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Bc. Jan Strnad

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French counterinsurgency: case study of Mali

Master's thesis

Author: **Bc. Jan Strnad**

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Supervisor: PhDr. JUDr. Tomáš Karásek Ph. D.

Year of the defence: 2022

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 28.04.2022

Jan Strnad

References

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Abstract

This thesis is dedicated to French intervention in Mali between the years 2013 and 2022. Insurgency in Mali led to the deployment of French forces in Operation Serval from 2013 to 2014. However, because of the unstable situation was French presence in Mali prolonged, and Operation Serval was succeeded by Operation Barkhane. In this case is tested claim of a group of authors that French counterinsurgency became similar to the US counterinsurgency after their cooperation in Afghanistan. In order to answer the research question *Has French counterinsurgency become similar to the US counterinsurgency?* by proving/disproving settled hypothesis are conducted qualitative analyses of Operations Serval and Barkhane. The theoretical framework is provided by the concept of Counterinsurgency's Impossible Trilemma by Lorenzo Zambardi. The results of both analyses and thus the overall result is disproof of the hypothesis because the French nature of counterinsurgency has not changed, however, the writing of current French doctrine was inspired by the US counterinsurgency doctrine.

Abstrakt

Tato práce je zaměřena na francouzskou intervenci v Mali mezi lety 2013 a 2022. Povstání v Mali vedlo k přítomnosti francouzských jednotek v letech 2013-2014 v rámci operace Serval. Vzhledem k nestabilitě situace byla francouzská přítomnost v Mali prodloužena a operace Serval byla nahrazena operací Barkhane. Na tomto příkladu je testován názor skupiny autorů, kteří přišli s tvrzením, že francouzská counterinsurgency se stala totožnou s tou americkou z důvodu jejich spolupráce v Afganistánu. S cílem zodpovědět výzkumnou otázku *Stala se francouzská counterinsurgency podobná té americké?* za pomoci potvrzení/vyvrácení stanovené hypotézy jsou provedeny kvalitativní analýzy operací Serval a Barkhane. Teoretický rámec je zajištěn teorií Counterinsurgency's impossible trilemma od Lorenza Zambardiho. Výsledky obou analýz a tím pádem i kompletní výsledek celé práce je zamítnutí stanovené hypotézy, jelikož se francouzská kultura counterinsurgency nezměnila, přestože byla současná francouzská doktrína při své tvorbě inspirována tou americkou.

Keywords

France, US, counterinsurgency, doctrine, Mali, insurgency, Serval, Barkhane

Klíčová slova

Francie, Spojené Státy, counterinsurgency, doktrína, Mali, povstání, Serval, Barkhane

Název práce

Francouzská protipovstalecká doktrína: případová studie Mali

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Introduction

Asymmetric conflicts are one of the main characteristics of warfare in the 21st century. Even though they are old as humanity itself, modern armies are still struggling with dealing with them. Each army has its own way how to suppress insurgency – this is called counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgency in particular countries is sometimes described and defined in counterinsurgency doctrines – these doctrines comprise a theoretical core for potential actions in the case of the start of insurgency. And because there is no universal way, countries seek to evolve and improve their counterinsurgency doctrines by inventing new methods and approaches or by finding inspiration in counterinsurgency doctrines of other countries. As matadors of counterinsurgency were seen for a long time Great Britain and France, but with the rise of globalisation and change of thinking in the Western world, this could not be true these days. The prim in warfare of the last decades is played by the US army, which experienced few counterinsurgency campaigns but does not have such a rich history as the two already mentioned countries. By taking inspiration from Great Britain and France, and gaining experience in the field, the US evolved its own counterinsurgency doctrine which gained fame, especially during invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Afghanistan became something as “a globalisation of warfare” – participating armies influenced each other, and it was especially the US army that was taken as a model for inspiration. This set the first motivation for writing this thesis because a few years later authors M. Shurkin, H. Armstrong, and G. Gentile claimed that it was cooperation in Afghanistan that influenced and changed French counterinsurgency. The aim of this thesis is to testify to this claim and assess whether is it true or not by the use of qualitative analysis. As a case for a test of this claim is used the situation in Mali between the years 2013 – 2022 where France intervened with Operation Serval and continued with Operation Barkhane since 2014. However, because of the character and capacity, this work only focuses on the testing of the claim mentioned above and does not aim to explain reasons which led to it or circumstances under which this claim was made. The thesis is constructed in the theoretical part and empirical part, theoretical part includes chapters dedicated to theory and concepts of counterinsurgency, the evolvement of French and US counterinsurgency, and the identification of characteristics of both counterinsurgency doctrines. The last chapter of the theoretical part includes the research question and hypothesis + theoretical framework used for proving/disproving of the hypothesis. The empirical part is designed into two main

blocks following two analysed operations. Each block includes subchapters of the planned design of the operation, the course of the operation, and the identification of characteristics of French and US factors. The last part is dedicated to the assessment of results, evaluating the hypothesis, and answering the research question.

Conceptual framework and literature review

1. Counterinsurgency

As in English, where the term counterinsurgency (COIN) is a compound of two words, the origin of the word itself is found in two expressions. The prefix of the word comes from the Latin *contra*, which can be loosely translated as “opposite” or “against”. (Harper, 2022a) The root of the word comes from the Latin word *insurgentem*, which is the present perfect of *insurgere* and means “rise against”, “stand high” or “lift oneself”. (Harper, 2022b) But what is COIN? As far as the definition is concerned, COIN suffers from the same malady as all concepts in social sciences - every definition can be right and wrong at the same time, and it is impossible to come up with a universal definition that would cover the whole issue.

Nevertheless, in the course of research on COIN there have been attempts to define the whole issue in more or less detail. This has led to 4 approaches of defining COIN. The first approach is a short general definition that tries to be as broad as possible. Examples of these definitions can often be found in dictionaries, but also in many authors. The Oxford Interpretive Dictionary gives the definition of COIN as *"an action taken against a group of people who are trying to take control of a country by force"* (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2022). Clearly, this definition is so general that many other terms besides COIN would fit. The Cambridge Dictionary definition, while comparable in length to the previous definition, is much more specific - *"military action taken by a government to prevent attacks by small groups of soldiers or fighters that are opposed to it"* (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022) Although this definition is already more specific, it is still too general. The second approach is the opposite of the previous one - it is a long and specific definition. In general, the longer the definition, the more specific it tries to be. It is the over-specificity that is problematic here, where these definitions cannot be applied to nearly identical phenomena that differ only in insignificant variables. An example of such a definition can be found in R. Scott Moore's *The Basics of Counterinsurgency* (2007): *"Counterinsurgency is an integrated set of political, economic, social, and security measures intended to end and prevent the recurrence of armed violence, create and maintain stable political, economic, and social structures, and resolve the underlying causes of an insurgency in order to establish and sustain the conditions necessary for lasting stability."* The third approach differs from the two previous ones. It does not seek a direct definition and instead tries to express the

definition as a causal effect. The best example can be found in Galula, who commented on the efforts to define COIN: "...counterinsurgency is only an effect of insurgency. Furthermore, counterinsurgency cannot be defined except by reference to its cause. Paraphrasing Clausewitz, we might say that "Insurgency is the pursuit of the policy of a party, inside a country, by every means." It is not like an ordinary war-a "continuation of the policy by other means"-because an insurgency can start long before the insurgent resorts to the use of force." (Galula, 2006) Thus, according to this definition, it is clear that COIN cannot exist on its own, and the necessary condition for COIN to exist is insurgency, in which case COIN does not need to be further defined, as it is an opposing reactive force to the insurgency. The fourth approach is that of antiquity, when COIN was not viewed through a post-decolonization lens and COIN itself was not seen as a stand-alone phenomenon, but only as part of the war. (Sheldon, 2020)

The existence of the phenomenon as such is closely related to the formation of mankind into social and political formations (banding together into bands and tribes, forming the first political units), but the first comprehensive reports and records come from the ancient period, specifically from the environments of ancient Greece, Rome, India and China. Mary Sheldon, in her work Introduction (2020), aptly points out that although there are views in the modern world that evaluate counterinsurgency as a new and relatively unexplored phenomenon, it is in the examples from the ancient period that one can find a great number of common aspects and similarities. Mary Sheldon divides these similarities into two groups - general phenomena and motivations in insurgency, and general measures and tactics in counterinsurgency.¹

Although there can be found some similarities among them, there are also factors that are completely different for the insurgency then and now. However, how to distinguish when it is still an "old" counterinsurgency and when it is a "new" counterinsurgency that, despite many commonalities, shows significant differences? The decolonization period is taken as the dividing line, and counterinsurgency can thus be distinguished into a pre-decolonization period and an after-decolonization period. (Ibid.) The pre-decolonization counterinsurgents

¹ For a discussion and complete list of similarities, see Rose Mary Sheldon (2020) Introduction, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 31:5, 931-955, DOI: 10.1080/09592318.2020.1764713

had one key benefit, which was crucial for influencing the continuity of insurgency. There were no exclusive rules for military engagement, no human rights, and no Geneva convictions. (Ibid.) Therefore, the counterinsurgency of the pre - decolonization period appears to be a lighter process compared to the COIN of the post - decolonization period. The absence of these regulations allowed the counterinsurgent to resort to more brutal practices and methods, such as genocide or the forced deportation of large numbers of people. (Ibid.) This is also one possible reason why COIN per se was not given much attention in theory during this period. However, after the transformation during the decolonization period, the attention of many military commanders was drawn to the theoretical side of the issue as well. One of the first was the Marquis of Santa Cruz de Marcenado, referred to by many as the "Spanish Clausewitz" (Heuser, 2010), with his work *Reflexiones Militares*, which is considered the first systematic work dealing with COIN. The main idea of his work is the assertion that if there is an insurgency, the people had a proper reason for it which has long been ignored. (Ibid.) From the 18th century onwards, there was a lull in systemic theory devoted to COIN that lasted until the second half of the 20th century - a period of further decolonizing conflicts. This period saw the works of David Galula, who is considered the most important author dealing with COIN. Galula gathered knowledge about COIN during his time as a military attaché in the Southeast Asia region of the Indochina War and put it to full use during his time in Algeria. After verifying and supplementing his theoretical knowledge in practice, Galula wrote two books that have become a mantra for all those involved in COIN. The main output of these books are the 4 laws that according to Galula apply to every COIN.

The 1st law asserts that the main target of a counterinsurgent should be the population, which is the true "war field" in an insurgency. Even if the counterinsurgent eliminates the insurgent and controls the territory, he has not won until he convinces the population. Nowadays, this targeting of the population is called a "battle of hearts and minds". The 2nd law warns the counterinsurgent not to take the support of the population for granted, as this support is usually spontaneous. To be fully effective, population support must be organized and there must be a minority within the population that actively supports the insurgent. The 3rd law asserts that the majority of the population will only follow the minority if the counterinsurgent can achieve at least partial success, is competent and decisive, and, most importantly, the population must get the impression that the counterinsurgent will be the clear winner of the entire conflict. The 4th law states that rarely

does a counterinsurgent have the resources to target the entire territory, so he usually advances in smaller chunks. (Galula, 2002)

These and many other of Galula's insights served as the basis for COIN concepts in the US and later in France. In the modern world (after 9/11), two comprehensive COIN concepts stand out in particular - the 2006 concept Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency by David J. Kilcullen and the 2010 concept Counterinsurgency's impossible trilemma by Lorenzo Zambeardi. The Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency was created in the US as a response to an outdated doctrine that did not reflect current requirements and ways of dealing with them. (Kilcullen, 2006) Therefore, at a conference on COIN, David Kilcullen presented his theoretical framework for effective COIN. When represented graphically, the whole concept looks like an ancient temple (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Three pillars of counterinsurgency, source: Kilcullen, D. J. (2006, September). Three pillars of counterinsurgency. In US Government Counterinsurgency Conference (Vol. 28).

The base consists of acquiring and working with information and using it in the form of propaganda, ideology and motivation. The important insight here is that everything takes place at three possible levels - local, regional and global. There are three columns linked to the base that represent the three main areas that a counterinsurgent should address - security, political and economic. Although security is often the most emphasized, Kilcullen (2006) argues that all three areas need to be in balance for a successful COIN. This is checked by analysing effectiveness and legality (the rate at which the population accepts the measures issued). The last part that closes the whole building is the roof, which depicts the control over all the previous parts. Kilcullen (2006) aptly points out here that the main goal of COIN is not to achieve stability as one might think, but it is a control that serves as a means to achieve normality. Normality in this rendering, however, implies a diversity of normality between societies, i.e., normality in one society may be diametrically opposed to normality in another.

The Impossible trilemma of counterinsurgency template is the result of an interdisciplinary approach to a specific topic, in this case security studies and economics. Zambernardi (2010) focused on the goals of COIN and transformed the economic phenomenon of the "open-economy trinity" (the opinion that an economy cannot have an independent monetary policy, a fixed exchange rate and a free capital movement (Obstfeld, 1998)) into a form that fits the COIN environment. The result is three specific objectives - force protection, the distinction between enemy combatants and non-combatants, and the physical elimination of insurgents. (Ibid.) There is a key obstacle here, however, in the form of the necessary choice by counterinsurgent - a counterinsurgent can only focus on two of the three possible objectives at a time, leaving one objective unfulfilled. (Graphically illustrated in Figure 2) (Ibid.) This concept will be developed more in the Research question and hypotheses section.

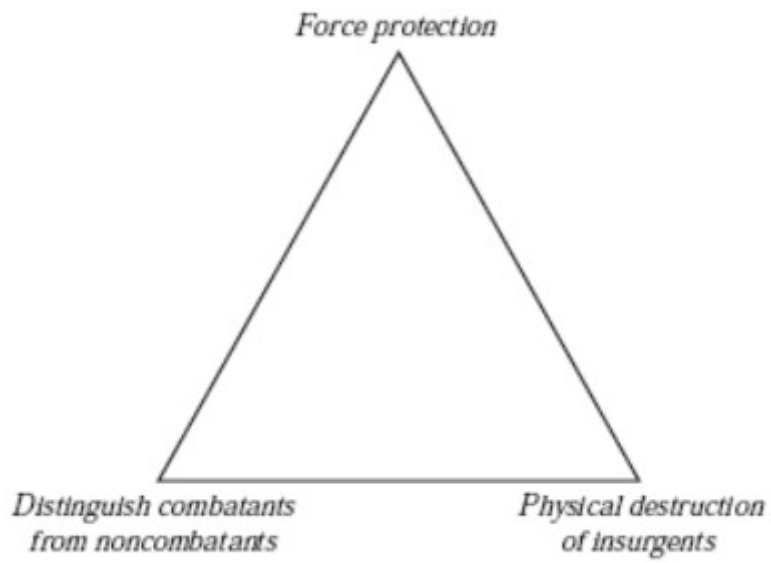


Figure 2: The Impossible Trilemma of Counterinsurgency, source: Zambarnardi, L. (2010). Counterinsurgency's impossible trilemma. *The Washington Quarterly*, 33(3), 21-34.

2. French counterinsurgency

Roots of modern French COIN date back to the 19th century at the time of colonial wars. French doctrine at that time can be characterised as an approach that was focused on various components of the conflict – politics, economy, and civilians. Violence was seen as only one of the possible instruments how to deal with the situation. (Shurkin, 2020) The major figure of that time was Marshal Thomas Robert Bugeaud whose general approach was “*people are centre of gravity in a war against insurgents*” (Ibid.) Specifically, his two main methods of dealing with insurgency were the *razzia* (the raid) and *Bureaux Arabes* (Arab Bureaus). The *razzia* is defined as a “*word of Arab origin designating a military raid against enemies or recalcitrant tribes*” (Meyer, 1907) The main goals of this tactic were terrorizing civilians and obtaining supplies. The second method, *Bureaux Arabes*, is seen as a blueprint for modern provincial reconstruction teams. (Shurkin, 2020) Originally, they consisted of one French officer accompanied by local personnel and troops. The main purpose of those *Bureaux* was to establish and keep good relations with local tribes and civilians. As Rid (2009) aptly observed, both the *razzia* and *Bureaux Arabes* were two contradictory halves of one strategy – the *razzia* played a “bad” part whereas *Bureaux Arabes* showed a kind face to locals and were only successful because they were applied together.

The gap after Marshal Bugeaud was filled with generals Joseph Gallieni and Hubert Lyautey who have begun to push their new concept of pacification. This concept of pacification expanded even further the original population approach by more limited usage of violence and putting more emphasis on politics. Nowadays it is called an approach of “hearts and minds”. Separately, both generals came up with their own methods of dealing with the insurgency. Gallieni was a great protagonist of the method called the oil spot, which he later described in his book *Neuf ans à Madagascar*. This method consists in creating an area within which are civilians secured and positively affected whereas outside this area counterinsurgent conducts combat operations. (Gallieni, 1908) Lyautey is famous for his concept of *quadrillage* (although the name itself became common only later) presented in his book *Du rôle colonial de l'Armée*. *Quadrillage* literary means splitting the area into smaller parts in order for better surveillance and policing. (Lyautey, 1908)

After Gallieni and Lyautey followed a break in new COIN concepts and methods – mostly because of WWI and WWII. What came after – insurgencies in Indochina and Algeria, is labelled as a bridge between colonial and post-colonial approaches (Shurkin,

2020) This period of COIN is characterised by the abandonment of the non-global approach and higher usage of violence. (Ibid.) During that time emerged the biggest names of the French COIN – General J. Hohard, Charles Lacheroy, Roger Trinquier and David Galula. After the experience in Indochina, the psychological concept has come to the fore. The purpose of this concept is to gain the support of civilians, influence their opinion and beliefs and serve as a contrast to the propaganda of insurgents. (Ibid.) Hogard himself was a great protagonist of political parts of the conflicts which is best explained by one of his quotes: “every operation, however small, must have a political goal”. (Raffray, 2014) David Galula, a French citizen, officer and one of the greatest COIN authors of all time was almost unknown to the French until the early 21st century. (Shurkin, 2020) He put his theoretical findings from Indochina to practice during the insurgency in Algeria and later summarized them in his two books - *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* and *Counterinsurgency warfare: theory and practice*. Galula’s knowledge is classified in the psychological school and has served as a building stone for COIN doctrines in the US and France. (Ibid.)

Big changes for the French COIN came with intervention in Afghanistan. Up to these interventions was COIN on the periphery of French interest. But in the end, it has resulted in the release of new publications which should put a modern face to the French COIN. The most notable are those published by Centre de Doctrine et d’Emploi des Force – *Gagner la bataille, conduire à la paix* and *Doctrine de contre rebellion* from 2007, respectively 2009. Both publications are built around population-centric approach with a great emphasis on the political parts of conflicts, reviving the ideas of former doctrines and examples of past events. As a dominant method is seen an oil spot with minimum use of violence. (Shurkin, 2020) Shortly after – in 2013, was French COIN doctrine actualised with the publication *Contre-insurrection*, which is still in effect today. *Contre-insurrection* expands on the previous two publications in the sense of a population – centric approach and politics and pushes them to the level that it is called a civil – military engagement. (Shurkin, 2020) With its last doctrine, France limits its own possibilities of intervention and wants to serve only as a support of an official government. Changes compared to previous doctrines are the revision of the method of the oil spot, instruction not to recruit local militias and forces and chaining of its operations to the host’s nations agenda and interest. (Ibid.)

Identification of key characteristics of French counterinsurgency

French Contre-insurrection from 2013 has taken inspiration from the US FM3 – 24 in many ways. (Shurkin, 2020) However, it is much smaller than the US template – it is not even one third of the original capacity (76 pages of Contre-insurrection compared to 282 pages of FM3 – 24). The overall process of COIN is built around the so called The PRESTER framework. The PRESTER consists of the first letters from four words – prepare, secure, hold, rebuild (French original – *PRÉparer, SÉcuriser, TEtir, Reconstruire*). The key to this framework lies in a combination of these four elements regarding the phase of COIN. For a detailed graphic showing individual phases and recommended combinations of elements see Appendix 1. The obvious turn is in the concept of hearts and minds. Contre-insurrection emphasizes the turn from “win the hearts and minds” to rather “liberating of hearts and minds”. (Contre-insurrection, 2013) This turn can be explained by a trend of a more human approach and renunciation of colonial history. In the document itself, it is explained as “*for the intervention forces, the aim is not so much to be 'loved' by the population as to be respected by it, but it is essential not to be rejected, if only to maintain contact and obtain information*”. (Ibid.) A direct product of The PRESTER framework is a change in its relation to host policy. This point is important because inside it are hidden relevant subpoints which characterise the French approach in the 21st century.

The most important and influential is the turn from pacification to stabilisation. It can be perceived as a final and definitive turn from colonial heritage. In a broader perspective, it means that the goal is not to stay, but to leave as soon as possible. In practice – to have the situation under such a level of control that it can be handed over to the local forces. Hand in hand with this goes a change in the perception of the political situation in the host country. The French approach to politics can be formulated as “a role of a bodyguard” – disclaims responsibility for a political solution and “only act in support of a local political structure. In all cases, it is this indigenous political system that guides or even constrains their (counterinsurgents) action.” (Ibid.) Counterinsurgent’s possibilities are then very limited, and his actions are de facto dependent on the will of the host’s nation. Interesting is the part with recommendation for force protection – Contre-insurrection emphasizes that “*force protection must not be achieved at the expense of environmental control*” and “*the best protection lies in contact with the population*” (Ibid.) For that reason should be preferred smaller posts rather than heavily protected big bases. (Ibid.) From the perspective of specific

methods, the building stone is the method of the oil spot from Gallieni although the doctrine literally says that it is an updated version that reflects the French army's capacity capabilities and 21st-century social perceptions. (Ibid.) It is a way for France to distance itself from the colonial connotations associated with this method.

The new method of oil spot consists of the division of the territory into three areas – priority zones, control zones and surveillance zones. Priority zones are the most secured areas, usually important cities or crossroads whose security is later put in the hands of local forces. Control zones are those areas, which cannot be fully secured as priority zones and because of that are their borders with priority zones guarded with the only possibility of crossing via checkpoints. Surveillance zones are those areas that are too big or too far away from priority zones to be secured and guarded. Because of that are usually just monitored with drones and aircrafts. As was said in the lines above, the main method of French COIN is the oil spot, but this method would be ineffective without additional supporting methods. Even here France draws on its history – *razzia*, *quadrillage* and cordon-and-search are key supporting methods which are used to support the effectiveness of the oil spot. All these supporting methods are usually used in the control zones, and if effectively used, control zones are then turned into priority zones and the surveillance zones are then turned into control zones. This is the overall goal of the use of the oil spot method – continuously broaden zones until the whole country is secured. For an example of division into zones and territorial use of supporting methods see Appendix 2.

With its doctrine France wanted to draw a thick line behind its colonial history and as Shurkin (2020) remarks, it turned France from a psychological way of COIN to a civil-military engagement. For French current doctrine is characteristic almost submissive relationship towards the host nation's political system, metaphorically expressed as “a bodyguard role”. It is no more important to win hearts and minds, according to the doctrine is a new goal to liberate them. The general course of COIN is expressed with The PRESTER framework, methods are divided into main and supportive parts. French doctrine recognizes only one main method – the oil spot. The oil spot was updated for the parameters of the 21st century and consists of three zones – priority, control and surveillance. Supporting methods are usually conducted in the control zone and the main supporting methods are stated *razzia*, *quadrillage* and cordon-and-search. About protection of forces doctrine officially states that environmental protection stands above force protection.

3. US counterinsurgency

The US has never been a colonial superpower like France or the United Kingdom and for a long time has not recognized insurgency and counterinsurgency as separate forms. Rather than, they were referred to as small wars. (Rich, 2014) Following the conflicts with Native Americans which were dealt with the creation of reservations – a predecessor of modern strategic hamlets, the US started operating outside the original US soil. (Ibid.) The first official publication regarding insurgency and counterinsurgency was the Small wars manual published in 1935. This manual was many times upgraded throughout the years. Unclear are the roots of this publication because it was inspired by conflicts in Haiti and Guatemala instead of The Philippine – American War, which is seen as a greater COIN experience for the US army. (Ibid.)

The turning point for the US COIN came with its involvement and defeat in The Vietnam War. There is no exact consensus on what exactly caused the American defeat in Vietnam. The most common reasons given are the absence of a clear strategy, misunderstanding of the environment and the incompetence of the high command. (ibid.) After the Vietnam War, the word COIN has become almost forbidden in the US and instead has been referred as Low-Intensity Conflicts, Operations Other than War, and Stability and Support Operations. (Mockaitis, 2011) But the new manual was still released - *Field Manual (FM) 100-20: Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict*. Under these labels were conducted missions like the one in Somalia in 1993.

The US has found its way back to the COIN during the invasion of Iraq. Missing clear and coherent COIN doctrine was causing trouble to US forces in Iraq and would lead to a catastrophe if only General David Petraeus in a reaction to this situation would have not created with his colleagues Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3 – 24 (FM3 – 24). Manual was released in 2007 and is based on the concept of hearts and minds - it is no surprise that the main inspiration was found in the works of David Galula. (Gentil, 2009) Although FM3 - 24 was presented as an excellent doctrine reflecting modern times, it also found many critics, such as Gian P. Gentile and his article Beneficial War: The Conceit of US Counterinsurgency. The main argument of the critics is the claim that this doctrine and COIN itself divert America from its way of war. (Rich, 2014) Despite criticism, the FM3 – 24 is still active today and was applied not only to the conflict in Iraq, but also to the conflict in Afghanistan.

Identification of key characteristics of US counterinsurgency

The US FM3 – 24 is a broad and detailed publication that covers more areas related to COIN than the French Contre-insurrection. What Contre-insurrection covers in small sections, FM3 – 24 describes in whole chapters and also whole chapters/appendixes are dedicated to areas which are not even mentioned in Contre-insurrection – linguistic support or legal considerations. US doctrine does not have any comprehensive framework like a French doctrine. Instead of this it separately operates with aspects and stages.

Offensive, defensive and stabilisation aspects altogether form a COIN. Stabilisation aspect includes operations of civil control and security, governance and essential services, economic and infrastructure development. (FM3 – 24, 2007) There is no recommended application of these aspects, FM3 – 24 (2007) describes their use as *“The proportion of effort devoted to offensive, defensive and stability operations within COIN is changed over time in response to the situation and vary geographically and by echelon.”*

Stages of COIN are explained with an analogy of medical care for the patient – stop the bleeding, inpatient care – recovery and outpatient care – movement to self-sufficiency. The first stage – stop the bleeding – is characteristic of collecting information, shaping the information environment and running first estimates. For the second part – inpatient care – is a typical effort to stabilize the overall situation by strengthening the host government and security forces. The last stage – outpatient care – is dedicated to transferring responsibility for COIN operations to the host nation’s government and forces and securitizing the last areas of the host country. Often mentioned poem throughout all publication is logical lines of operations. Logical lines are used by commanders *“to visualize, describe, and direct operations when positional reference to enemy forces has little relevance”* (Ibid.) Their use is connected with all aspects of the US COIN doctrine, for examples see Appendix 3. What does politics mean for French COIN doctrine, the same means intelligence for the US doctrine. The use of intelligence is highlighted and strongly recommended for all stages of COIN in all operations.

The US doctrine does not have any primary method of dealing with an insurgency, instead of that it states that there are various methods, which can be interconnected, and their use can vary according to the environment. Despite that, FM3 – 4 works with three specific methods, which are mentioned to be examples of successful methods. Clear – hold – build is a derived method of the original oil spot. This method focuses on specific high-priority

areas, but only focuses on that particular areas, not taking into account outside areas to such extent as the original oil spot or French modern version of it. During the first phase “clear” are recommended operations *razzia*, *quadrillage* and cordon-and-search. The second method, combined action, is loosely inspired by the original version used by David Galula during COIN in Algeria. The aim of this method is to create platoons or companies consisting of host nation’s and US soldiers. According to FM3 – 24, this method has two important limitations – it is recommended to be used only in an environment where are no large insurgent forces, and the overall purpose of these units is only defensive, they should not be used in offensive operations. Because of that, this method can be perceived only as a supporting one. The last method concluding the trio of examples is a method of limited support. Same as the previous one, it is a supporting method rather than a dominant one. The purpose of this method is to support the host nation’s government and army in order to let it conduct COIN by itself.

The FM3 – 24 with its content and length aptly reflects the number of people, who participated in the process of creation. Despite the focus on various areas related to COIN and details in all parts, the manual does not provide the amount of information one would have expected. If a French approach is characterized as “a bodyguard”, the US approach should be characterized as “a random passer-by who will put you aside, deals with a threat by himself and return the situation to your control when is it safe”. Even though the US doctrine highlights the idea that choosing a method depends on the environment, it also works with three methods as “examples”. The Clear hold – build method is derived from the method of oil spot, in the US version is focused more on the priority areas and does not pay much attention to outside areas. This method is accompanied by two supporting methods, combined action and limited support. Combined action is limited by two important factors – the number of insurgent forces and their primary focus on defensive operations. Limited support opens for the US a possibility to be engaged in the conflict even though there is no US physical presence.

Research question, hypotheses

The original motivation behind this thesis is an observation made by M. Shurkin, G. Gentile and H. Armstrong concerning the French way of COIN. This trio of authors similarly asserts that the current French COIN doctrine is a product of the French military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Shurkin, 2020) Doctrines, manuals and brochures speak in their own language whereas reality can be at the same time diametrically opposed. Because of that was chosen conflict in Mali where is France continually present since 2013 to testify if a French way of conducting COIN became similar to the US one, the same as in the case of doctrines. Naturally from this problem arose the research question of this thesis, which is following:

Has French counterinsurgency become similar to the US counterinsurgency?

In order to put a theme of this thesis into a comprehensive complex is used theoretical framework published by Italian scholar Lorenzo Zambernardi in 2010 – Counterinsurgency’s impossible trilemma. Zambernardi derived his concept from the economic science, where is it also labelled as the “unholy trinity” or the “open-economy dilemma” and stands for a paradigm when a state cannot have at the same time an independent monetary policy, a fixed exchange rate and free capital movement. It is only possible to focus on two factors/goals at one moment. (Obstfeld, 1998) In COIN, the impossible trilemma stands for incompatibility of force protection, distinguishing between enemy combatants and civilians and physical destruction of insurgents. (Zambernardi, 2010) The result of this theory is a combination of two chosen goals with one goal left behind. Force protection and physical destruction of insurgents mean the uncontrolled killing of civilians which is unacceptable for western countries because of their focus on human rights. (Ibid.) Force protection and focus on civilians means abandoning the goal of physical elimination of insurgents. In the end it evolves into the necessity of using diplomacy and possibly cutting a political deal with insurgents. But as Morgenthau (1993) claims, it faces a problem of democratic countries denying political deals with non-democratic actors. The last combination, physical destruction of insurgents and focus on civilians excludes force protection and naturally leads to higher casualties of counterinsurgent troops. This situation causes public and political pressure on the home scene, such as in the case of the Vietnam War. (Zambernardi, 2010) As the only approach for a complete and successful COIN sees Zambernardi the combination of physical destruction of insurgents and focus/protection on/of civilians with a possible risk of political pressure at home.

Zambernardi in his work operates with insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan as examples of the US COIN related to his theory. Zambernardi (2010) states, that at the beginning of these insurgencies, the US followed a combination of force protection and physical elimination of insurgents, but it changed in both cases because of its inefficiency in the combination of securing the population and killing insurgents. By the qualitative analysis of Counterinsurgency's impossible trilemma theory and evolution of the French way of COIN was characterized French former approach as the combination of securing the population and physical elimination of insurgents. The following hypothesis is formulated to answer the stated research question:

French COIN turned from the physical elimination of insurgents to the force protection while keeping distinction between enemy combatants and civilians.

To be this hypothesis considered proven true is conducted a qualitative analysis of two French COIN operations in Mali – Serval and Barkhane, with a focus on French and US characteristics of operations. For a better conceptualization of the analysis are features divided into two groups – the first group is focused on the overall approach towards politics whereas the second group is focused on the used methods. To reach the answer to the settled research question “*Yes, French counterinsurgency is similar to US counterinsurgency.*” the hypothesis must be proven true, which will be achieved if at least 50% of the factors analysed are identical to the American doctrine.

The picture below is a graphical expression of the influence of the US COIN on French COIN. Part no. 1 expresses the US approach to COIN before the creation of the FM 3 – 24 in 2007. Part no. 2 illustrates the change in the US approach after the implementation of FM 3 – 24. Part no. 3 represents the French approach to COIN before its participation in the invasion of Afghanistan. Part no. 4 pictures the French approach to COIN during and after the invasion of Afghanistan from 2007 onwards.

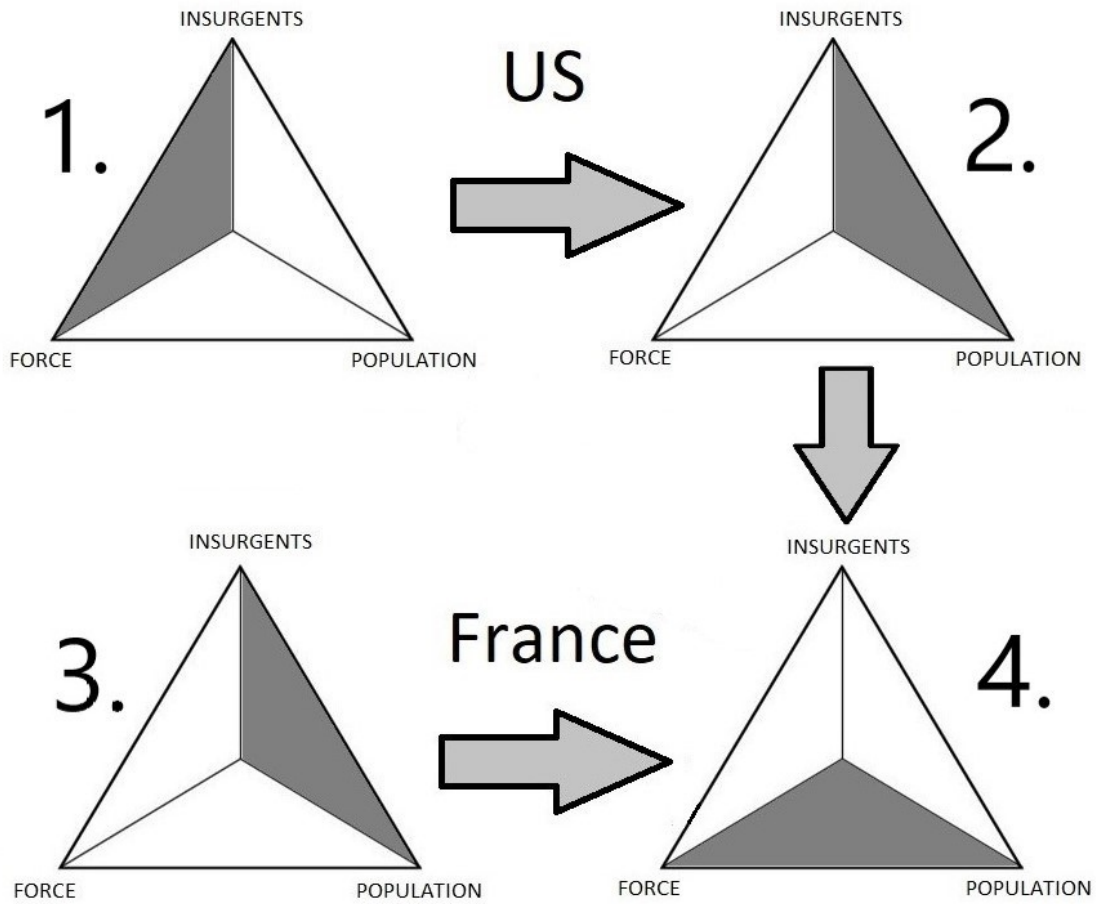


Figure 3: Graphical expression of the influence of the US COIN on French COIN

French counterinsurgency in Mali

4. Historical and political background in Mali

The main force determining the development of Mali over the centuries is the geographical distribution of the country. While the northern part of the country is consisting of the desert, the southern part lies in the subtropical climate zone and includes savannah, tropical forests and farmland. This natural division is responsible for the split of the Malian state into two different worlds. Because of its territorial predisposition, the northern part of the country is poorer with worse living conditions than the area of the southern part. In recent years, this has also been exacerbated by climate change, as seen in the case of drying up of Lake Faguibine, which has deprived a wide swathe of the region's population of their livelihoods. (Connolly-Boutin & Smit, 2016) The population of the north area consists of two ethnic groups – the Tuareg and the Arabs. Both ethnic groups are organized on the clan and tribe basis (clan is usually used for Tuareg, whereas tribe is used for Arabs) with both horizontal and vertical division. The highest organizational formation of both groups is a confederation, which consists of noble and commoner clans. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2015) The southern part of Mali is a centre of food production and also the main recipient of financing. (Ibid.) Ethnically, the population of the south part is black, with the dominant group called Bambara. Bambara has been in the possession of power for the last centuries. There is a long-standing mistrust between northerners and southerners that stems not only from the different ethnicities of these groups, but also from the fact that it was the Tuareg and Arabs from the north who for a long time enslaved and sold out the black population from the south. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2013) Incidentally, slavery in general is still present in Mali today, with estimates of almost 200 000 people living in slavery. (Rodet, 2021)

The modern history of Mali, which laid the foundation for current events dates back to 22 September 1960 when the independent Republic of Mali was established. As the first President was elected Modibo Keita who established a one-party system and brutally suppressed the first Tuareg rebellion (1963 – 1964). Despite the fact that rebellion was initiated just by the part of Kel Adagh Tuareg confederation, the response of Keita was in nature of collective guilt and left a bloody mark on North-South relations. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2013) Keita was overthrown by a coup led by Moussa Traoré on 19 November

1968. Traoré tried to transform the Malian economy from its socialist orientation, but his efforts met with neither success nor public sympathy. (Meditz, 2005)

Traoré experienced the beginning of the second Tuareg rebellion which started in 1990. As in the previous rebellion, even this one was caused by a few clans even though it enjoyed broader support than its predecessor. The experience of Tuareg from Muammar Qadhafi's Islamic Legion caused that the fights with the Malian army were much more even and forced Traoré to the negotiation table. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2013) The Tamanrasset accord was signed on 6 January 1991, but only two months later was Traoré dethroned during the March Revolution. The accord granted the special status to the northern territory, reduced presence of the Malian army in the north, more administrative power given to the local population, reduction of military posts and a promise that almost 50% of an upcoming development program will come to the northern areas. (The Tamanrasset accord, 1991) The accord was never implemented, and fighting continued until April 11 of 1992 when was signed the National Pact. It involved points from the previous record augmented by details of the transition of power to local authorities in the north and the integration of rebel fighters into the Malian army. The creation of the post of the Commissary of the North was an important point, which was unfortunately never realized. The last, but most important point (as emerged later) was a creation of a new region Kidal. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2013) Although, same as with The Tamanrasset accord, majority of the points was never implemented by the Malian Government. The creation of a new region Kidal was perceived by some clans as a preference of the confederation Kel Adagh and that was for them the reason to continue in fighting. (Lecocq, 2002) In the same year was Alpha Oumar Konaré elected as the first Malian President who arose from the democratic elections. Despite that, the rebellion continued until 1996 when the fighting died down. A crucial role was played by the integration of rebel fighters into the Malian army and the reintegration financial support for others. (Modibo, 2002) Konaré was re-elected for his second term in 1997 and in 2002 was as a new President elected Amadou Toumani Touré, who was a key figure in March Revolution in 1991.

The third Tuareg rebellion emerged in 2006 after 150 Tuareg officers deserted from the Malian army and a few clans stood up against Government in Bamako. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2013) The Malian Government wanted to deal with the situation peacefully and after three months were signed the Algiers Accords (named after the mediation from Algeria). The main

points of this deal were the implementation of points included in The Tamanrasset accord and the National Pact extended by new conditions for the region of Kidal and the creation of new security units which should be responsible for the security situation in the north. These units should have consisted of northern inhabitants, which was considered beneficial both for the Malian Government and the rebels. (Ibid.) Despite that, a minority of rebels refused the Algiers Accords and made an alliance with the Nigerien Tuareg rebel movement. (Lecocq, 2010) Even then Malian Government tried to resolve the situation peacefully, but it changed with an attack on Malian units. The Malian Government joined forces with local Tuareg and Arab militias and the rebellion officially ended in January of 2009. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2013) The implementation of the Algiers Accords was similar to the implementation of previous deals – the majority of points were not implemented.

5. Operation Serval

The fourth Tuareg rebellion which set off a chain of events that ultimately led to the launch of Operation Serval broke out on January 14, 2012, but was preceded by the establishment of the Tuareg group *Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad* (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad – MNLA) on October 16 by fighters who had returned from Libya. Even though the return of fighters from Libya practically led to the beginning of the rebellion, it is seen as a catalysator of events rather than the original reason behind the rebellion. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2013) For a rebellion, MNLA created an alliance with radical and terrorist groups from the northern Mali - al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Ansar Edine. The leader of the coalition was MNLA, and the original goal was the independence of northern Mali, not just autonomy as in previous rebellions. Two months later, on March 6, 2012, MNLA announced the independence of the northern Mali. The Government in Bamako was clueless and just a few weeks after, on 22 March, a mutiny of young military officers led to a coup d'état and Dioncounda Traoré was appointed as an interim President. The new order was short-lived, as early as June 2012, AQIM, MUJAO and Ansar Dine turned against the MNLA, pushing its fighters out of the cities and taking control of northern Mali to establish a caliphate and impose Sharia law. The newly emerged coalition kept its power and ruled over northern Mali for the rest of the year 2012. The radical turn came in the first days of January 2013, when coalition forces attacked the city of Konna, which was the beginning of their offensive to the south. On January 10, President Traoré addressed the request for help to France and UN following the Article 51 of the UN Charter. Only a few hours later, on January 11, the first French units entered Mali and Operation Serval officially began.

Operation Serval had three main objectives, which were later extended by the fourth. The first objective was to stop terrorist aggression and their move toward Bamako. The second objective stood for the need to preserve the existence of the Republic of Mali and enable it to recover its territorial integrity. The third objective was aimed at *“the promotion of the application of international resolutions through the deployment of the African stabilisation force and support for the Malian armed forces in their recapture of the North”* (Rapport d'information, 2013) The fourth objective was added later and was dedicated to the freeing of French and other international hostages. (Ibid.) On January 23, the French

Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian stated that these objectives should be accomplished by four distinctive missions:

- *"To assist Malian forces in stopping the advance of terrorist groups towards the south, whether by air strikes - from our fighter aircraft or helicopters - on identified targets or the deployment of ground troops, the former supporting the latter;*
- *the destruction of rear bases - fuel or ammunition depots, training centres, various infrastructures - in order to prevent terrorist groups from reconstituting themselves;*
- *supporting the stability of Mali and its institutions, in particular through a presence in Bamako, which also makes it possible to ensure the security of our nationals and of the few EU citizens;*
- *encourage the acceleration of the deployment of African forces of the International Support Mission to Mali, MINUSMA², around the Nigerian headquarters in Bamako, and to help with the rapid implementation of the European training and supervision mission for the Malian army, known as "EUTM Mali", since France is the framework nation. (Ibid.)*

Course of the operation

Operation Serval was conducted in different phases. The majority of sources including French official Rapport D' Information acknowledges three main phases. In this thesis is used distinction made by Lt. Gen. Olivier Tramondy and Lt. Col. Philippe Seigneur in their article *Operation Serval: Another Beau Geste of France in Sub-Saharan Africa?* because of its explanation value. The first phase, also called Phase 0 covers the first days of Operation Serval and includes blocking the jihadist offensive to the south and the early start of the French offensive to the north. The second phase labelled Phase 1 covers the seizing of the central part of Mali called The Niger Bend. The third stage which is marked as Phase 2 covers the period of seizing the northern part of Mali, especially the region of Gao and the

² United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established by Security Council resolution 2100 on April, 25, 2013 with goal to "support the political process and carry out a number of security-related stabilization tasks, with a focus on major population centres and lines of communication, protecting civilians, human rights monitoring, the creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the return of displaced persons, the extension of State authority and the preparation of free, inclusive and peaceful elections". (UN, 2013)

insurgents haven in the Ifoghas Mountains. Graphical illustrations of all phases can be found in the figure no. 4.

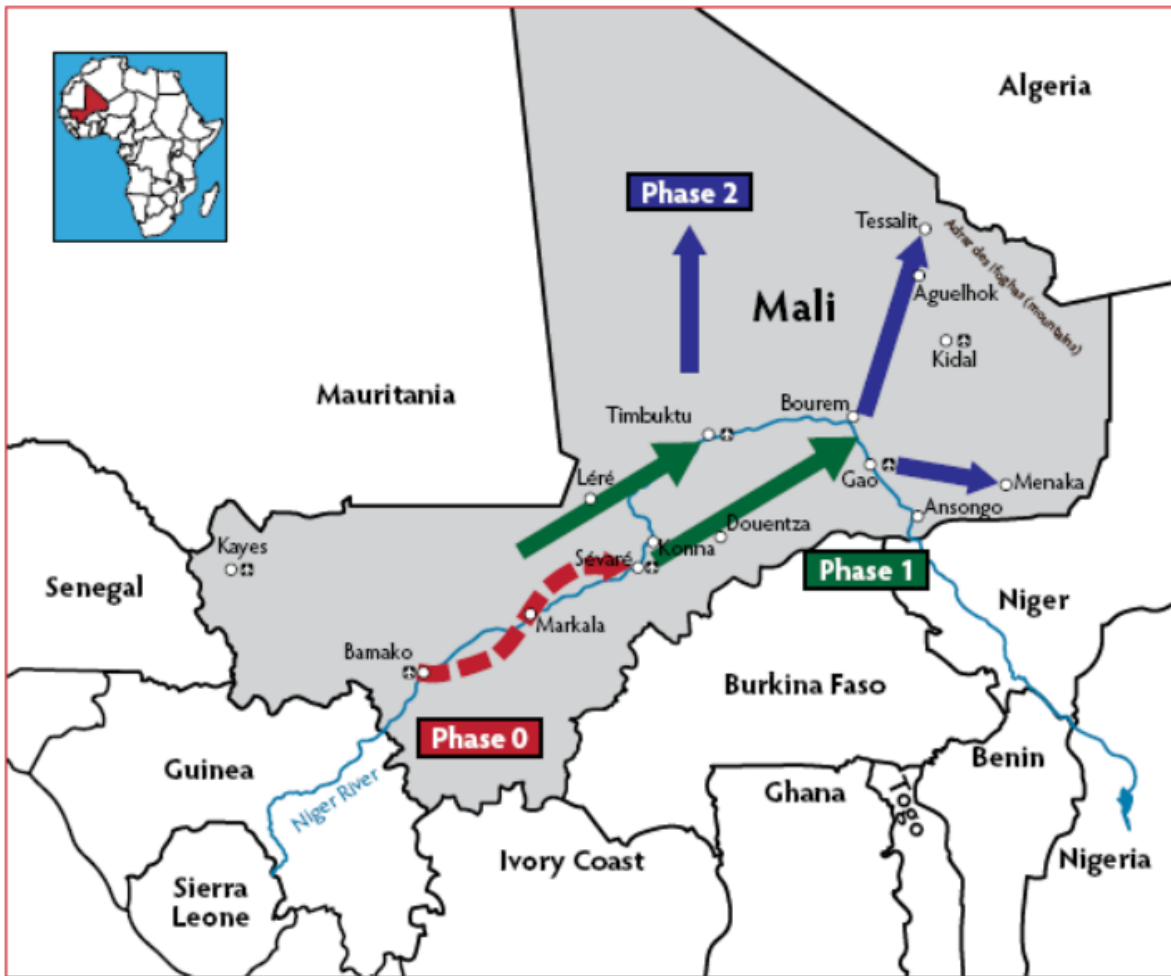


Figure 4: Phases of Operation Serval, source: *Tramond, Olivier, and Philippe Seigneur. “Operation Serval: Another Beau Geste of France in Sub-Saharan Africa?” *Military Review* 94.6 (2014): 76–86.*

French direct involvement in Mali began only within five hours since President Hollande announced French intervention in Mali and beginning of the Operation Serval. Gazelle light-attack helicopters (originally based in Burkina Faso) attacked and stopped a column of insurgent pickups heading to the south near the city of Konna and on the evening of the same day aircraft fighter from the N’Djamena (Chad) destroyed a command centre of Ansar Dine with a few storages. (Spet, 2015) Simultaneously were alarmed troops already present in the region (either forward deployed or part of the other operations) and troops in

France which were part of the Guépard system³. The first unit which arrived (on January 11) was SGTIA⁴ with a force of 200 soldiers from Chad. These units were transformed to Mali by planes and their main task was to secure the airport in Bamako and adjoining areas. At the same time was preparing another SGTIA in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) which departed on the next day's morning and travelled to Bamako in their vehicles (this SGTIA consisted of 200 men and 60 vehicles). (Ibid.) When they reached Bamako in two days, they joined already present SGTIA from Chad and the first troops from the Guépard system which were transported from France by planes. These three units formed the first GTIA⁵, labelled as GTIA 1. GTIA 1 played a crucial part in the first phase of Operation Serval. Shortly after it was formed, it seized the bridge in Markala (250 kilometres from Bamako) on January 15 and on January 18 with assistance from Malian forces, it got under control the city of Konna. The key point of the area – the airport in the city of Sévaré, was under French control just two days later, on January 20.

During Phase 1 was GTIA 1 reinforced by other soldiers from the Guépard system and at the end of January were in Mali present three GTIAs (GTIA 1, 2, 4 – GTIA 3 arrived during Phase 2 and replaced GTIA 1) accompanied by 6 400 soldiers from African countries. (Shurkin, 2014) Two main objectives of Phase 1 were the cities Timbuktu and Gao, because of that French forces divided themselves and their African allies into two groups – one heading towards Timbuktu and securing the cities of Diabaly, Nampala and Léré on their way and the second group marching towards Gao and securing cities of Douentza and Hombori. (Ibid.) Units marching to Gao reached their goal sooner and when French special troops seized the airport in Gao on January 25, the whole city was secured by conventional forces of France and African countries. The first group whose goal was Timbuktu accomplished its task just a few days later and on January 28 was Timbuktu in the hands of French forces. Both groups have met with less resistance than expected and have made

³ Guépard system is a French army system of fast reaction, 5 500 soldiers are on alert and ready for deployment in a period from 12 hours to 9 days (Rapport d'information, 2013)

⁴ SGTIA - combined arms tactical subgroup (sous-groupement tactique interarmes) is one of the basic units of the French army consisting of four platoons (Shurking, 2014)

⁵ GTIA - combined arms tactical group (groupement tactique interarmes), bigger organizational unit than SGTIA, made of companies, not platoons (Shurkin,2014)

greater use of aircraft, helicopters and drones against the retreating insurgents. When Timbuktu and Gao were seized, air forces turned their attention to areas around Aguelhok and Tessalit in the north and successfully destroyed storages and training centres in the area. (Tramond & Seigneur, 2014)

Phase 2 was designed to secure the rest of the northern part of Mali, specifically the region of Gao and the Ifoghas Mountains, where was located the haven of insurgents. The first goal was to seize the city of Kidal and on January 31 was a city under the control of French forces. The city was taken by a similar strategy as all previous cities – French special units parachuted into the airport, secured the area and conventional forces entered the city from the outside. Different from previous seizures was the attitude of French forces, which stopped before the city and let Chadian troops which arrived from Menaka clear and secure the city. The city of Tessalit followed only a week later and on February 8 was in the hands of French forces, which were reinforced by GTIA 3 which arrived from France and should replace GTIA 1 in one week. (Ibid.) On the same day were conducted series of attacks in Gao by insurgents which led to a 10-day operation in the Gao countryside to find depots of weapons. Once the cities were secured, French attention turned to the Ifoghas Mountains, the last bastion of insurgents. The Ifoghas Mountains had been Tuareg's haven since the first Tuareg rebellion in the 1960s. This operation involved all French allies – African troops mostly represented by Chadian soldiers, Tuareg fighters of General Gamou (officially presented as Malian army, but they were deserters) (Shurkin, 2014) and fighters of MNLA, who were already on the French side. This operation was a real testament for French forces and their allies, mostly because of the environment and high temperature. The roughness of the terrain emerged as a serious complication for the wider use of air forces and caused the brunt to rest on the backs of the ground troops. The hardest and most decisive battle of the final operation happened in the Amettetaï valley, where French and Chadian forces neutralized almost 100 insurgents from the overall number of 600 fighters. (Ibid.) When the operation in the Ifoghas Mountains was over at the end of March, French forces focused again on the region of Gao, which was still under the strong influence of MUJAO, and focused mainly on the finding of weapons and their securing. This was because of rumours about insurgents having precision weapons, such as surface-to-air missiles, but none of them were found. (Ibid.)

At the beginning of May began a transition of power to Malian forces. Following the UN Security Council Resolution 2100 from April 25, International forces from African countries were integrated into the forces of MINUSMA and French forces stayed in Mali as quick-reaction forces. French forces set their location to three cities in the north – Gao, Kidal and Tessalit. The whole transition took a long period of time until the end of Operation Serval on July 13, 2014. During that period remained situation under the control of MINUSMA and French forces with only minor clashes.

Comparing the results of Operation Serval with set objectives, it can be evaluated as a success despite the fact, that not all objections were met. The first goal – stopping terrorist aggression and their move towards Bamako – was reached because of fast intervention and an effective 3-phased campaign. The fast intervention was possible because of three main reasons – forward-deployed units, the Guépard system and the narrow system of decision-making of the French President with the French army.⁶ (Rapport d'information, 2013) Terrorist aggression was stopped in a way, that it did not threaten Malian state, especially Government in Bamako, but the terrorist threat was not completely eliminated even though Ansar Dine was almost destroyed and AQIM was seriously weakened. A second goal - preservation of the existence of the Republic of Mali and recovering its territorial integrity – was accomplished with the elimination of the current insurgent threat and transition of control over all territory to the Malian army and MINUSMA forces. The Meeting of the third goal was partially done in the first half of Operation Serval with the realization of MINUSMA and the intervention of troops from African countries, mostly from Chad. But the second part of the goal was reached in a slightly different way because Malian forces were rather put aside from main operations and focused more on training and preparation provided by MINUSMA instructors. Soldiers of General Gamou were originally former Tuareg members of the Malian army who deserted and were brought back from Niger and were presented as “Malian army” only by the press. (Shurkin, 2014) Unfortunately for French forces, the last goal – the rescue of hostages – was not met with success, because one of the hostages was killed at the beginning of Operation Serval and others were moved from the Ifoghas Mountains before the defeat of the insurgents. (Rapport d'information, 2013)

⁶ French President can send French troops to a foreign mission without the approval of Parliament for a maximum length of 4 months (Tramond & Seigneur, 2014)

Generally, Operation Serval was successful in a majority of its goals and helped to save Mali from the collapse, restoring at least a minor order in most parts of the country. France itself sees a whole Operation as a great success, however, in debate emerged opinions if Serval was really a success as has been presented. The main reason for this questioning is setting a result of Operation Serval in the context of the region and the development of Mali as a state - Operation Serval “just” resolved a crisis but did not resolve the conflict itself. (Charbonneau, 2016)

Characteristics of French COIN doctrine in Operation Serval

The overall analysis of Operation Serval was conducted by Michael Shurkin for US Army via RAND Corporation and was published under the title *France’s War in Mali: Lessons for an Expeditionary Army in 2014*. The original motivation for his work was to present it as an inspiration for the US army in its intentions of creating a force, which would be able to react and fight in asymmetrical conflicts characteristic of the 21st century. Despite the fact that the US itself sees Operation Serval as an inspiration for their army and therefore claims that French COIN is in practice de facto different from the US one, it is necessary to identify concrete steps/aspects/actions which could explain and illustrate differences. Those steps/aspects/actions are identified in the following lines in order which follows the timeline of the Operation with the last paragraph containing overall systematic differences which were present during the whole operation. Despite the French Contre-insurrection from 2013 being the main body for identification of French characteristics in COIN, during Operation Serval emerged factors which are of cultural-national characteristic and as such are essential for complete analysis.

The speed with which France reacted and intervened within five hours of the announcement was breath-taking for all people interested in the field. This fast action was possible because of already mentioned factors – forward-deployed units, the Guépard system of reaction and the effective decision-making process of the French President regarding sending French units to a foreign mission. In the case of forward-deployed units, France was a little bit lucky it happened in a region where France has been traditionally present since colonial times. If a similar situation emerged in a different region or continent, France would not have an advantage of forward-deployed units. Guépard system proved its worth in the first sharp test but in later phases suffered from the French weak logistical capacities, which were fortunately supported by French allies – they were responsible for 75% of all logistical

operations to Mali during the Operation Serval (Shurkin, 2014) Role of French President at the beginning of Serval was the last crucial element for French rapid action, but the US President hold similar rights in regard to sending troops to a foreign mission, only with the difference in the time for which can troops be sent without the approval of Parliament – the US President can send troops up to 60 days whereas the French President can send troops up to 4 months. Generally, the case of French rapid intervention in Mali cannot be taken as a characterisation of overall French COIN and should be considered rather as a unique situation. However, it was a product of luck and French systematic factors and arrangements which would make it highly improbable for US forces to intervene in a similar way as the French did.

The second factor which was present during the whole Operation and highly resonated in the first days of intervention is a high level of risk which was accepted by French forces. Determination to take more risk was present in various areas – use of light vehicles with small protection, use of a small number of soldiers, emphasis on the use of ground forces with soldiers often on their feet and cooperation with local actors – MNLA and Tuaregs. The use of light vehicles was in the first days a result of their presence in the forward bases and soldiers used them to travel to Mali. The use of light vehicles was additionally supported by pressure from President Hollande towards his generals – it was Hollande who was responsible for a fast campaign to the north because he wanted to finish the Operation as soon as possible. (Helluy in Shurkin, 2014) Another reason for the use of light vehicles was that they are much faster than heavy vehicles and reports from intelligence services claimed that rebels will rather withdraw than fight. (Shurkin, 2014) Because of these reasons were preferred mobility over protection which is in contradiction with the US typical class of heavy and slow vehicles. (Ibid.) Shurkin (2014) also found a minor detail which was behind fast and self-sufficient repair of vehicles in cases of vehicle failures which were natural when we take into account the distance which they had to travel to get first to Mali and then hundreds of kilometres to the north of the country - all on the old, dusty, non-asphalt roads. This detail lies in the age of vehicles – a great part of vehicles used in Mali was old, waiting for a replacement. But what is important, these old vehicles did not have complex electronic systems which are common in modern vehicles and are impossible to repair in field conditions. That is the reason, why French soldiers were able to repair their vehicles “on the way” and could accomplish given orders. French choice of vehicles and their use –

long travels focused on speed which put vehicles on the edge of their functional possibilities is something significantly different from the use of vehicles by the US Army.

According to the tempo of the operation was necessary to adapt also methods used in the field. The most used method was an adapted method of the French version of oil spot – adapted in the way that transformation of zones was much quicker and dynamical than described in the French doctrine. Priority zones were big cities such as Sévaré, Timbuktu, or Gao. All were turned into priority zones by a similar scenario – French special units parachuted into the airport, secured the area and ground forces entered the city from the outside. Meanwhile, air forces were conducting surveillance operations with occasional attacks on the ground targets in the northern part of the Malian territory. Malian countryside was considered as controlling zones with operations of cordon-and-search and razzia. The northern areas which were far away from the big cities seized by the French army and their close countryside were seen as surveillance zones. Even though France put an extra effort into surveillance operations, their use in practice was significantly limited because of the French absence of needed technology (drones and planes). (Rapport d'information, 2013)

Shurkin in his work identifies one key factor, which played a crucial role in all actions and had an important influence on the result of the whole Operation Serval. He labelled this factor as a “*knowledge of environment*” and comments on it as something “*typically French*” (Shurkin, 2014) But the basis of this one factor is much more complex and long-term than to be expressed just with one collocation. French knowledge of Malian affairs, sociology, and geography dates back to centuries of colonization era. For Mali, especially its northern part was the milestone year 1894 when French forces seized the city of Timbuktu and later conquered the rest of Malian territory. Since then, France got involved in regional politics of clans and tribes and was able to find a way how to take advantage of that. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2013) By balancing power between the confederations of Arabs and Tuaregs and the presence of their own troops, France was able to sustain stability in the whole country until Malian independence in 1960. This experience proved to be very useful also in Operation Serval. During Phase 2 in the later part of the offensive in the north, France allied with forces of later General Gamou and forces of MNLA. In spite of the fact that both groups

were opponents of ruling the Kel Adagh confederation⁷, their alliance with France was seen very unpleasantly by Government in Bamako. (Shurkin, 2014) However, it was an important help for French presence in northern Mali. Not only members of these groups were excellent scouts and interpreters, but as Shurkin (2014) promptly noticed, the racial question played here its role. Both groups are of Tuareg origin and are considered as members of the “white” race – the same as the inhabitants of northern Mali who have had a bad relationship with “black” people from the south. This brought support to French troops in countryside areas and made French forces able to buy supplies from locals. And, possibly the most important advantage – when locals saw Tuaregs and Tuareg rebels from MNLA among French troops, it prevented them from possible mobilisation and revolt against France. (Ibid.)

French application of US COIN models in Operation Serval

It is clear from the previous chapter that Operation Serval included many French aspects of COIN. Even though social science is not a biased field, analysis conducted in order to find US aspects of COIN in Operation Serval brought no points in terms of methods or other characteristics. However, a significant difference from French doctrine was identified in terms of the political attitude of France. From the beginning – the days before Operation Serval, France declared its strong dedication to support the Malian Government and when President Traoré called for help, France did not hesitate and intervened. Intervened more in the style of the US – “crowned” itself as a leader of COIN operation, conducted battle operations on its own or with help from other African countries (especially Chad) and put Malian forces aside from the action. French political approach to the Malian conflict is greatly summarized by an example of the alliance with General Gamou’s forces and MNLA rebels. General Gamou – former Colonel of the Malian army who deserted and MNLA which was responsible for the original rebellion, it was no surprise that the Malian Government was not happy with this alliance. But, as Shurkin (2014) claims – with knowledge of regional affairs, France exactly knew what it was doing and with whom. Nevertheless, France was

⁷ During the Colonial era, it was the Kel Adagh Confederation that was supported by France against ruling Kel Iwellemmeden Confederation. Since then, the Kel Adagh was the dominant confederation in Mali. (Pezard & Shurkin, 2013)

also trying to give a positive and friendly impression with symbols and acts such as was a meeting of President Hollande with interim President Traoré in Mali.

Partial conclusion

Operation Serval has introduced an inspirational concept of success for asymmetric operations of the 21st century. Its success was built upon a fast reaction, abilities of the French army and luck, which was acknowledged even by French officers. The overwhelming majority of analysed factors tally to French COIN doctrine or were identified as factors, which have roots in French historical and cultural background. The fast reaction of French forces was possible because of three main factors – forward deployed units, the Guépard system of reaction and the effective decision-making system of the French President towards the French army. Its role also played the fact, that Mali is a former French colony and lies in a region where France is present even nowadays. Throughout the operation, preferring mobility over force protection and tolerance of a high level of risk emerged as crucial factors. French ability to utilize experience and knowledge of socio-cultural environment brought a significant advantage and help French forces to get more support from the population and effectively move in hard terrain. However, the French approach to the political part of the conflict was identified as a more US-stylized which was illustrated by its decisive position in the international field at the beginning of the conflict, in a way how French forces separated Malian troops from the battle actions or by allying with General Gamou's men and MNLA.

High tolerance of risk and preference of mobility over soldiers' security became tell-tale signs of Operation Serval. The use of light vehicles with light protection components and various actions conducted by soldiers on their feet implies that force protection was not a priority in Operation Serval. Despite this finding, the number of casualties remained surprisingly low (1 dead in Phase 0, 9 dead in the following actions until the end of the operation on July 15, 2014 (Rapport d'information, 2021)). The need for the elimination of insurgents was included in the main goals of Operation Serval and the overall course of the Operation was consistent with that. The protection of civilians is partially involved in the second (preserving of Malian integrity and territory) and third (application of international resolutions) goal. This focus was also present during the whole Operation – the use of small units and actions conducted on the ground by soldiers on their feet enabled French troops to fully distinguish between civilians and insurgents. The second proving factor came from the

population itself because they welcomed French troops and showed their support to them. This was even strengthened by making an alliance with General Gamou's men and MNLA because civilians saw their own people among foreign soldiers which only increased the support for French forces. The overall conclusion of Operation Serval is that French forces focused on the physical elimination of insurgents and the protection of civilians. The goal of force protection was left behind.

6. Operation Barkhane

In the last months of Operation Serval was becoming obvious that complete withdrawal from Mali was not the most suitable solution for the situation in Mali. The rising number of attacks, escalating situation in the central part of Mali and fear of spill over of the conflict into neighbouring countries led to the idea of the creation of a succeeding mission. (Rapport d'information, 2021) Simultaneously with these fears were held talks between countries of the Sahelian region under French patronage, which led in the end to the creation of the G5 Sahel organization on February 26, 2013, consisting of Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Mali and Burkina Faso. It had been agreed that there was needed a more regional approach and a new operation called Barkhane will operate in the whole G5 Sahel area. Because of that, Operation Barkhane did not succeed only Operation Serval in Mali, but also Operation *Épervier* in Chad. Because of that was necessary to deploy forces across the whole region, but also in cooperation with MINUSMA forces which were already present in the area of Mali (since 2013) The headquarters was set to N'Djamena in Chad, but the strongest force was located in Gao, Mali. For a detailed map of the deployment, see Appendix no. 4. The beginning of the mission was set for August 1, 2014, two weeks after the end of Operation Serval in July. However, compared to Operation Serval's goals, the goals of Operation Barkhane had been defined in a much more general sense. French Rapport d'information from April 21, 2021, recapitulated its goal as "*bringing the terrorist threat within the reach of local forces*" which should be accomplished by two sub-goals – 1) "*weakening of the armed terrorist groups*" and 2) "*training and strengthening of the local forces*" (Ibid.) There has been also one "unofficial" goal – to assist and protect MINUSMA personnel, because despite the presence of soldiers, MINUSMA has suffered difficulties with the protection of its people. (Wing, 2016) However, the practical range of the whole operation is much wider and includes not only battle actions and training of local forces, but also gathering intelligence and a set of activities called "civil-military engagement" which should get French troops closer to the civilian population in Mali. (ECFR, 2020; Shurkin, 2020)

Course of the operation

Because of its longer duration compared to Operation Serval, Operation Barkhane is divided into phases copying years instead of weeks as was the case of the first half of Operation Serval. French Rapport d'information (2021) distinguishes the whole Operation

into 3 main phases. It sets the first phase into the years 2013 – 2014 and labels it as “the phase of emergency”. However, this timeline reflects the duration of Operation Serval, not Barkhane. The second phase is put between the years 2015 – 2017 and includes the containment of terrorists in the north and the implementation of The Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (APR) from June 2015 which was the product of the Algiers process. The last, third phase, starts in 2018 and continues until these days. This phase is characterised as a time of turn from a kinetic logic to more partnership-based logic. (Ibid.) However, the author of this thesis does not consider this distinction to be of the most sufficient value because it is not only too broad and includes even Operation Serval, but because French Rapport d’information was published in 2021 and because of that was not possible for it to include and cover important events of that year which would have probably affected the distinction of later phases. As a solution to this problem, the author follows his own distinction which is divided into 4 phases. The first phase is set into the period between the beginning of Operation Barkhane on August 1, 2014, and the signing of the APR in May and June of 2015. The second phase is situated in the period from the signing of the APR in May to June 2015 and the end of the year 2017. The third phase happened from the beginning of 2018 to January 13, 2020, when was held the Pau Summit. The last, fourth phase, has started on March 27, 2020, when Operation Takuba began and is still happening at the time of writing of this work (Spring 2022).

2014 - 2015

Operation Serval set the bar high – especially in terms of results. However, what had become obvious already before the start of Operation Barkhane in 2014 and even after its beginning on August 1, was the rising number of violent incidents and violence generally. Even today is not clear what exactly was behind this rise, but there had been detected possible factors, which could have affected the situation between the years 2014 – 2015. This period is identified as the first part of Operation Barkhane in this thesis, its timeline is bounded by the start of Operation Barkhane on August 1, 2014, and the signing of APR in May – June of 2015. Two possible factors, which could be influential in destabilizing the situation since 2014 – the first is handing over of the power and control to Malian forces, the second is a crisis which emerged in the central part of Mali between farmers and herders.

The transition of power to Malian forces was seen as another natural step that should have brought conflict to a peaceful end. But, what happened surprised not only French

soldiers. International Crisis Group brought in its report from 2016 evidence of abuses, violence, sexual assaults and torture of civilians by Malian soldiers. The reasons for these crimes are believed to be racial and political – it should be a punishment for the support and obedience of insurgent groups. The second factor, the uprising in the central part of Mali, was also a partial product of previous factors which served as a catalysator for upcoming events. The central part of Mali suffers from a long-term conflict between farmers and nomadic herders. (ICG, 2016) During the rebellion and Operation Serval, the central part of Mali served first as a battleground just to be later turned into a passage-stop on a way to the north. Inhabitants of this area were for a long time out of the attention of Malian forces and when they finally got there, they were punished and abused. This turned many people from the support of the state to the support of radical armed groups, because they were able to provide them with at least basic security. A side effect of this turn was higher recruitment into armed groups, especially from the young males which entered voluntarily. But, when they received weapons and basic training, they tried to use it as an advantage against their long-term enemies, farmers against herders and vice versa. (Ibid.)

The years 2014 – 2015 were also the time when the organizational parts of rebel forces witnessed changes, which were later crucial for the evolvement of the situation. In the second half of 2014 were formed two major coalitions, which entered peace talks with the Malian Government and signed the APR in 2015. The *Coordination des mouvements de l’Azawad* (CMA) was created on July 16, 2014 and comprised of the MNLA, *Haut Conseil pour l’unité de l’Azawad* (HCUA), Sidatti branch of *Mouvement Arabe de l’Azawad* (SMAA) and part of *Coordination des Mouvements et Forces Patriotiques de Résistance* (CMFPR). (Wing, 2016) The other broad coalition, known as The Plateforme consisted of other part of CMFPR, Ahmed branch of MAA (AMAA) and The *Groupe autodéfense touareg Imghad et allies* (GATIA). The Plateforme respected the sovereignty of the Government and was seen as a Bamako’s ally. (Charbonneau, 2017) These two coalitions entered the peace talks with the Malian Government known as The Algiers Accords and on May 15, 2015, signed The Plateforme with the Malian Government the APR. CMA joined the APR one month later, on June 20. (Wing, 216) However, these were only Tuareg and Arab coalitions, major jihadist groups (AQIM, MUJAO, Ansar Dine) did not participate in the APR. (Ibid.) At the beginning of 2015, January was formed a new jihadist group in central Mali – *Katibat Macina*, also known as the *Macina Liberation Front* (MLS) led by a former imam Amadou Kouffa.

French forces were deployed at first in a number of 3 500 personnel (Rapport d'information, 2021) and during the first phase of Operation Barkhane conducted various operations, especially razzia, airborne operations with paratroopers, cordon-and-search operations, with the effort put on mobility, (Shurkin, 2021) but also they were not out of open skirmishes. However, a big portion of energy was put on intelligence gathering operations and targeted killing actions. The result of this focus was the neutralization of various important figures: Ahmed al-Tilemsi, former leader of MUJAO and then leader of Al-Mourabitoune in December 2014 or Hamada Ag Hama (known as Abdelkrim el-Targui), the leader of the Al-Ansar Katiba, in May 2015. (Rapport d'information, 2021) The circle of the most frequented activities was closed by reacting to terrorist attacks, which became frequented especially at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015.

2015 – 2017

This timeline is identical to one of the periods from French Rapport d'information which is there called “containment of the terrorist threat in the North as part of the implementation of the Algiers Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation” (Rapport d'information, 2021) It aptly expresses French approach in those years because France did not help with the implementation of the APR. (Shurkin, 2021) However, at that time was the APR seen as a significant success by all included parties, and its main prospects – “regional and local peace and reconciliation structures, a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme, decentralisation measures, and the implementation of community policing to strengthen trust between communities and security actors” were believed to bring an end to the conflict. (Interpeace, 2020) Implementation of the APR suffered from the same fate as the previous agreements – the Malian Government did not step up to the implementation and at the end of 2017 was clear, that signatories from the radical groups lost their patience and fate in the APR, meaning their practical refusal of the results of the agreement. (Charbonneau, 2017)

In terms of the evolvement of radical armed groups, two important changes emerged. The first change was tied with MNLA. Because of in-fighting and attacks from jihadist groups in 2015 - 2016, the coalition of CMA was seriously weakened, and the inner structure also suffered changes – the dominant position of MNLA was weakened in favour of HCUA. (ECFR, 2020) In February 2017 was formed a new jihadist coalition The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (*Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen* - JNIM)

consisting of Ansar Dine, the Katiba al-Furqan (one of the affiliate branches of AQIM), the Katiba Macina and al-Mourabitoun. (ICG, 2021)

From the perspective of Barkhane forces, this period of time could be labelled as “an indefinite period of time”. While the operations swiftly followed the framework of actions from the previous period, the level of violence and conflicts started to rise, despite the signing of the APR. The situation was confusing because almost all actors fought among themselves – jihadist and radical armed groups did not fight only against Malian, MINUSMA and Barkhane forces but also in high tension between themselves. This compelled French officials to rise the number of personnel of Barkhane from 3 500 soldiers to 4 050 soldiers in 2016 and 4 800 soldiers in 2017. (Rapport d’information, 2021) However, confused were even some French officers, who did not understand why France did not participate in the APR and its implementation. (Shurkin, 2021)

2018 – 2020

The period from 2018 to January 13, 2020, meant for France the hardest time during its presence in Mali. A big portion of the unstable situation between 2018 and 2020 came from the rising violent activities of JNIM. The rise of the violence was the biggest since 2013 and victims were from all participating groups – armed radical groups, MINUSMA and Barkhane forces, and also a great number of civilian casualties. For a comparison of violent incidents see Figure no. 5, for a graph expressing rising violent incidents see Figure no. 6.

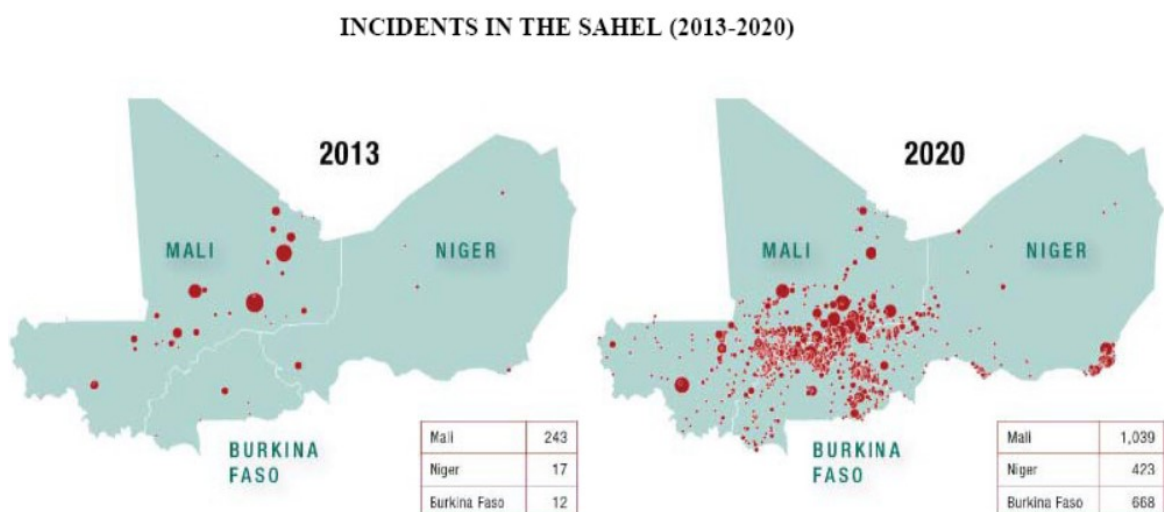


Figure 5: Incidents in the Sahel in 2013 and 2020, source: *Dumas, F. D. (2021, April). RAPPORT D'INFORMATION (No. 4089). ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE.* https://www.assembleenationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_def/115b4089_rapport-information#

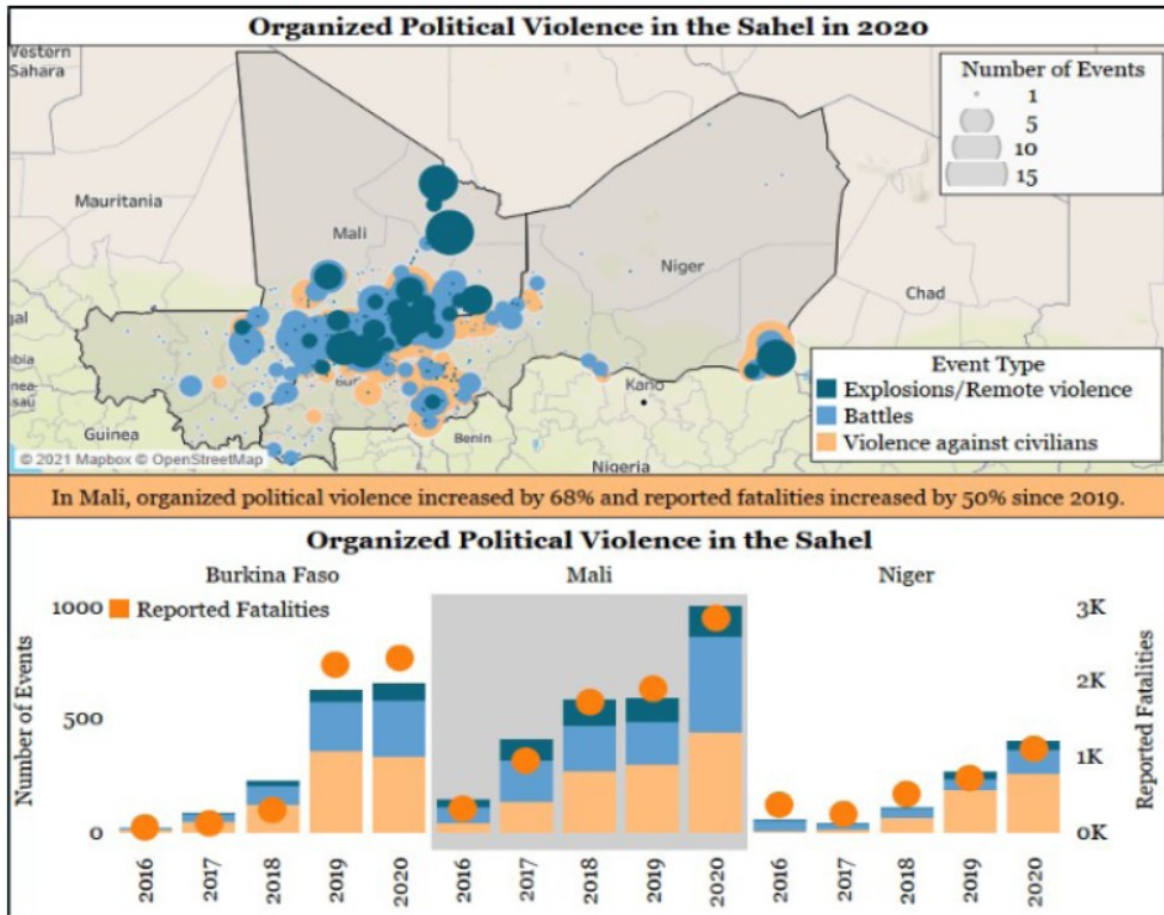


Figure 6: Graph of violence between 2016-2020, source: *Dumas, F. D. (2021, April). RAPPORT D'INFORMATION (No. 4089). ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE.* https://www.assembleenationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_def/115b4089_rapport-information#

The higher level of violence was also reflected in the attacks against Barkhane forces, which were to that time not so common – if insurgents attacked foreign forces, they usually focused on the MINUSMA personnel, who was more vulnerable. (Rapport d’information, 2021) The situation for French forces was so severe in 2019, that French General Lecointre stated that the situation was in various aspects similar to the situation before Operation Serval. (Ibid.) However, from 2018 to 2020, French forces suffered 20 casualties which is

more than one-third of all French casualties (57) between 2013 and January of 2021 in Mali. (Ibid.) The symbol of these losses was a crash of two helicopters on November 25, 2019, which costs the lives of 13 soldiers. This loss was the biggest single-day loss of French soldiers since the 1980s. (BBC, 2019) Despite high losses and a rising level of violence, the French number of troops fell to 4 650 soldiers (withdrawal of 150 soldiers compared to 2017). (Rapport d'information, 2021) But even in the face of these misfortunes, French forces continued in their operations (which did not differ from the operations of two previous periods) and gained notable results in terms of neutralization of high-value targets. Among the most important were Mohamed Ould Nouini, known as Abou Hassan al-Ansari, leader of Al-Mourabitoune in Mali in February 2018, and Djamel Okacha, known as Yahya Abou Al-Hammam, leader of the Timbuktu Emirate in February 2019. (Ibid.) The literal “dot” after this period was made by Pau Summit on January 13, 2020. As the result of this summit, France announced the strengthening of its current presence in Mali with the deployment of 600 additional troops, the creation of international military Operation Takuba under French lead consisting of special forces (officially part of the Operation Barkhane) and the creation of The G5 Sahel Coalition, which should improve communication and coordination between European Union and The G5 Sahel countries. (Ibid.)

2020 – 2022

The Pau Summit provided a much-needed “injection” that was already necessary given the previous period of heavy fighting and increased levels of violence. Announced Operation Takuba started on March 27 and was divided into two groups located in Gao and Ménaka. June 2020 brought the crucial success of the French focus on the high-value targets when was neutralized Abdelmalek Droukdel, leader of AQIM. (Rapport d'information, 2021) However, on August 18, 2020, after months of demonstrations was Malian President Keïta unseated by a coup d'état and the leader of the coup, Colonel Assimi Goita became a Vice – president while on the presidential chair was put former defence Minister Bah Ndaw. (BBC, 2020) During Autumn, France started a series of large-scale experimental operations in cooperation with Malian and other African troops. The first operation named *Bourrasque* mobilized more than 3 000 troops and was aimed at weakening The Islamic State at the Greater Sahara (EIGS - *État islamique dans le Grand Sahara*). (Rapport d'information, 2021) At the beginning of January 2021, a similar large-scale operation

followed. The operation was named *Éclipse* but in contrast to *Bourrasque*, its focus was on territorial control in the tri-border area (Mali X Burkina Faso X Niger). The main effort was put into the mobility of forces which were most of the time wandering in the area of 400 km X 200 km. (Ibid.) Operation *Équinoxe* was a successor of operation *Éclipse* with a similar purpose – to keep this area under the control. (Ibid.) However, on the night of May 25, 2021, Mali suffered from another coup d'état, again led by Colonel Assimi Goita. In reaction to this coup, France reacted by stopping the joint military activities, but they were restored just a month later. Just a few days later on June 7, 2021, French President Macron announced the withdrawal of French forces from Mali and The G5 Sahel countries. Withdrawal should begin in the first quarter of 2022. Troops who will stay there (1 000 – 1 500 soldiers) should become part of a new international mission in Mali. The main reason for this decision has been the dealings of Sahelian Governments with terrorist groups. (Ibid.) Later was added, that some African countries requested the presence of French troops – but the only confirmed country until these days (Spring 2022) is Chad. In the summer of 2021, specifically on August 17, French forces killed Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, leader of EIGS. (Roger & Diallo, 2021) On February 17, 2022, France announced the beginning of withdrawal from Mali and redeployment of its force to other Sahelian countries. As the main reasons were stated obstructions and a bad approach toward international missions in Mali by the Malian military junta. (Ibrahim & Moncrieff, 2022)

Characteristics of French COIN doctrine in Operation Barkhane

At the beginning of identification of French and US characteristics in Operation Barkhane is important to note and keep in mind the different goals and courses of Operations Serval and Barkhane. Whereas Serval was a highly dynamic operation with specifically set goals, Barkhane has been a static operation designed for the longer term with broadly defined goals. Because of that can appear analyses of Operations Serval and Barkhane differently, but the aim and content remain same.

One of the main French characteristics of Operation Serval was its strong focus on the mobility of its troops. It remained the main characteristic even in Operation Barkhane, despite its static nature. The core of the French fleet of vehicles remained the same as was in Operation Serval, but was reinforced by motorbikes, quad bikes, and a few pieces of heavy vehicles. Even though the number of heavily armoured vehicles outnumbered the number of light armoured vehicles (260 over 210), French forces were able to keep their mobility at a

high level. (Rapport d'information, 2021) The peak of using its mobility as an advantage came with new experimental operations *Éclipse* and *Équinoxe*. However, the use of light vehicles has brought one major complication for French troops – the significant number of deaths and injuries was caused by improvised explosive devices (IED). IEDs became one of the main weapons during Operation Barkhane - French light vehicles are light because of the absence of heavy armour and thus are not able to protect troops inside when confronted with IED.

Methods that have been used during Operation Barkhane do not reflect expectations after Operation Serval. A French version of the oil spot method has been completely missing. Shurkin (2021) offers a possible explanation with a claim, that it is the small number of French soldiers in Mali (and the Sahel at all) to enable French forces to use such a method. This reason counts also for *quadrillage*. (Ibid.) The most used methods were *razzia* and cordon-and-search operations, but these methods are involved also in the US COIN doctrine. With operations *Éclipse* and *Équinoxe* French forces revived sort of operations typical for Galula's era. Wandering units were effectively used in Algeria and both operations are highly similar to this kind of operations. Even though it was outside the territory of Mali, the deployment of 200 soldiers for a period of one month without any permanent base in Niger was complete re-use of the old method. Despite the fact that this method is not mentioned in the French COIN doctrine, because of its origin and use is this method considered as one of the French characteristics.

Factor directly related to methods is the number of soldiers and personnel. At the beginning of Operation Barkhane was in Mali presented fewer troops than at the end of Operation Serval – part of the troops was withdrawn, and new troops had to cover the area of all of Sahel. “*Do maximum possible with minimum troops*” is according to Shurkin (2016) one of the key aspects of French military thinking. It is even more efficient when the numbers of French troops in Mali and US troops in Afghanistan during their maximum presence are compared – 5 250 French troops in Mali in 2021 (Rapport d'information, 2021) compared to 110 000 US troops in Afghanistan in 2011 (BBC, 2021) In terms of surveillance which is highly emphasized in French Contre-insurrection, French forces were again limited by a number of its drones and planes and did not conduct as much operations as they would like.

French approach towards politics is diametrically different from its approach during Operation Serval. In Operation Barkhane has France followed directly its doctrine and has

not intervened in any cases – the ARP, two coups, or rising antipathies towards French presence coming mostly from the southern parts of Mali. This aversion to politics has been confusing for many officers, who believe that military action should be accompanied by the political one. French (non)political approach is promptly summarized as “*acting politically without being political*” by Shurkin. (2020) This can be a product of fear that France will be associated with its colonial history, which is something that France has been trying to distinguish from by all possible means.

French application of US COIN models in Operation Barkhane

As identified in chapter 3, one of the main characteristics of the US COIN doctrine is the great effort that is put into intelligence. Intelligence is one of the necessary parts in the process of elimination of high valuable targets – as this chapter previously described, this has been one of the French key interests during Operation Barkhane. However, not only that great effort dedicated to intelligence is a sign of US FM3 – 24, but this is even supported by the fact, that the US provided France with an intelligence cell, which proved to be of high importance during the whole operation. (Rapport d’information, 2021)

During whole Operation Barkhane have French army faced accusations of being “Americanised” and comparisons that “*Mali is for France the same as was Afghanistan for the US*”. (Shurkin, 2020) French soldiers and especially officers have been well aware of these opinions and the French army has been trying to get away from its label. According to interviews with French soldiers, they were aware of the differences between French and US styles of warfare and were able to identify “*bad lessons learned in Afghanistan*” (Shurkin, 2016) Among top military officers is this process even labelled as “de-Americanisation”. (Goya in Shurkin, 2016)

Partial conclusion

Different nature of Operation Barkhane has provided slightly different outcomes than dynamic Operation Serval. The final result is not so one-sided as was in the previous analysis, however, French characteristics are still dominant. French reliance on mobility and their natural tolerance for high-level risk has been once again significant factors in the French way of COIN. A small number of deployed troops also directly points to French characteristics, but this factor is also crucially inscribed in two other areas (factors) –

methods, which have been used and a number of bases. A small number of troops have directly affected methods, which can be used and applied during Operation Barkhane. For this reason, have not been used methods of oil spot and *quadrillage*. (Shurkin, 2020) However, *razzia* and cordon-and-search are methods included in both doctrines and French forces used them long before intervention in Afghanistan and the writing of both documents. Because of that is not possible to distinguish whether the use of these methods during Operation Barkhane has fulfilled the characterisation of French or US doctrine. But, with operations *Éclipse* and *Équinoxe* and the deployment of wandering unit in Niger, French forces revived methods from Galula's era. Even though these methods are not present in French *Contre-insurrection*, their use put a significant French signature on methods used during Operation Barkhane. In terms of the number of bases, this has been part of speculations about the “Americanisation” of the French army (small number of big highly secured bases), but this argument is not as clear as should be expected. The number of French bases in Mali has indeed been small – only 5 bases (ECFR, 2020) but the reason for such a small number of bases lies in the overall small number of troops in Mali during Operation Barkhane. With the number of troops that have been deployed would be impossible to keep a big number of bases throughout the whole territory. But, even though the number of bases was small, they have been strategically located to cover the most important areas. It is only a hypothetical question of how it would look (in terms of methods and bases) if there have been more French troops in Mali – but this would not only be a variable influencing these two areas, but it would also be a rejection of a French way of COIN by its nature.

With its approach to politics, French completely fulfilled its COIN doctrine. Constantly averting political involvement but at the same time acting “*politically without being political*” (Shurkin, 2020), France limited itself in possible ways how it could lead a conflict towards a potential end. Face to face with talks about the “Americanisation” of the French army, the French army has not supported these talks as one would expect and a number of US factors present in Operation Barkhane has been low. The most obvious and only identified characteristic was in term of intelligence. The big focus on intelligence has had its roots in the French focus on high-value targets. This has been supported by the fact, that an important part of French intelligence in Mali and Sahel was comprised of US intelligence cell.

French forces have kept their focus on mobility even in static Operation Barkhane. However, this focus on mobility over safety has brought a higher number of deaths, because French light vehicles do not have enough strong armour to protect soldiers inside against IEDs. Generally, French troops continued in their tradition of tolerance for high-level risk. French strong focus on the elimination of insurgents has been illustrated by French dedication to eliminating high-value targets with which France has wanted to weaken the top management of jihadist and armed groups. Also, in more successful months French forces neutralized 80 insurgents per month on average. (Goya in Rapport d'information, 2021) In the case of population, French forces have tried to revive their population-focused approach from Galula's era, however with the absence of political dedication was this approach not successful as was decades ago. Their civil-military engagement has brought them in particular events more trouble than gains, because of insurgents hiding among civilians. (Shurkin, 2020) In the words of the Theory of Counterinsurgency Trilemma, French forces continued in their focus on the physical elimination of insurgents and protection of civilians. The goal of force protection was left behind as in the case of Operation Serval.

Conclusion

Almost a decade-long conflict has offered an opportunity to implement two types of COIN operations – one dynamic and one static. The different nature of both operations has been an opportunity to analyse and test claims that French COIN doctrine became similar to US doctrine after their joint cooperation in Afghanistan. Doctrines of both countries are summarized in their publications – French Contre-insurrection from 2013 and US FM3 – 24 from 2006. The similarity of both documents was highly discussed and there were opinions that the French Contre-insurrection took a great amount of inspiration from the US FM3 – 24. The aim of this thesis was to test whether these similarities are present even in operations themselves. To test these assumptions were chosen two COIN operations under the French lead – Serval and Barkhane. Results brought by an analysis of Operation Serval were clear with a high explanatory value. Methods used during Operation Serval were those defined by French doctrine and the overall approach was a product mostly influenced by the systematic – historical background of French forces. But the approach to politics was identified as the one typical for the US. The symbols of the Operation became speed and risk tolerance – two significant characteristics of French forces during the whole operation. The French blueprint in the whole Operation was so strong, that emerged opinions which gave Operation Serval as an example to the US army. Operation Barkhane as a direct successor of Operation Serval has brought a different nature for analysis with a chance of possible direct outcomes. However, despite its different nature and differences in both analyses, even Operation Barkhane proved to be a French matter rather than the US. One of the crucial factors has been the small number of deployed soldiers which in the end influenced the use of some methods and the number of French bases. Part of the methods used during Operation Barkhane can be found in both doctrines and are of French historical origin. However, French forces have used methods from the Galula's era which turned the pointer more to the original French way of COIN. During all missions was an obvious focus on mobility and speed, same as in the Operation Serval. In Barkhane, France had changed its attitude towards politics and turned completely from the US way to the strict French way following their doctrine. The biggest presence of the US influence was identified in a high effort dedicated to the intelligence which was even supported by the presence of the US intelligence cell. But Operation Barkhane was the same as Operation Serval of French nature.

This means that the vast majority of analysed factors are identical to the French COIN doctrine and hypothesis

“French COIN turned from the physical elimination of insurgents to the force protection while keeping distinction between enemy combatants and civilians.”

is not proven true. As partial conclusions indicated, the French focus has not changed, and the main goals of the French COIN are the physical elimination of insurgents and distinction between civilians and enemy combatants. This knowledge also provides an answer to the settled research question:

Has French counterinsurgency become similar to the US counterinsurgency?

The final answer to the research question is: No, French counterinsurgency is not similar to US counterinsurgency.

Even though the result of this case study is clear, author is aware of the uniqueness of the intervention and small number of analysed operations. This can lead to an opinion that only this case study is not sufficiently representative to support its own findings. However, French intervention in Mali is currently (Spring 2022) only possible case for such analyses and until emergence of other possible cases for analysing, it will remain as the only proof for modern nature of French COIN.

Region of Sahel and Africa generally are great opportunities for further research, not only in cases of concrete countries but even in regard to a high number of non-state actors (tribes, jihadist groups, or armed radical groups) or international missions (*Épervier* in Chad or MINUSMA in Mali). Rich and complex topics are also Russian and Chinese presence on the continent or activities of their agencies there (Wagner group).

Summary

This thesis is designed as a case study of French counterinsurgency in Mali. The aim of this work was to answer a research question *Has French counterinsurgency become similar to the US counterinsurgency?*. In order to answer the settled research question was formulated hypothesis based on the theory of Counterinsurgency's impossible trilemma from Lorenzo Zambeardi - *French COIN (counterinsurgency) turned from the physical elimination of insurgents to the force protection while keeping the distinction between enemy combatants and civilians*. In order to prove/disprove the hypothesis and answer the research question were conducted two qualitative analyses of two French operations in Mali – Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane. These analyses were focused on the identification of French and US characteristics of COIN doctrines in these operations. However, the overall result was that French counterinsurgency kept its characteristics, the hypothesis was disproved and the answer to the research question was *No, French counterinsurgency is not similar to US counterinsurgency*.

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Appendix no. 1: The PRESTER framework (graph), source: Collaborative document under the direction of Colonel Philippe ROMAN-AMAT. (2013). Contre-insurrection [E-book]. Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrines et d'expérimentations. <https://www.cicde.defense.gouv.fr/images/documentation/DIA/20130417-NP-CICDE-DIA-3.4.4A-COIN-2013.pdf>

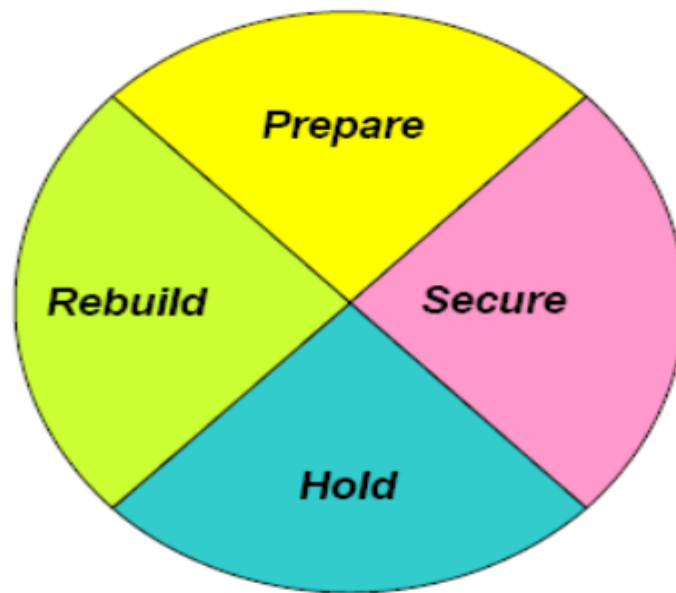
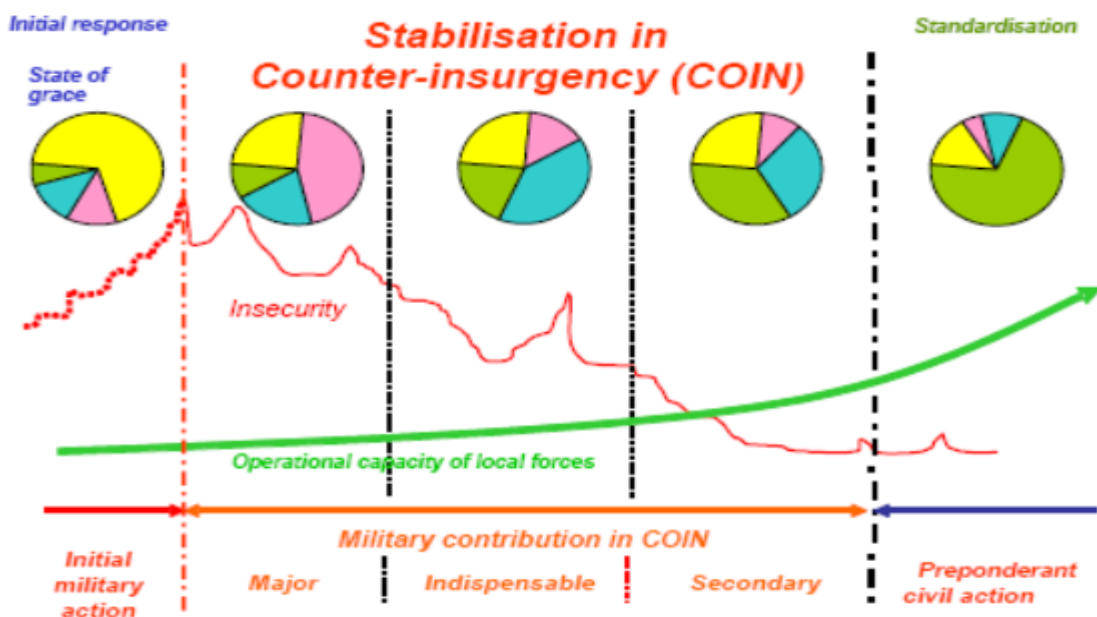


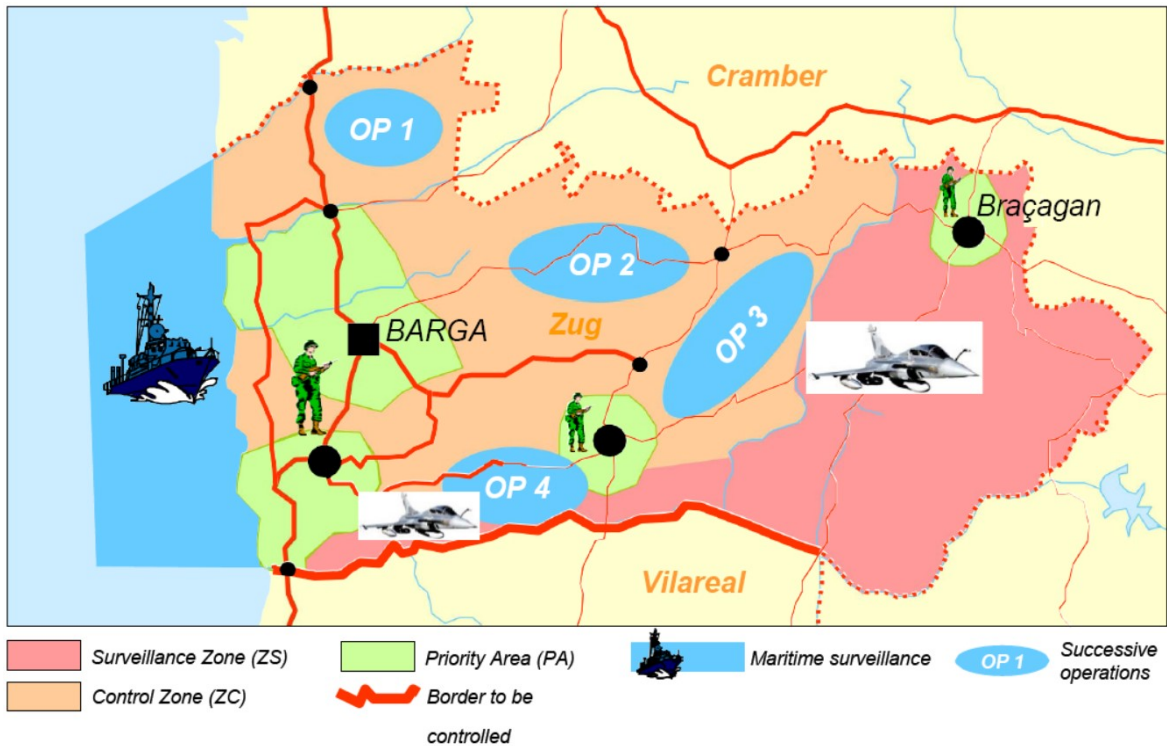
FIG -7 The PRESTER operational framework in COIN.

These four axes of effort are not sequenced in successive¹¹³ phases, but are simultaneous and intertwined. They are weighted in different proportions according to the situation and the evolution of the level of security in each area considered.

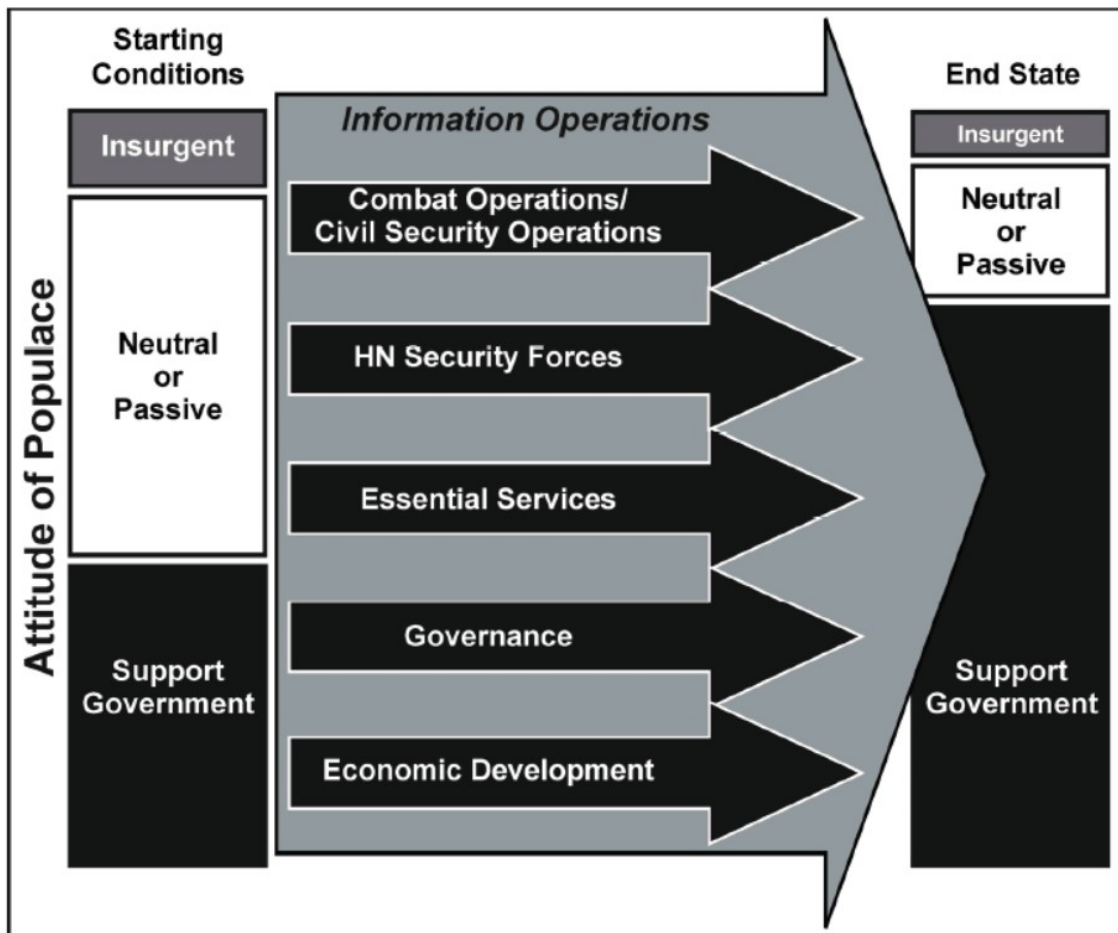


Appendix no. 2: The method of oil spot and use of supporting methods, (graph), source: Collaborative document under the direction of Colonel Philippe ROMAN-AMAT. (2013). Contre-insurrection [E-book]. Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrines et d'expérimentations.

<https://www.cicde.defense.gouv.fr/images/documentation/DIA/20130417-NP-CICDE-DIA-3.4.4A-COIN-2013.pdf>



Appendix no. 3: Examples of logical lines of operations, (picture), source: Counterinsurgency, U. S. Army Field Manual FM 3–24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3–33.5 (December 2006).



Appendix no. 4: Deployment of Barkhane's forces, (picture), source: Ministère des Armées. (n.d.). Opération BARKHANE. <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/bande-sahelo-saharienne/operation-barkhane>

