
[87] Gérard Araud, "République Centrafricaine: Adoption De La Résolution 2134: Entretien Du Représentant Permanent De La France Auprès Des Nations Unies, Avec 'Bfm Tv'," news release, 2014.
[88] Robert I Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror," *Foreign affairs* (2002).

at the fear of the crisis becoming a religiously motivated and ideological battle, Hollande stated that "chaos leads to terrorism. Because what in the beginning was a new convulsion, just another putsch, has become a religious confrontation".[89] Laurent Fabius echoed that concern, suggesting that even regular "highway men" might turn into "terrorist groups with a religious agenda".[90]

This shift in the framing of the crisis as one that is rooted in potential international terrorism actually can be traced by comparing it to the rhetoric used earlier in 2013. In March of that year, when asked by a French news agency whether there was a risk of the CAR becoming a safe haven for jihadist terrorists, Fabius replied "No, luckily, we have not reached that point yet. But we do have to be very careful because what we see in Mali, in Nigeria, or elsewhere shows that terrorist groups are a little bit everywhere."[91] But just a few months later, when asked the very same question, he responded "Unfortunately yes. Already there are many brigands and, considering the situation of Africa, if things are not put back in order there is a risk of dissemination starting from these terrorist hotbeds."[92]

Despite the efforts to frame the crisis in CAR through the lens of global terrorism French actors were unable to identify a clear terrorist threat as it was uncertain which side of the conflict would be labeled rebel and which side would be labeled terrorist. This also suggests why French decision-makers initially failed to recognize the emergence of the anti-balaka militia, who were responsible for much of the violence committed during the second half of 2013, because they were given the label of *Christian* militia, a label that did not fit for those prepared to fight an

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[89] Hollande, "Conférence De Presse De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française Au Mali Et Sur La Situation En Syrie Et En Centrafrique, À Bamako Le 19 Septembre 2013.."
[90] Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 1 Commission Des Affaires Étrangères: Audition De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères."
[91] Laurent Fabius, "Entretien Du Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, M. Laurent Fabius, Avec *Europe 1*," news release, 2013.
[92] "République Centrafricaine: Entretien Du Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, M. Laurent Fabius, Avec *France 2*," news release, 2013.

Islamist insurgency.[93] Nevertheless, French elites continued to perpetuate the claim that fear of terrorism should remain a primary reason for intervention despite having any proof that there were indeed Islamist fighters in the CAR.

This framing, just as it did in the case of Mali, served to give meaning to the crisis in a narrative that was widely understood at the time. Framing it in this way might also guarantee that France's core partners would contribute to the military intervention. But, in order to justify an intervention in the name of the Global War on Terrorism, targets needed to be identified and the existing threats attributed to declared enemies. None of those enemies existed. As of the second half of 2013, there were no groups circulating the CAR territory that claimed the creation of an Islamic state, propagated the imposition of Sharia law, or declared France and the West as their archenemy.[94] Complicating this situation was the growing concern that France might be portrayed as a Christian crusader on the African continent. To avoid the stigmatization of the CAR's Muslim population, French actors began to invalidate the terrorist safe haven narrative by announcing that neither religion nor terrorism would influence their decision-making. In fact, two days after the intervention occurred, Hollande stated: "First of all, I want to be clear and precise. In the CAR we are not fighting terrorism. There is no terrorism as such. There is chaos, disorder, inter-religious violence, which at some point can become explosive not only for the CAR but also for the neighboring countries. Therefore we, that is the Africans with the support of the French, do not intervene to fight terrorism, we intervene for humanitarian reasons. In fact, this is a humanitarian cause".[95]

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[93] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.
[94] Ibid., 149.
[95] François Hollande, "Conférence De Presse Conjointe De Mm. François Hollande, Président De La République, Ban Ki-Moon, Secrétaire Général Des Nations Unies, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Président De La République Unie De Tanzanie, Macky Sall, Président De La République Du Sénégal, Et Herman Van Rompuy, Président Du Conseil Européen, Sur Les Relations Francoafricaines, La Sécurité En Afrique Et Sur La Situation En Centrafrique, À Paris Le 7 Décembre 2013," news release, 2013.

Contributing to the shift in the debate from a discourse on humanitarianism, to terrorism, and back to humanitarianism reflected France's (and the international community's) role as a bystander during the genocide in Rwanda. As I highlighted in Chapter II, the genocide in Rwanda became France's most serious foreign policy debacle since the Algerian War, being accused by both domestic and international actors of neglect *and* compliance with those who left approximately 800,000 Rwandans dead.[96] It served to promote a complete re-evaluation of France's role in Africa, in particular the motives of its military presence there, and led to a reorientation of France's subsequent political and military involvement on the continent.

It's no surprise then that policy-makers had in mind the trauma of the Rwandan genocide – and its negative impact on France's standing in the international system – when debating how to respond to the deteriorating situation in the CAR. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, my argument that ontological security concerns shaped the decision-making process rests on the assumption that French decision-makers experienced shame over their country's past 'failed' policy in Rwanda, contributing to the anxieties that enabled them to overcome the strong non-interventionist stance the government had taken since the beginning of the 21st century. When asked about whether this shame impacted the response to the crisis in the CAR, a personal advisor to President Hollande at the time said "the CAR – twenty years after the genocide – is a way of [rectifying the past]…[In the CAR] we [thought] a genocide [was] possible and we intervene[d] in an attempt to prevent it. This is a sort of counter Rwanda. We tried to make sure that what happened in Rwanda would not happen in the CAR."[97]

Hollande also argued that in "Central Africa we were worried about a major disaster. Several serious abuses and acts of violence, directed primarily against women, indicated that a

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[96] Nicholas J Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (OUP Oxford, 2000).
[97] Quote taken from Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 144.

risk of a genocide existed. Inevitably, I had in mind what had happened in Rwanda."[98] France's Permanent Representative at the UN, Gérard Araud, also shared this concern, urging his colleagues to act rapidly in order "to avoid the worst, to avoid a catastrophe that, alas, had already happened twenty years ago at the center of the continent".[99] The analogy with the Rwandan genocide is obvious. Furthermore, Araud referred to the genocide as happening at the center of the African continent, the same way French actors designated the CAR in order to emphasize its place and role on the African continent.

The Rwandan analogy served two purposes. On the one hand, it served (just as the terrorist narrative) to provide a narrative "script" that actors could lean on when attempting to legitimize further action. On the other hand, it highlighted that the French desire to intervene also comes from a desire to right a wrong. By preventing another Rwanda, France might be able to "cast out demons from disjunctured historical pasts".[100] To remind the reader, in attempting to secure their state's self-identity, state agents must consider both their sense of ontological security about a situation and how capable they are to produce a desired outcome. In this case, France's material capacity and sense of responsibility, combined with the recall of a particular source of shame resulting from past self-identity disruptions (i.e., Rwanda), began to create a heightened sense of anxiety in France. By preventing another genocide at the heart of Africa, French decision-makers could prove to the world that a military solution to the conflict would be an adequate, non-discriminatory response, since it was driven by humanitarian motives.[101]

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[98] François hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 17 Janvier 2014.," news release, 2014.
[99] Araud, "République Centrafricaine: Conférence De Presse Du Représentant Permanent De La France Aux Nations Unies."
[100] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 125.
[101] Gérard Araud, "République Centrafricaine: Intervention Du Représentant Permanent De La France Auprès Des Nations Unies," news release, 2014.

Since the discourse used to debate intervention came from different grounds (from a humanitarian narrative to a terrorist narrative and back again) during this phase of the decision-making process, it demonstrates that France was still processing the *meaning* of the conflict in terms of their ontological security. While the GWOT narrative was an attractive one at the beginning, the fear of another Rwanda – and the subsequent shame France would feel if it were allowed to happen on its watch – became the most relevant in the context of creating meaning for France's future actions. Fabius, acknowledging France's capacity to change the situation from which he derived a responsibility and moral obligation to intervene in order to halt a potential genocide, justified the need for action in front of the UN. There, he said "…the CAR has never faced such a tragic situation…Today, an entire population lives in fear and is subject to grave and systematic human rights violations: widespread abuse, villages burned, assassinations, rape, forced marriages, with, in addition, an increasingly sectarian and religious dimension…We have no right to ignore the CAR. We must respond, as we responded together when basic rights were violated in northern Mali, with the outcome you are familiar with. We have the ability to make the difference in the CAR. The time has come to act."[102]

Indeed, the time to act had come for the French. Overwhelming anxiety associated with the threat of ontological insecurity forced the actors to change course. Non-intervention, in this case, was simply no longer tenable once it became apparent that the crisis appealed to the actors' self-understanding as representatives of a power of influence that had to honor its obligations. As I will show in the next section, this line of reasoning – that France should be ashamed if they let the CAR down – became the primary justification following the launch of *Operation Sangaris*.

[102] Laurent Fabius, "Central African Republic, Statement by Foreign Minister Mr. Laurent Fabius, September 25," news release, 2013.

Justifying the Decision

During this phase of the decision-making process, the French used language based on human rights, empathy with the plight of the Central African population, and drew parallels with the Rwanda crisis saying that they (along with its European partners) could not stand idly by and watch the situation in the CAR unfold as had done in Rwanda 20 years prior. Specifically, language was used that justified the intervention as stemming from France's perceived obligations it derived from its military capacities and the decision-makers' belief that they truly prevented a second genocide from happening in Africa.

To support the righteousness of their decision, French actors imagined an even worse scenario in the CAR, one that was reminiscent of the catastrophe that unfolded 20 years before. Despite the horrific scene actually unfolding in Central Africa, they attempted to tell a story that made it seem like it could have been a lot worse. "What would the scale of the acts of violence and the massacres be today if France had stood idly by?", Hollande asked rhetorically. "…We would have counted the dead not in the tens, not in the hundreds, but in the thousands because the terrible threat, the terrible and insidious poison of the clash between religions had crept into [the Central African Crisis]".[103] To stand idly by, the president and his ministers argued, would have meant that France might have condoned the death of potentially 100,000 people.[104]

French leadership mainly grounded their actions in terms of France's place in shouldering a responsibility – both for France's past failures and for its promotion as a country that has certain duties in the world. As François Hollande publicly announced his decision to deploy

[103] hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 17 Janvier 2014.."; "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur La Politique De Défense De La France, À Creil Le 8 Janvier 2014," news release, 2014.
[104] Laurent Fabius, "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec France 2 Le 9 Janvier 2014, Sur La Situation En Syrie Et En Centrafrique.," news release, 2014.

French troops to the CAR, he reiterated that the UN Security Council unanimously gave consent to a resolution that mandated an African force to bring about security, to re-establish stability, and to protect the population of the CAR. "France supports this mandate," he said. "This is its [France's] duty: its duty to assist and to act in solidarity with a small country, the CAR, a country that is far from here, a friendly nation, a country that is the world's poorest country, a country that called us for help."[105]

This responsibility to act also stems from the conviction that France possessed the capabilities to change the situation on the ground. Having a continuous presence in the region and prepositioned forces (especially as they were being reallocated from the troop drawdown in Mali) made the French believe that they were the right ones to act during critical situations such as these. This, of course, is enhanced by the fact that French decision-makers "identify their country as a value-promoting entity, which is willing to defend these values even if this requires the use of force and the cost of human [French] lives."[106] The combined effect of feeling determined to intervene in situations where there is a perceived need for French action and possessing the necessary capacities within the French Army to conduct an intervention results in a very specific self-understanding of French elite's – and their country's – role in the international system. Thus, intervention becomes an option that French "decision-makers cannot easily exclude from their foreign policy toolbox".[107] As Fabius argued, using human rights abuses as a pretext for French actions but in the context of French responsibility, "I understand that the French think that this [the CAR] is far away, this [the intervention] will be costly, but when your friends are on the verge of being massacred, when the United Nations unanimously

[105] François Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur La Situation En Centrafrique, À Paris Le 5 Décembre 2013," news release, 2013.
[106] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 157.
[107] Ibid.

ask you to intervene, France has the responsibility to do it".[108] In order for France to be perceived as a great power, as a power that still has influence in the world, it has to be able to live up to its self-imposed role expectations. In this case, that role requires France to hold certain rights and duties such as the management of crises, the preservation (or an interest in the preservation) of the established system, and "the enforcement of the norms and rules of international society".[109]

The concept of morality was also used to justify the decision, with the President conjuring up images form the past to legitimize French actions. During his first state visit to the CAR after the intervention, Hollande confirmed that the need to intervene had become acute and that the only motivation that guided him to choose a military response was the desire to save "as many human lives as possible and to prevent the carnages that were imminent".[110] It's important to note, however, that François Hollande, even up until the end of his term, never publicly admitted France's role in the Rwandan genocide. He did, however, announce in 2015 that he would declassify then-President Mitterrand's Rwanda archives for research purposes by both French and Rwandan scholars. Two years later, after some debate, the French Constitutional Council actually ruled that they should remain secret. Nevertheless, after the Rwandan government said they would release their own report, President Macron appointed a 15-member team in 2019 to probe the records and investigate France's role in the genocide. Subsequently, Macron became the first French president to publicly apologize and seek forgiveness for France's role in the genocide after the two reports concluded that a colonial attitude blinded the

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[108] Fabius, "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Itélé Et Europe 1 Le 15 Décembre 2013, Notamment Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, La Lutte Contre Le Terrorisme Islamiste, La Construction Européenne Et Sur La Disparition De Nelson Mandela."
[109] For more details about the international society of states, and the responsibilities of great powers, see Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Macmillan International Higher Education, 2012).
[110] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, À Bangui Le 10 Décembre 2013."

Mitterand administration to the preparation of mass killings, holding them considerably responsible for the genocide.[111]

But the moral action of France also touches on self-identity needs of the French, which I argue compelled them to contribute to the intervention in the CAR. Repeatedly, the decisional group used self-identity phrases to mobilize support. One of these self-identity needs is the idea of exceptionalism. For example, President Hollande stated on January 20, 2014, that "France is one of the few countries in the world that possess the defense mechanism capable of confronting all kinds of threats. And I do say one of the few countries in the world".[112] Elsewhere he proclaimed that the unique combination of high-quality materials, well-trained troops, a unique strategy and military doctrine, and an important defense budget "allows us to be a great nation".[113] By elevating their country to the realm of exceptional, French actors acknowledged their role as an exceptional power and the expectations that derive from that status. This expectation, by definition, demanded intervention. As a predominant actor who concerns itself with the security of its African partners, France was able to fall back on the identity which was forged by a Gaullist-inspired security culture that attributes great importance to the virtues of autonomous decision-making and independent defense capabilities.[114]

More generally, France's recent interventions in the CAR and Mali are in line with its capacity to project forces around the globe and its claim to be at the top of an international hierarchy. This, argues Erforth, "obliges its leaders to take action beyond the country's own boundaries in order to preserve the current system and to diffuse the norms that are considered as

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[112] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur La Politique De Défense De La France, À Creil Le 8 Janvier 2014."

[113] Ibid.

[114] Irondelle and Besancenot, "France: A Departure from Exceptionalism?."

righteous".[115] In particular, it is the perceived proximity to francophone Africa that makes French actors focus their normative (moral) aspirations on that part of the world. The exceptionality of this identity bleeds through in the President's remarks where he said, "France took on its duty where it feels most involved, in Africa. We did it in Mali…and today we are in the CAR to prevent a massacre – some even speak of genocide – because we believe once again that this is our responsibility".[116] Just as in the case of Mali (as well as during the agenda-setting phases of both decision-making processes), the characterization of the actors as 'friends' and as those who share a cultural and geographic proximity comes into play here as a defining element of France's self-image vis-à-vis its African counterparts. Fabius, along with other actors, repeatedly referred to the notion that friendship obliges them to act, saying "when friends are swallowed up, we cannot ignore them and say we do not mind".[117]

Another self-identity need that compelled France to intervene in the CAR was based on the perceived requirement to protect its most cherished universal values and republican traditions; traditions which make it a country with great honor and standing. While the traditional, rationalist understanding of interventions – even humanitarian interventions – posits that they are driven by material or geostrategic interests, an ontological security interpretation posits that achieving a stable sense self (and self-esteem) is an equally important interest of a state.[118] And, according to Lebow, honor and standing are the ultimate means to achieve self-esteem in society.[119]Against this backdrop it can be argued that Prime Minster Ayrault's defense

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[115] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 159.
[116] François Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Relations Entre La France Et Les Etats-Unis, À Washington Le 11 Février 2014," news release, 2014.
[117] Laurent Fabius, "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Rmc Et Bfmtv Le 13 Janvier 2014, Sur La Situation En Syrie, Le Nucléaire Iranien, Les Interventions Militaires Françaises En Centrafrique Et Au Mali Et Sur La Grande-Bretagne Au Sein De L'union Européenne.," news release, 2014.
[118] Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003). Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*.
[119] Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

of the French intervention, according to which France "did not intervene to defend its interest…but first of all to defend our [their] values", comes closer to the truth than many critics of France's policy towards Africa would be ready to acknowledge.[120]

Those values were at the forefront of decision-makers' minds when justifying the intervention. Repeatedly they told their audiences that "all the French should be proud of what we are doing", reminding them that it is "France's responsibility and its honor to contribute to the resolution of this crisis".[121] Those values were also used to defend against those who criticized France's second intervention in less than one year as a potential constraint on the already burdened state budget. Discounting the expected cost of *Operation Sangaris*, Fabius argued that one should ignore the financial aspect of the operation because "France needs to shine (*rayonner*) and honor its international obligations".[122]

This 'image of self' guided French actors in their orientations and can be observed in the way they appeared self-conscious about their role in the world. "What would have one said about France if it had done nothing despite having forces stationed in the region?", asked Hollande. "What would have one said about the United Nations?"[123] Defense Minister Le Drian agreed when affirming that doing nothing "would have been catastrophic for France's image".[124] The need to satisfy the self-image of representatives of a *puissance d'influence*, who promotes its

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[120] Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 36 Commission Des Affaires Étrangères: Réunion, Conjointe Avec La Commission De La Défense Et Des Forces Armées, En Présence De Mgr. Dieudonné Nsapalainga, Archevêque De Bangui, Et De L'imam Oumar Kobine Layama, Président De La Communauté Islamique Centrafricaine."
[121] Gérard Araud, "République Centrafricaine: Entretien Du Représentant Permanent De La France Auprès Des Nations Unies, Avec *Rtl*," news release, 2013; Nationale, "Compte Rendu Numéro 25 Commission Des Affaires Étrangères: Audition De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères."
[122] Fabius, "Interview De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec France Inter Le 9 Décembre 2013, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, La Situation En Ukraine Et Sur Les Funérailles De Nelson Mandela."
[123] François Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 17 Janvier 2014," news release, 2014.
[124] Nationale, "Compte Rendu N° 27 Commission De La Défense Nationale Et Des Forces Armées: Audition De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Défense, Sur L'opération Sangaris En République Centrafricaine."

universal values through adherence to obligations associated with its international standing, ranks among the primary drivers of the French decision to intervene in the CAR.

A third self-identity need vocalized by the 'decisional group' was the need to reassure themselves, and the international community, that this intervention was not a rupture with the normalization process underway regarding French security policy in Africa. Under no circumstances "should the impression prevail that France acted as a guardian angel and kingmaker of any political fraction".[125] Thus, actors refrained from labeling *Sangaris* as a full-fledged military intervention. Rather, they referred it to as a gradual reinforcement of existing troop concentrations, focusing on the brevity such an operation would take, despite the fact that it was a full-scale military intervention. In fact, the operation's codename, *Sangaris*, is the name of a gentle butterfly known for its light footprint and short lifespan.[126] Aware of the risk that another military intervention could erode the normalization narrative, the official stance during the justification phase insisted that the operation "did not contradict with France's general policy of capacity building in Africa" and was entirely in line with the envisioned Africanization of Africa's security.[127]

In an effort to frame the mission as the continuation of previous policies, the president emphasized, in a statement at the start of *Operation Sangaris*, the role the African force had already played and would continue to play. The UN mandate, he reminded, was technically given to the African forces, and France was just playing a supporting role.[128] Le Drian also engaged with this self-identity need, countering critics who felt France was returning to its

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[125] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 152.
[126] Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*.
[127] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.
[128] Hollande, "Déclaration De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique, À Bangui Le 10 Décembre 2013."

unilateralist instincts in the CAR, with this line of reasoning: “I do not see why one forgets them [the African peacekeepers]. We are not alone and not only because the African forces are there but also because we are mandated by the United Nations and by the international community. Together with the African forces this mandate is clear. We are commissioned by the United Nations, by the international community. We respect this mandate that applies to the African forces and to France”.[129] The foreign minister later stated that “to stand by the Africans and not substitute them; this is our understanding of partnership with this continent of the future”.[130] Describing the operation and the role of French troops as supporting forces brought the intervention in line with the overall narrative of the reduction of France’s presence on the continent as well as the transfer of responsibility of Africa’s security to the African states themselves. This served the purpose of quieting anxieties associated with straying from the desired self-image of a country who has learned and moved on from its mistakes of meddling in African crises. Of course, this was just a story. As Erforth points out, leadership and advisors to the President and his ministers were convinced that the African forces were woefully underprepared and incapable of handling the crisis themselves.[131] From an ontological security perspective, this shows how narratives can be selectively activated to provide a cognitive bridge, or ease the “ontological dissonance”, between competing self-identifications. [132] It does so by validating a policy change that resolves a physical security challenge, while also preserving state ontological security, by offering “autobiographical continuity, a sense of routine, familiarity, and

[129] Jean-Yves Le Drian, "Interview De M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Ministre De La Défense, Avec Bfm Tv Le 11 Décembre 2013, Sur L'intervention Militaire Française En Centrafrique.," news release, 2013.
[130] Laurent Fabius, "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Dans *Les Echos* Du 9 Janvier 2014, Sur La Situation Au Mali Et En Centrafique, La Diplomatie Économique Et Sur La Politique Gouvernementale," news release, 2014.
[131] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*.
[132] Lupovici, "Ontological Dissonance, Clashing Identities, and Israel's Unilateral Steps Towards the Palestinians."

calm".[133] In this case, French leaders strategically activated part of the biographical narrative that reminded everyone that France was normalizing its relationship with its former colonies; and they strategically deactivated – or conveniently forgot – the part that reminded everyone that France was, and remains today, Africa's *gendarme*.

In the end, the decision-making phase, when analyzed through an ontological security interpretation, reveals the purpose of the intervention. It revealed how the choice to intervene was about the desire to prioritize the preservation of the nation's self-identity as a country with "certain responsibilities" over the preservation of the nation's identity as one that is "normalizing" its security policy with former colonies. As this case showed, the purpose of France's involvement was largely shaped by its perceived obligations that derived from its military capacities and the decision-makers' belief that they truly prevented a second Rwanda from happening in Africa. Past failures to live up to the national self-image contributed to France facing what Steele calls "huge self-identity costs" should they decide to *not* intervene in the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the CAR.[134] While French officials did not always defend their decision to pursue intervention using ontological security interests – they relied sometimes on a sense of responsibility that emanated from their position on the UN Security Council as well as their capacity to act – I argue that they did employ ontological security arguments to create meaning for their actions. By activating a narrative that allowed the intervention to be perceived as "business as usual", France was able to avoid the two-fold shame of 1) avoiding the tragedy of a second Rwanda, and 2) avoiding the image of a neocolonial dominator.

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[133] Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change," 611.
[134] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*, 146.

Conclusion

The crisis in the CAR was yet another instance where competing self-images and beliefs about the aims of French security policy in sub-Saharan Africa struggled with each other and shaped the decision-making process. The shift from a non-interference policy to an interventionist one in this case, however, was less visible and less abrupt than in the case of Mali. Nevertheless, the issue induced similar anxieties over ontological insecurity. When President Hollande announced his decision to deploy a peacekeeping operation to the CAR, it was framed as the only possible solution, as if there was no other choice on the matter. Again, as in the case of Mali, this suggests that it was assessed to be a critical situation which came up unexpectedly to the actors. Yet, in order to retain agency (which is the aim of an ontologically secure actor), French decision-makers were able to formulate a course of action that was consistent with a preferred version of France's self-image and created a narrative that quieted any subsequent anxieties over the choice. This choice, however, was the result of a longer, more drawn-out process during which several narratives competed for dominance. Examining that process has been the goal of this chapter.

Even more than in the case of Mali, the crisis in the CAR presented the Hollande administration with a circumstance that risked damaging France's renewed identity vis-à-vis African security. The ongoing operation in Mali had placed the administration at their material and cognitive limits, and the complicated political situation unfolding in Central Africa – which made it difficult to discern the blurred lines separating rebel factions, terrorists, and civilians at large – made the French government hesitate over a course of action. The site of the crisis as being simultaneously at the heart of the African continent and France's former colonial Empire gave rise to images of both neocolonialism *and* compassion. This invoked anxiety in French

actors, who saw the setting of the crisis as a place that reinforced both the perceived need for a French intervention and the fear of the consequences such an intervention would provoke.

French actors first tried to overcome their anxiety of justifying a more active security policy in the CAR (without invoking the impression that France was prolonging its neocolonial policies of the past) by framing the crisis there in terms of the Global War on Terrorism narrative. The move was instrumental at first, serving as a discursive tool that would make the international community more attune to a crisis in a country that had remained on the margins of the international security agenda. However, it has been argued that this was more "an expression of a belief system that had been internalized by Western elites when speaking of international security [at that time]" rather than a true interpretation of events on the ground.[135] French actors, hot off the heels of a successful intervention against Islamist extremists in Mali, were prompted to use that frame as a way to understand the crisis in the CAR as a potential safe haven for international terrorists. But once it became obvious that the GWOT narrative did not sufficiently provide *meaning* to the conflict, decision-makers reverted to the principles of honor and standing as the main explication for why France should push for intervention. The 'decisional group' evoked a self-image of being members of a great nation, one with rank and glory, and used it to compensate for the lack of a direct threat to France's national security. Yet, French actors were torn between their reluctance to launch yet another intervention on the African continent and their desire to satisfy that self-image.

At the same time, the genocide in Rwanda emerged as a principal source of shame and served as an analogy that would be used to support a French-led and internationally-supported intervention. By late summer and early fall of 2013, French leaders found themselves recalling

[135] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 166.

painful experiences (and, in some ways, acknowledging failed policies) regarding the crisis in Rwanda two decades earlier. Reminding themselves, as well as the rest of the international community, of the consequences non-intervention caused during the Rwandan crisis, the Hollande administration concluded that it could no longer stand by and be witness to yet another genocide. At this point, the shame of past failures made the current policy of non-interference ontologically unbearable. Anxiety over this looming sense of insecurity became the moment which defined a new meaning for the crisis and how the French would respond. Now, French actors decided that the need to reaffirm their self-image as a nation of honor and standing outweighed the need to avoid the label of neocolonial power. References to the Rwandan genocide and demonstrations of empathy with the Central Africans served to reinforce the moment as one where ontological security "kicked in".

However, this increased self-awareness that action was needed provoked yet another contradiction in the French discourse. By advancing the option of a French intervention, Hollande and his ministers inadvertently declared that regional actors (i.e., the African forces) were incapable of solving the problem without external help, despite the repeated commitments the administration had made to ensuring that Africa should be capable of handling its own security problems. A few months prior to the intervention, those same 'incapable' actors were described as the most effective agents in solving the Central African crisis.

How, then, did French decision-makers smooth out this contradiction to French identity? They activated a narrative which labeled their country as a *puissance d'influence*. Drawing on the Gaullist principle of *grandeur* and faced with another potential genocide on the African continent, French actors evoked the sentiment of responsibility they had with a part of the world that remains instrumental in justifying France's great power status. As Fabius announced to the

media two months after the operation commenced, “if you are a global power, you cannot walk one way while looking the other, turn a blind eye, and leave a friendly nation left to destroy itself”.[136] This sentiment of responsibility soon became the driving force behind the intervention. As President Hollande stated, “I am responsible because I am the head of a country that has [close] ties with Africa, because we are solidary with this continent…I have a particular responsibility and therefore I care for France being at the forefront”.[137]

French elites also activated a narrative that made the operation appear to be in line with previous policies up to that point. Being that it was not a new intervention, and simply a troop augmentation (when in reality it was a full-fledged military operation), France could frame the operation in terms that made it appear as if France was still committed to working alongside Africans (even though it was felt that they didn’t have the technical means to do it alone) while at the same time being true to the desired troop reductions promised by the Hollande administration. Selectively activating some parts of France’s 21st century African security identity narrative, while selectively deactivating others, was a strategic move made by the leadership, and served to bring a sense of calm and familiarity to the operation without making them feel ontologically insecure. Nevertheless, the need to intervene as a form of securing France’s identity won out over the objections against it. This identity, as I mentioned before, is rooted in French actors’ perceived self-image as being a member of a country that strives for honor and standing in the international community, and a country that has special responsibilities to stand with the people of the CAR.

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[136] Fabius, "Entretien De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Dans *Les Echos* Du 9 Janvier 2014, Sur La Situation Au Mali Et En Centrafique, La Diplomatie Économique Et Sur La Politique Gouvernementale."
[137] François Hollande, "Assemblée Générale Des Nations Unies: Conférence De Presse Du Président De La République, M. François Hollande," news release, 2013.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter, I pursue three main goals. First, I want to restate my objective and main argument for the dissertation and summarize the principal findings of the empirical chapters. Second, I propose several contributions this work has made to the broader field of security studies that uses an ontological security approach. I pay particular attention to how the concept of anxiety should be understood and what statesmen's attempts to overcome anxiety tells us about the temporality of ontological security. Finally, I end the chapter with new questions that arise from the study and share my view of where an ontological security research agenda might take us.

Primary Conclusions of this Study

The research began by highlighting the paradox that existed between a French political discourse that promoted military disengagement and African ownership of its security interests while at the same time French troops intervened twice, in less than a year, in the country's former backyard. The primary objective of this dissertation was to understand why France can't seem to let go of its role as the former *sheriff of Africa* (*gendarme de l'Afrique*) through the analysis of its two latest military interventions in sub-Saharan Africa. A key assumption of this project was that the military interventions were a choice (as opposed to a necessity). As such, understanding that choice, and the decision-making processes that led to it, has been at the heart of this project. The added benefit of this type of approach is that it might also shed light on unraveling the mysteries of contemporary French security policy in Africa.

Supplementing that primary objective was the analytical lens used to study the decision-making process: an ontological security interpretation. Thus, I adopted the premise that all states (and the leaders that represent them) seek out ontological security, and it is the need for ontological security that drives states to structure their actions – and their words – in ways which attend to their self-identity needs. I demonstrate this need, or this security interest, by highlighting the ways it shaped the decision-making processes during the crises in Mali and the CAR. These crises represented critical situations because they disrupted the self-identity of the actors involved causing them to feel anxiety over the looming 'identity insecurity'. Because states need to account for these identity threats in their foreign policy decisions, they were the perfect place to identify the ways in which French ontological security interests and, by proxy, anxieties over ontological *in*security, both constrain (like in Mali, before the Ansar ad-Din offensive changed the meaning of the crisis) and enable (like in the CAR, when the shame of Rwanda rekindled France's responsibility to its former *pré carré*) state actions. So, if my goal was to investigate how French leaders in the Hollande administration confronted identity anxieties during the crises in Mali and the CAR from 2012-2013, and how those anxieties influenced the decision-making process, what kind of conclusions can be made?

Security and Self-identity Needs

The first conclusion is that, while it is clear France continues to be an important security actor and peacekeeper in francophone Africa, spearheading many multilateral conflict resolutions and interventions, the country's present interventionism is no longer simply the result of neo-colonial path-dependencies or a means to satisfy material interests; both of which were notorious for having dictated French security policy in Africa in the past. Although there were

elements of France's traditional role (and universalist impulses) peeking through, what we saw instead was the struggle between competing self-identity needs that shaped France's decision to intervene in Mali and the CAR.

In both cases, France was torn between contradictory principles. On the one hand, French actors subscribed to the doctrine of normalization that had begun since the start of the 21st century. Their commitment to multilateralism and promotion of African self-reliance in security was prevalent. This, of course, stems from a distinct tradition in French security and strategic culture, one which directly relates to France's "missionary self-understanding".[1] As the country of human rights, France has to defend and promote these rights worldwide, particularly in Africa. This rhetoric was widespread in the early days of the two crises and the French government committed itself to limiting its involvement to low profile political or military support of an African-led force (be it AFISMA in Mali or the African peacekeeping force in the CAR). On the other hand, as representatives of an influential power – a power with certain responsibilities – French decision-makers made it their prerogative to create stability in a region where they had both the military experience and capacity, as well as the political will, to provoke change. This principle is heir to the Gaullist legacy of independence and a French security culture based on the "sacrosanct principle of autonomous decision-making and independent defence capabilities".[2] These competing self-identity needs created anxiety among the decision-makers. President Hollande, in particular, was visibly torn between these two principles. Up until the decision itself, it was unclear whether he would comply with his self-imposed constraint of non-intervention or instead satisfy the role of a *puissance d'influence* by calling for an intervention

[1] Irondelle and Schmitt, "France " 126.
[2] Irondelle and Besancenot, "France: The End of Exceptionalism?," 22.

and showing the world what France was capable of, despite that it might undermine his credibility and challenge his administration's core beliefs.

Seen this way, the fear of drifting away from a policy of normalization with its former African colonies was enough to initially keep the desire for intervention at bay. Anxiety, like it typically does in ontological security, was preserving the status quo. However, after a certain point in each case, several things changed which facilitated the Hollande administration in choosing intervention each time. Up until those points, non-intervention could have been consistent with a French identity of a power trying to move beyond the old images of *Françafrique*. After those points, however, non-intervention would most certainly have not been consistent with a deeper self-understanding of a power that still wants to matter on the world stage.

The first factor that influenced the shift away from a no-boots-on-the-ground policy was the characterization of the actors, setting, and plot as occurring in a shared space, cohabitated by those with a longstanding relationship and historical closeness. The strong connection the French feel with their francophone counterparts in Africa was ever-present in the early stages of the decision-making process. These close ties created empathy and a sense of responsibility, allowing France to justify an intervention more easily in that region as opposed to other regions where there is no shared culture, history, or language (like Afghanistan or Syria). By highlighting the literal and metaphorical vicinity of the two continents, Europe and Africa, decision-makers' understanding of the crises brought about an increased threat perception. This was especially true in Mali. However, it is surprising that the narratives buttressing a close connection between Africa and Europe were not more pronounced in the CAR, given its status as a place with a continuous and close connection with the *Hexagon*. French actors tried to avoid

references to that common history for fear it would evoke images of a less-than-honorable past and provoke negative connotations given France's infamous past involvement in the country.

Related to this sense of closeness, a second factor that facilitated the decision to intervene began to emerge. Keenly aware of African capabilities and capacities, because of its continuous presence in the regions, there was growing doubt among the French leadership that an African force, or even an African-led multilateral intervention force, could handle the crisis on their own. Once French actors became skeptical of a multilateral solution, they started down a path that challenged the established narrative of minimal interference and indirect support. In Mali, the administration made a sudden about-face, turning away from a strict non-interventionist discourse to a solution that framed France as a lead actor of a growing coalition that would fight against global terrorism. The conflict was no longer contained in the Sahel; rather it was becoming a direct threat to Europe and international security in general, something that African forces could not prevent on their own. In the CAR, the shift was more subtle, but followed a similar path. Because the African forces were overwhelmed by the inter-ethnic clashes, and woefully underequipped to handle the situation, France would step in to help a country that has a special kinship with its former colonizer.

Most importantly, the third factor that facilitated the choice to intervene was how the meaning of each crisis changed, and how that change was brought about. In Mali, the Islamist offensive changed the meaning of the conflict from domestic and civil unrest to a foreign invasion by an existential terrorist threat. Standing idly by and allowing that to happen would no longer serve France's ontological security needs. Similarly, in the CAR, fears of a humanitarian catastrophe (and haunting memories of France's role in the Rwandan genocide) changed the meaning of the crisis from a regional problem that required a regional solution to a crisis that

might bring great shame to France's honor and standing in the world. Again, as in Mali, doing nothing after this *new* meaning would not serve France's ontological security needs. Anxiety over feeling ashamed about past self-identity disruptions and driven by ontological security needs to avoid repeating an objectionable historical past, France felt compelled to choose intervention over non-intervention each time.

These two cases, then, are examples of how meaning is constantly created and changing through the process of what Steele calls self-interrogative reflexivity.[3] The French were constantly identifying who they were (identity), what each crisis was about (both before and after the changed meaning), and, most importantly, what their actions regarding the latter (the crisis in Mali and the CAR) would mean to the former (their own sense of self-identity). This reflexive monitoring, according to an ontological security approach, occurs every day, by both individuals and (to some extent) states. As such, a state's biographical narrative must continually integrate events which occur in the world and sort them into the prevailing 'story' of the self. But a biographical narrative can only be effectively sustained during times of rapidly changing external conditions through debates and contestation.[4] An ontological security approach shows that this debate was critical in shaping the outcome of the decision-making process and was instrumental in forming what France should feel most anxious about. So, it is natural to pose the following question. When and how does the meaning of a crisis have to change such that it demands French military action? Or, in other words, what creates the greatest anxiety with French decision-makers: the shame associated with being seen as a neocolonial and unilateral actor, or the shame associated with standing-by and watching a potential atrocity occur when you have the ability to stop it? In both cases the new meaning of the crises, and the decision to intervene in

[3] Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the I.R. State*.
[4] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*.

response to that new meaning, suggests that France feels more secure when it preserves its identity as a humanitarian actor, one with special responsibilities (which are, or course, related to its capabilities in the region) as opposed to when it secures its identity as a power who is willing to 'let go' of its role as the *gendarme*.

Narratives, Ontological Security, and Policy Change

Another major conclusion I make is that French actors were able to activate an important narrative that served to smooth out ontological dissonance in their competing self-images towards sub-Saharan Africa. As we saw above, choosing non-intervention would serve to secure the identity of France as being a power that wishes to continue normalizing its relations with Africa and be seen as a player that is moving away from the notorious days of *la Françafrique.* Similarly, choosing intervention would serve to secure the identity of France being a residual world power, one that can still be great (*grandeur*) and influential because it fulfills its special responsibilities in the international community. However, choosing one course of action over the other creates a dilemma; the intervention serves to satisfy some ontological security needs while sacrificing others. The dilemma itself is enough to create existential anxieties. How do the French square this dilemma? How do they manage these anxieties and keep them at bay? They do so by activating a narrative that captures both the concept of responsibility (which erases doubt from naysayers who are suspect of France's neocolonial and unilateralist impulses) and the concept of *grandeur* (which is an important tradition in French foreign policy).

The *puissance d'influence* narrative is what captures elements of the Gaullist legacy in French security policy while at the same time preserving the idea that France is normalizing its relationship with its former colonies. This is tricky to accomplish because the narrative needs to

activate certain elements of the state biographical narrative while at the same time deactivating others. One traditional element that was activated in the influential power narrative was the concept of responsibility. Despite the extreme costs an intervention entails, the Hollande administration still deemed it was their responsibility to act; a responsibility that is a carryover of the traditional Gaullist legacy, for France has long felt if it is to remain a great power it has a responsibility to emanate the greatness that is France (such as language, culture, and values). A strong identification with a certain conception of the French state and its role in the world was activated, turning the President (who was sometimes seen as hesitant leading up to the Mali intervention) into Commander Hollande.[5] As he stated during the CAR crisis, "I am responsible because I am the head of state of a country that has [close] ties with Africa; because I stand in solidarity with the continent…I have a particular responsibility and therefore I care that France is at the forefront".[6]

Also, as we saw, deactivating the less-than glorious elements of Gaullism were prevalent. For instance, the French were quick to remind the international audience that all of these interventions were based on legitimate UN resolutions; it was not the French themselves who self-legitimized the interventions. They reminded everyone that these interventions would be short in-and-out operations (never mind that *Sangaris* lasted three years and *Serval* morphed into *Barkhane*, which was a decade-long counterterrorism operation); it was not a return to continuous presence and was still in line with the drawdown of troops like the administration promised. Furthermore, they declared that all operations should take a multilateral form and would be guided by the principle of Africanization of African security (despite the doubts the

[5] Notin, *La Guerre De La France Au Mali*.
[6] Hollande, "Conférence De Presse De M. François Hollande, Président De La République, Sur La Crise Syrienne, La Situation Au Liban, Les Relations Franco-Iraniennes Et Sur L'afrique, À New York Le 24 Septembre 2013."

French had that an African force could sufficiently attend to the crises); they did not intervene unilaterally simply because they could.

Ultimately, in order to preserve the idea of France (or what it means to be French), actors bridged the cognitive divide by employing existing tropes of French *grandeur* into a modern narrative which situates the actors as representatives of a *puissance d'influence*. This new narrative is part of today's jargon surrounding French foreign policy; the concept of *grandeur* has "almost entirely disappeared from the French political discourse, being considered a relic from the colonial and postcolonial past".[7] The narrative of *puissance d'influence* comes without preconceived ideas of neocolonialism and is therefore a preferred talking point among the political elite. There is familiarity with the narrative without all the baggage, allowing a policy change (that might otherwise be ontologically unacceptable) to occur without disrupting state biographical continuity and ontological security. Chief among the principles of what it means to be an influential power is "the positive perception of France across the globe" which is the justificatory self-narrative that adequately links the state's actions (i.e., intervention) with the content and meaning of its biographical narrative.[8] Narrating this principle, France can simultaneously exist in the international system as a security actor on the African continent, as a democracy promoter and human rights defender, and as a power that does not shy away from using force as long as it helps defend the values and ideas to which the nation subscribes. Values, it believes, it can radiate (*rayonner*) to the rest of the world.

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[7] Erforth, *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*, 13.
[8] Fabius, "Extraits D'un Entretien Avec L'association De La Presse Étrangère De M. Laurent Fabius, Ministre Des Affaires Étrangères, Sur Les Défis Et Priorités De La Politique Étrangère De La France, À Paris Le 20 Novembre 2012."

Interventions in Africa as a "Routinized" Foreign Policy Practice

Ultimately, my analysis in this dissertation rests on the argument that the interventions in Mali and the CAR, which were based on very different crises (threat of global terrorism emanating from the Sahel, the risk of another genocide in central Africa), were chosen because they not only contributed to international stability, but also to the security of France's very self-image. It is fair to say that France's identity (or the identity it wishes to project) in the international system is intertwined with Africa's instability; there is a reciprocal character to the relationship. France can only fulfill this identity if there is a place for this identity to be put into practice, which is France's traditional sphere of influence. There is a deep attachment to the crises in Africa, and this attachment keeps the option to intervene alive. This observation leads to the possibility that France might actually *want* (or even *need*) conflict in Africa. Why would this be so? Shouldn't France actually want to avoid conflict, or avoid the need to intervene?

My final conclusion is that the African interventions of the Hollande administration, and the relationship that French identity has with military interventions, is a routine; and this routine is what helps secure state identity. As I highlighted in chapter III, states (and the individuals who lead them) need stable identities, they need ontological security. But standing in the way of a stable identity is the uncertainty around us all of the time, deep profound uncertainty. Routines with significant others is how we keep that anxiety at bay. If we were constantly aware of all of the world's dangers all of the time, our anxiety would be so intense that it would be impossible to act at all.

Because routinized relationships stabilize identities, states become attached to the self-identity needs those routines support.[9] In other words, for France to be a power that matters in

[9] Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma."

the international system – for France to be France – it needs to assume the role of Africa's regional protector. By routinely engaging in forms of military intervention, military intervention functions as a practice that promises to tame insecurity, while simultaneously allowing France to fix a sense of self-identity in the face of systemic and environmental uncertainty. As a medium-sized power that wants to "punch above its weight", France uses interventions (both military and otherwise) as a way to reestablish a coherent autobiographical narrative. When read as a routine, military interventions serve to restore confidence in France's ability to manage crises, tame existential anxieties (for themselves and, as they argue, for the rest of the world), and promise to reinstate a sense of agency.

But France can't do that unless there is instability and conflict on the continent. Moreover, interventions as a routinized relationship requires that Africans respond predictably, giving the French a steady flow (so to speak) of instability and conflict, so that they continuously feel the need to intervene. This, of course, is impossible to control. For the moment, however, French interventions into Africa are still influenced by African elites who seek the security guarantee of their former colonizers and who play a key role in feeding into and reinforcing the image that France is trying so desperately to move away from. One example is in the case of *Serval*, when phone calls from the presidents of Senegal and Niger, who feared the impact of instability in their neighbor Mali, were made to President Hollande, urging him to intervene.[10] What is perceived by francophone African leaders as the French security guarantee still gives African leaders a major role in influencing French military policy. The French desire to maintain the credibility of its security guarantee, and to remain a pivotal actor in Africa (and on the world stage), has reinforced this dynamic. This, in turn, has made French leaders susceptible to

[10] Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective."

pressure from the demands of African leaders who are eager to exploit the security guarantee for their own benefit.[11]

This leads to a quandary. What happens if elites stop resorting to French assistance in security matters? While African elites are behaving 'predictably' for the time being, there may be a time when this is no longer the case. In fact, it is already beginning to happen. For instance, last year Mali turned its back on France in favor of Russia and the Wagner Group to help it fight Islamist militants.[12] The move came amidst waning Malian support for French forces despite the fact that they initially made great strides against militants in 2013. Their success even resulted in the French receiving a hero's welcome in Bamako. Similarly, in the years following the end of *Operation Sangaris*, the newly elected president Faustin-Archage Touadéra (who still only had control of about 20% of his country) grew mistrustful, just as his predecessors, of his own army and frustrated with what he considered the ineffective French military presence and UN peacekeepers.[13] Consequently, he turned to Russia and the Wagner Group in a bid to re-establish control over rebel-held areas. Russian propaganda has facilitated this turn. It is relentless, anti-western, and filled with references to France's former colonial impulses.[14] This, in turn, has fueled a growing desire among francophone African elites to look elsewhere (i.e., not towards France) for future partners. If African leaders no longer turn to the French security guarantee, France's identity and purpose in the international system will be seriously challenged. And without interventions, France risks losing the ability to satisfy its very self-image as a universal

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[11] This, as I have argued, has made it more difficult for France to break away from the perception of the *gendarme* of Africa.
[12] Beverly Ochieng, "Lavrov in Africa: Have Wagner Mercenaries Helped Mali's Fight against Jihadists?," *BBC News*, 7 February 2023.
[13] Roger Cohen, "Putin Wants Fealty and He's Found It in Africa," *The New York Times*, December 24 2022.
[14] Ibid.

democracy promoter, human rights defender, and an important player in the international system.[15]

Contributions to Ontological Security Studies

This dissertation has made three main contributions, which I will outline below.

Process over Outcomes

First, it has shown how a process-oriented analysis through an ontological security interpretation of foreign policy can improve our understanding of state choices, particularly those that lead to violent action. By attempting to interpret the events as they unfolded, and by isolating self-identity as the referent object of security, I argue that we might better explain why France continues to interfere in African security matters. This approach challenges the outcome-oriented explanations that have persisted in the study of French foreign policy analysis, making the point that we should pay as much attention to how policy is made as we do to how policy is practiced.

The close analysis of processes has revealed two other important points. First, and rather simply, analogies – when read as a narrative 'script' – can be quite persuasive in altering

[15] French politicians are very sensitive to this image, particularly in the Sahel, and the effects of Russian propaganda on smearing that image. For example, the Defense Minister recently criticized a scene in the movie "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" over its depiction of French troops. In the film, a soldier is portrayed in a French uniform as someone who wanted to pillage and exploit Wakanda's (fictional country) natural resource, Vibranium (fictional mineral). The French took offense, saying that it seemed to have latched onto Russian propaganda in the region – perhaps unintentionally – that uses similar images to undermine French influence in order to gain a stronger foothold for the Wagner group. However, in line with narrative activation in order to smooth out inconsistencies or disruptions to ontological security, the French couched their criticism under the veil of fighting Russian propaganda for the greater good of the international community, as opposed to a criticism that admitted their own shame over the post-colonial process. See Pierre Bairin and Marguerite Lacroix, "French Defense Ministry Condemns 'Black Panther: Wakanda Forever' over Depiction of French Troops," *CNN* 2023.

meaning and achieving goals. A narrative 'script' can simplify reality and provide insight into the future through an "ideologically filtered reconstruction of past events and [imputation] of their lessons."[16] They give meaning to a contested present and unknown future. For example, we saw how analogies referring to Afghanistan shifted perceptions that a grave terrorist threat was bubbling in the Sahel. Similarly, analogies to Rwanda correlated with an increased willingness by the French to deploy a peacekeeping operation to the CAR; without French intervention, the only other possible outcome of the crisis (according to the analogy) was that there would be another genocide.

And the other important point the examination of process unveiled was how there can be more than one version of the French 'self'. There are many layers of and many versions of what it means to be French. While studying military interventions does not capture *every* version of the French self, these two cases did capture competing versions of a certain identity, as the decision-makers were torn between their commitment to multilateralism and their belief that France needs to act. The national narrative of French security practices in Africa, in other words, is formed out of these competing sets of ideas. These biographical sub-narratives, as I am calling them, are what constitute true French identity; and this identity is constantly being negotiated and contested, whether it is during a crisis abroad or during a crisis at home. By examining the processes that led to French interventions, I showed that national identity is neither given nor immutable but emerges from a process of interpretation. State identity, and the desire to secure that identity from threat, is always the result of struggle between competing narratives. By explaining the process of how this struggle shaped the decision-making, a more precise understanding of foreign policy-making becomes possible.

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[16] Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*.

Anxiety and Change in Foreign Policy

The second contribution is a response to a criticism that is common to studies that use an ontological security interpretation to explain foreign policy choices, which is that ontological security scholars are conservative, or that they prefer stability and status quo over change.[17] The rigidity in foreign policy choices, in these studies, is explained through the concept of anxiety. Because the key concern of ontological security studies is how states manage uncertainty – which is understood as generating anxiety – actors are taken to view change, especially if it contradicts the autobiographical narrative, as something negative to be avoided. This is because states become attached to their identity-sustaining routines and relationships; those routines help define 'who we are' as a nation.[18]

This was indeed the case in the early stages of both case studies as it explains France's commitment to non-intervention and multilateralism in the early stages of the decision-making processes. For the French, it was the tremendous anxiety that would result from a rupture of the normalization process (and the stigma of being seen as a neocolonial dominator) that explains the on-the-surface irrational choice to stay out of a conflict that they might have easily prevented if they intervened earlier.[19] In line with the ontological security interpretation, anxiety inhibited that behavioral change.

However, at the same time, we see that anxiety also enabled change, but only after the meaning of each conflict was resolved. When faced with this new meaning (global terrorism in Mali, risk of genocide in the CAR) France had two choices: it could either change its policy position (its behavior) or its self-conception. The demands of ontological security demanded that

[17] See for instance Krickel-Choi, "The Concept of Anxiety in Ontological Security Studies."; ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] This is particularly true in the CAR.

it choose the former in order to quiet anxieties. However, the behavioral change was accompanied by a discursive change which was necessary to maintain a stable sense of identity. Enabling this change was that the choice to intervene was not a completely new policy; France has a long history of military interventions into its former colonies. Nevertheless, what is important in this study is that anxiety can be seen as a concept that both inhibits *and* promotes change.

But the logical question that follows is when, and under what conditions, does anxiety promote or inhibit change? Vis-à-vis African security matters, appeals to France's role and responsibility as a former Great Power – or as an influential power – might always trump appeals to France's efforts to normalize its relationship with its former colonies. Consequently, the anxiety felt by the state should it not honor its role as a *puissance d'influence* becomes unbearable; anxiety produces the policy change that ontological security demands. This is because there is a distinct difference between the degree to which anxiety and ontological insecurity can be overcome regarding France's competing biographical sub-narratives. On the one hand, there is nothing that France can do when engaging on the African continent (except for maybe promoting *la Francophonie*) that can overcome anxiety associated with the stigma of neocolonialism. No matter whether France interferes or not, that stigma will always be there. However, on the other hand, there *is* something France can do to overcome anxieties associated with being complicit in something that it was fully prepared and capable of preventing. Intervention, in this case, quiets anxieties and the story of being an influential power squares the policy change with a consistent self-identity. There is no way France can justify non-intervention in the face of a humanitarian catastrophe (or existential terrorist threat) in its traditional sphere of

influence with any version of its biographical narrative. Standing idly by is not even remotely a part of the story of what it means to be French.[20]

Temporality of Ontological Security

The final contribution of this project is that is supports a recent move in the study of ontological security, which is beginning to inch away from understanding the concept as less a 'security of *being'* and more as 'security of what we are *trying to be'*.[21] Giddens' focus in ontological security, which is related to Laing's belief in "integral selfhood", is that it is something that individuals – and collectives – can possess and have.[22] What this dissertation shows is that ontological security is a process that is constantly in progress. It is a temporal process of always wanting 'to be' while never quite getting there. Scholarship on security and identity, and the aim of this project, is beginning to focus on how that process occurs.

Such a shift in focus implies that there is no core or autonomous 'self' to return to in order to feel ontologically secure. Rather, there is a layering of identities that overlap.[23] Take the French desire for multilateralism for instance, and the military operations in the Sahel since the start of *Operation Serval* in Mali.[24] As I mentioned before, the multilateral approach has been at

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[20] In fact, Hollande was one of the first leaders to encourage a military response to Syria in the summer of 2013 after it became public that the Assad regime used chemical weapons against its own population, crossing a 'red line' set by the Obama administration in the months leading up to the attack. France, however, did not have the backing it hoped for, and no military intervention took place. While a different set of French identities are applicable to the Arab world when compared to Africa, which might explain France's reluctance to intervene unilaterally, the case is important as it shows a deep desire to avoid a label of a country who can simply stand back and watch an atrocity unfold, let alone occur without recourse. The shame would be unbearable.

[21] Kinnvall and Mitzen, "Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security in World Politics: Thinking with and Beyond Giddens."

[22] Laing, *Self and Others*; Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*.

[23] See, for instance Jeroen Van der Heijden, "Institutional Layering: A Review of the Use of the Concept," *Politics* 31, no. 1 (2011). My intent is not to introduce a new concept so late in the dissertation, rather to point to an avenue of research to which my own can contribute.

[24] *Operation Serval* morphed into *Barkhane*, a regional intervention to counter terrorism in cooperation with the G5 Sahel countries – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger – which ended in 2022.

the forefront of France's approach to military interventions in Africa since the 1994 Rwanda genocide, but the recent operations in the Sahel have shown that older forms of unilateralism continue to reassert themselves.[25] They have been layered into a hybrid form of multilateralism. For example, while *Operation Barkhane* (*Serval's* follow-on mission) was organized as a multilateral coalition, despite France spearheading the intervention into Mali in 2013, it has been argued that the operation has left room for a multilateral approach that incorporates features that invoke practices that pre-date 1994.[26] One of those practices is that France wants to always be the *lead* nation in the fight against terrorism. Turning to a normative interpretation of the crisis emphasizing shared interests in the fight against terrorism and protecting Mali's sovereignty, France was able to win support from the AU, EU, and the UN during the intervention. This form of legitimization can be seen as a carryover of the way France used to self-legitimize interventions. Self-legitimization is simply replaced by France guaranteeing it maintains a leadership position. Similarly, recasting the objective as a stabilizing mission for African peace and security can be seen as a carryover of France's policing mission as the *gendarme* of Africa. This is reminiscent of previous practices and an old identity that France is trying to move away from.

It has also been argued that *Operation Barkhane* was formed as an ad-hoc coalition, with France choosing partners of opportunity in order to justify its multilateral ambitions.[27] While there is indeed a regional counterterrorism force, it is France which handles the majority of kinetic operations and use of force to counter terrorists.[28] EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Mali

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[25] Remember, at the onset of each crisis, France preferred to put its efforts into supporting actions authorized by the UN and led by regional bodies such as ECOWAS.
[26] Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde, "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutionalist Perspective."
[27] Ibid.
[28] Michael Shurkin, "France's War in the Sahel and the Evolution of Counter-Insurgency Doctrine," *Texas National Security Review* 14 (2020).

simply retrained the armies and focused on security sector reform. In other words, it became predominantly a French mission. Also, forces from *Barkhane* intervened in February 2019 in an old-style unilateral military intervention at the request of Chadian President Idriss Déby to beat back rebels who were advancing from Libya.[29] French operations in the western Sahel have been a location where multilateral identities are being merged with the old unilateral practices.

So, going back to the focus on ontological security as a process that is in continual progress, we see in this project how French actors are constantly struggling with achieving security of their identity; because that identity is deeply embedded and attached in unconscious ways. Thus, anxiety is an ever-present emotion and statesmen and diplomats are seen to be in a continuous battle with keeping that anxiety at bay. In the case of France, this dissertation has opened up the 'black box' of anxieties that exist vis-à-vis its African security policy. Anxieties are not monolithic. Furthermore, anxieties (much like identities) are not stagnant. They are ever-changing. As such, commitment to the norm of multilateralism might not always constitute an anxiety-generating moment. Although deviating from a multilateral framework was justified as a brief and necessary infringement of the norm, future deviations themselves might become the new norm. As Barnett and Finnemore have shown, even small deviations can set a precedent and affect future action.[30] "Over time, these exceptions can become the rule – they become normal, not exceptions at all: they can become institutionalized to the point where deviance is 'normalized'."[31]

In closing, I would like to add one more point revealed by focusing on the temporal nature of ontological security, which is that in the pursuit of keeping anxieties at bay – anxieties

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[29] VOA News, "Backing Chad's Deby, French Warplanes Stop Rebel Advance from Libya," news release, 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/french-military-stops-hostile-progression-into-chad/4771473.html.
[30] Barnett and Finnemore, "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations."
[31] Ibid., 721-22.

generated by international or cultural norms – we see that actors are in some ways limited to the extent that they have control over their security. Social practices and other forms of institutional and normative 'power' can circumscribe agency and individual choices. This 'power' is not fully recognized in the ontological security studies literature and is an avenue for future research.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

While this dissertation, and the approach used in it, has revealed additional (and I might add more complete) understandings of contemporary French security policy in Africa, it has also prompted several new questions. Chief among those is what happens to France when it can no longer sustain – or is no longer deemed responsible for – interventions into Africa? I have already highlighted a gradual shift of preference in both Mali and the CAR away from France, and towards Russian mercenaries, as a security guarantor. But the French army also faces a challenge to readiness, owed in large part to heavy budget cuts and austerity measures prompted by the eurozone crisis, exacerbated by the burden of sustaining ongoing overseas operations, most notably *Operation Barkhane* in the Sahel and the homeland security operation known as *Operation Sentinelle*.[32] France's approach to security has evolved to include humanitarian intervention under the doctrine of the responsibility to protect (R2P), which also now includes the war on terror. Such mission creep dramatically overstretches French military capabilities. The result has been a struggle to conduct training in conventional, large-scale warfare which might include high-intensity conflict in Europe. Military overextension may not only result in French armed forces being unable to accomplish the peacekeeping goals of protecting civilians

[32] *Sentinelle* is a French military operation with 10,000 soldiers and 4,700 police and gendarmes first deployed after the 2015 Île-de-France attacks, and was reinforced following the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. Stéphanie Pézard, Michael Shurkin, and David Ochmanek, "A Strong Ally Stretched Thin: An Overview of France's Defense Capabilities from a Burdensharing Perspective," (2021).

and preventing genocide, but also could leave France in a position so reduced that it will not be able to defend itself in the future.[33] This struggle was made relevant by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

This, naturally, leads to the question of whether there are other ways of securing France's national self-image in Africa *without* military interventions. Why, in other words, does France resort to the use of force to secure its identity? This question, along with the implications of a country that can no longer sustain (or justify) military interventions in Africa, is something that can be addressed in future work on French foreign policy analysis.

So, in closing, I would like to propose where an ontological security interpretation of French foreign policy analysis might take us. At the core of my proposition is to question whether France's attachment to a disengaged and multilateral identity regarding its African security policy is an attainable narrative. Or is it, in other words, a fantasy? Recent scholarship on ontological security has begun to take the concept of fantasy – which is conceptualized as the linguistic construction of the social world and our identity in it– more seriously, arguing that it allows us to better understand our ability to cope in an uncertain and anxiety-inducing environment.[34] By identifying an object of desire which might not always be attainable – in this case an identity of French disengagement with African security matters – we might better capture the ways how exactly ontological security is sought through narratives. And in doing so, we also might better understand why French security policy in Africa is so hard to change.

In particular, a focus on fantasy narratives can illuminate how the search for ontological security – although a very powerful story that plays a crucial part in the narratives that individuals, collectives, and states construct to make sense of themselves – is just that, a story. It

[33] Yates, "French Military Interventions in Africa."
[34] Eberle, "Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression: Fantasy as a Factor in International Politics."

is a fantasy that can never quite be fulfilled. So, in response to increased feelings of ontological insecurity people, groups, and states temporarily close down categorical identifications (such as, in the case of France, 'colonizer', 'dominator', or 'global player') in favor of something else. It is a form of representational fantasy that works to defend against emotional anxiety and traumatic experiences. We saw this occurring in both case studies as France tried desperately to cling to a normalized approach to its role in African security affairs. However, there was perhaps not enough attachment to that fantasy – not enough desire. Hence, France reverted to a policy that was reminiscent of its old way of doing business.

My recommendation for future research, then, is for scholars (including myself) to look at how these categorical identifications look in practice and what particular fantasy narratives are presented to pin down a sense of togetherness, cohesion, and wholeness. This means asking a number of questions regarding how we empirically study cases of ontological security, which are often focused on the study of discourse and narratives and how they represent the relationship between self-identity and security. One question to ask, in particular, is if the study of narratives is enough to properly capture the emotional dimension of ontological security (the fantasy aspect). I believe that we also need to study the attachment to such fantasy narratives, and why certain fantasies are more appealing than others, and to whom do they appeal the most (i.e., domestic versus international audiences, for instance). In the case of France, I would like to know why the attachment to an influential power fantasy narrative "sticks". What is the exact mechanism that makes this fantasy compelling when others aren't? This, of course, becomes important if we consider some of the other important discourses of French society and politics today, such as the nationalist and populist discourses of the far right (e.g., Marine Le Pen and the National Rally), migration discourses and the fear of 'others' (e.g., the Burkini ban), and

discourses on war (e.g., the desire for Strategic Autonomy). What is it in these discourses that emotionally affect people, and how do they generate a response that reflects our unconscious need for attachment?

More generally, studying the mechanisms of attachment to fantasy narratives can shed light on how we study security-centered narratives as a whole, and when certain security narratives might be more willingly adopted by others. Take, for example, security studies which analyze European integration focusing on the EU as a security union, as a strategically autonomous actor, as a European way of life, etc.[35] How can we establish what such security-centered narratives look like, and how can we go beyond self-representations of such security narratives in order to problematize their historical emergence in terms of some other fantasy? For instance, in the case of the EU, is the attachment to integration an attachment to an imperialist fantasy? Or, in the case of France, is the attachment to Strategic Autonomy (an autonomous European security actor with France as its leader), particularly with respect to security threats emanating from Africa, an attachment to a civilizing mission fantasy (whereby France is trying to push its values onto the rest of the European Union)? The goal, as I see it, is that we need to move away from simply identifying what that attachment is and move closer to identifying *why* that attachment is there (at both the discursive and individual level) and *how* it persists; what pre-existing power structures work at both the unconscious and conscious level of the state and its leaders? In the case of French security policy in Africa, this offers the opportunity to identify why French actors routinely turn to military intervention as a way to solidify their importance as a global security actor, and how such an attachment continues today, even as a new generation of leaders emerge that were born after the decolonization period. Instead of studying the stories that

[35] Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners, and Jennifer Mitzen, "Introduction to 2018 Special Issue of European Security:“Ontological (in) Security in the European Union”," *European security* 27, no. 3 (2018).

bring a sense of ontological security, I want to see more research into the thing that makes those stories so convincing in the first place; what makes them "dominant" in the case of France.[36] In other words, the focus should move towards identifying what exactly it is we are studying as opposed to how we study it.

Nevertheless, as this dissertation has shown, French security policy in Africa to this day remains under the influence of the colonial past. However, one should not understand the colonial past and present action as standing in a causal relationship to one another. Past action does not determine future action. In these cases, the decision to intervene was a matter of choice and understanding that choice has been at the heart of this project. France's colonial history, while an important element, constitutes only one among many of the current political and cultural identities to which present-day actors attribute their decisions. It is thus not surprising that the colonial past is referred to both as the reason for non-intervention *and* the justification for intervention**.** Still, what we see in France today is that interventions are guided mainly by ensuring their political standing in the world. Even though the French would like to see more European support in terms of financial and human resources, they still have a self-perceived sense of responsibility which has become a part of the French foreign policy identity. And, as I suggested before, what would happen to France's attachment to its identity in the international system if it were no longer needed to defend its values and friends in the world? Would it be able to "let go" of its role as a global security actor, particularly in Africa? I think a focus on fantasy narratives might help us figure that out.

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[36] I propose an analysis akin to that made by Krebs who studies the rise and fall of dominant narratives or how the staying power of the relevance of nuclear weapons narrative can be understood through seeing the weapon as an object of fetishism among nuclear powers. See Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of Us National Security*, 138; Anne Harrington de Santana, "Nuclear Weapons as the Currency of Power: Deconstructing the Fetishism of Force," *Nonproliferation Review* 16, no. 3 (2009).

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