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Blinded War?

*Assessing the Relationship Between
Grand Strategy and Intervention in France
during the 2013 Malian Crisis*

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I declare on my honour that this dissertation has been written by myself, without seeking any unlawful external assistance, that it is not a reworking of work submitted to another institution for evaluation, and that it has never been published, in whole or in part. All information (ideas, sentences, graphs, maps, tables, ...) borrowed from or referring to primary or secondary sources are properly referenced according to the current academic method. I declare that I have read and adhere to the **Code of Ethics for students regarding borrowing, quoting and exploitation of various sources** and that I know that plagiarism is a serious offence.

Joseph Berthomiere-Miret

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Berthomiere-Miret', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

I would first like to thank Mr de Wilde d'Estmael for his helpful comments and his help along the process. I also want to express my gratitude to the academic team of the master's in international relations at UCLouvain and to my professors at Sciences Po Lille for their precious teaching which sparked my curiosity about international security and strategy.

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List of Abbreviations

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AU	African Union
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CDSN	Conseil de défense et de sécurité nationale
DGA	Direction générale de l'Armement
DGRIS	Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Stratégie
CEMA	Chef d'état major particulier
CPCP	Centre de planification et de Commandement des Opérations
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DRM	Direction du Renseignement Militaire
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMA	État-major des armées
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
RECAMP	Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix
SGA	Secrétariat général pour l'administration
SGDSN	Secrétariat Général de la Défense et de la Sécurité Nationale
MNLA	Mouvement Nationaliste de Libération de l'Azawad
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest

Introduction

Studying Grand Strategy and Intervention

France collapsed, taking Europe with it. The recovery from 1942 to 1945 was the achievement of Anglo-Saxons, armed with a philosophy and a strategy. But as soon as victory was achieved, we were once again disoriented by the great decolonization movement. Indochina was lost thanks to a series of excellent tactics, all of which were defeated by the enemy's strategy, against which we were unable to come up with any strategy worthy of the name. [...] Suez, a tactical victory, ended in an appalling political failure, for lack of the slightest notion of the strategic conditions necessary for the success of such an undertaking. [...] My conclusion is that, to a large extent, our ignorance of strategy was fatal.

General André Beaufre (1965, p. 4)

Introducing a discussion on ‘grand strategy’ with a historical reminder of the danger of a lack of ‘military strategy’ might seem counter intuitive. Yet, it appears that the consequences of a lack of military strategy are more evocative than those of a lack of grand strategy. When Beaufre mentions a tactical victory that leads to a strategic disaster, he is referring to a successful conduct of military operations, but which because it is not part of a larger design, i.e. a strategy at the scale of war, does not lead to victory. This relation between tactics and strategy can be taken to a higher echelon. Here, tactics become strategy and strategy becomes grand strategy. Grand strategy, in this sense, appears to be ‘the highest form of statecraft. In one usual definition, it is a state’s “theory of victory,” explaining how the state will utilize its diverse means to advance and achieve national ends’ (Balzacq & Krebs, 2021, p. 1).

Given its ability to coordinate multifactorial state action in a complex international setting, grand strategy is a 21st-century callback to the words of Cardinal Richelieu (2011/1688, p. 223), for whom ‘nothing is more necessary to

the government of a State than foresight, since, by its means, one can easily prevent many evils which could only be cured with great difficulty when they have occurred'. As a result, the notion is undergoing a certain conceptual revival, 're-emerging in the politico-strategic sphere', and is increasingly commented (Briens & Gomart, 2021, p. 24). As such, China's Belt and Road Initiative; Beijing's maritime adventurism in the South China Sea; the People's Liberation Army's potential crossing of the Formose Strait or the Party's international institutional proactivity are all 'strategies' or policies regularly purported to be part of a grand strategy of 'China Dream' or 'national rejuvenation' (Danner, 2018; Dargnat, 2016; Stanzel et al., 2017). These numerous allusions and speculations on Chinese grand strategy nevertheless provide little or no insight into how 'Xi is reorganizing the Party, bureaucracy, and military to see through his strategic vision' (Erickson, 2019, p. 82). Yet, these internal mechanisms and their alignment are essential to the implementation of grand strategy. China may well have a 'theory of victory', but it will only be able to carry it out by adapting to systemic change and working with its 'bureaucrats [that] are likely to attempt to ensure that a grand strategy is coordinated around the parochial interests of their particular bureaucracy' (Betts, 2000, p. 30; Edelstein, 2021, p. 606). Therein lies what John L. Gaddis calls 'the calculated relationship of means to large ends' (2009, p. 7). Calculated 'is meant to imply a deliberate as opposed to an accidental, inadvertent or fortuitous connection between ends and means' (Gaddis, 1987, p. 29). However, just as observers tend to overlook the importance of implementation and thus this 'calculated relationship', the voluminous academic literature dedicated to the notion shows a similar tendency.

Consequently, the central aim of this dissertation will be to contribute to the understanding of those mechanisms that enable (or not) grand strategy to 'direct' foreign policy. To this end, we put forward a 'within case' study of the decision-making process that led to the French intervention in Mali in January 2013 under the name 'Operation Serval'. Triggered to assist Malian authorities confronted since early 2012 with a resurgence of violence from jihadist and autonomist groups in northern Mali, Serval suffered fierce criticism describing it

as an 'astrategic' operation or one with deleterious political consequences (Charbonneau, 2017; Gaulme, 2013; Pérouse de Montclos, 2022). By analyzing the 'connection' described by Gaddis, we propose to shed light on the workings of its relationship to French grand strategy. His 'ambiguous' status *vis-à-vis* Paris's preferred multilateral practices gives us a hook that we will follow from the formulation of grand strategy at the Elysée to the French boots on the Sahel.

Case study selection

Studying grand strategy raises an extremely wide range of possibilities given its far-reaching understanding upon many spheres of a state's action. Recourse to military intervention proves to be a relevant object for several reasons. Such a decision is first a high mark of State sovereignty; it also commits the state outside its borders at the risk of military personnel's lives; it commits its credibility *vis-à-vis* competitors within the international system and may lead to negative backlashes for the intervener (Finnemore, 2003; Krebs, 2009; Rosenau, 1968; Snow, 2016). Consequently, if there are decisions that grand strategy can 'guide', it appears that this is undeniably one of them. Indeed, although intervention is a response to a combination of international and domestic incentives during a (more or less foreseeable) crisis episode, all its temporal dimensions (preparation, decision, conduct) seem unable to avoid critical interactions with the substance of grand strategy. In this regard, Hal Brands observe that Barack Obama's decision to refuse U.S. intervention alongside the French in Syria took place during the crisis and was partly shaped by it but was firmly embedded in the broader framework of a well-designed American grand strategy (Brands, 2016). With Peter Feaver, Brands adds that 'in a crisis, no one says, "let's consult our grand strategy plan to see what we should do." But they do so implicitly, because the cost/benefit calculations and list of preferred options that are tried first generally do link back to grand strategies' (Brands & Feaver, 2021, p. 560).

Choosing France seemed logical enough since, when one combines grand strategy, interventionism and available literature, all over a period spanning the last 20 to 30 years, few nations stand out. The United Kingdom and above all

the United States seem to meet these requirements. However, grand strategy being a concept strongly rooted in the United States, Washington is regularly scrutinized (Brzezinski, 2012; Drezner, 2005; Ikenberry, 2007; Jervis, 2021; Layne, 2006; Posen, 2014; Van Evera, 2008). As for London, it offers a slightly less viable profile given the imprecision associated with its grand strategy (Johnson, 2019; Porter, 2010). In contrast, France lends itself well to study. Firstly, because like Bruno Tertrais shows, Paris's allies tend to emphasize its grand strategy (2021, p. 43). Furthermore, academic work also recognizes France's grand strategic proactivity, past and present (Balzacq, 2019; Bozo, 2006; Cambon, 1930; Cerny, 1971; Davis, 2011; Frank, 2021; Gordon, 1993; Kolodziej, 1974; Simon, 2013; Tertrais, 2021; Rieker, 2017). Paris also offers an advantage not enjoyed by the United States, since the content of its grand strategy is little or not at all the subject of debate and tends to remain stable over the long term (Guitton, 2021). The reasons for the choice of Operation Serval will be discussed later. It should be noted that France is also a relevant case given its strong commitment to military operations (Bentégeat, 2020; d'Aboville, 2020; Tenenbaum, 2018; Treacher, 2000; Utley, 1998). Since 1995, it has taken part 'in over 100 military operations' outside of its borders, second only to the United States (Schmitt & Tenenbaum, 2023, p. 355). In this way, as an integral part of the French foreign policy landscape, intervention is likely to hold a special position within French grand strategy (Leroy, 2021; Vittot, 2021).

Methodology, theoretical contribution and literature

Hans Morgenthau used to argue that the social sciences were falling towards 'the trivial, the formal, the methodological, the purely theoretical, the remotely historical – in short, the politically irrelevant' (cited in Van Evera, 1997, p. 97). Contrary to Morgenthau's observations, we argue that our approach represents a contribution firmly anchored in a highly political reality. It shifts our understanding of grand strategy away from 'mystified' inner workings and towards its practice. This is precisely the central contribution of this essay. As Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich (2018, p. 28) note, 'at the

heart of every proposed variant of grand strategy is a logic about how values relate to goals and processes in a causative manner', but these relationships are not organic and 'are significantly underexplored in the literature'. In their state-of-the-art review aimed at structuring a research program, they invite readers to improve our knowledge of these relational processes. Among the four practical suggestions they put forward is the need 'for scholars [to] unpack in a systematic fashion the relationship between ends, ways, and means and between grand strategy and military strategy, politics, and policy.' (Balzacq et al., 2018, p. 28). This dissertation therefore has for ambition to participate in this effort.

Doing so involves 'following the grand strategy's 'journey' using qualitative research methods. First, by observing its formulation and content and then by looking for 'markers' of its precise influence on the policy process. Hence, our reflection adopts a non-standardized form of process tracing (non-standardized implies that it is not subjected to 'empirical tests', as these would be too space-consuming for this work) (Collier, 2011, p. 825). However, process-tracing allows 'to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable' (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 206). In our case, the observed outcome is the decision to launch Operation Serval, the independent variable is the influence of grand strategy, and the causal process is the sequence of steps in the decision-making process. It should be noted that part of this work, aimed at analyzing the psychological factors behind François Hollande's decision-making, is based on a quantitative method of content analysis or 'frequency analysis'. The data obtained using this approach are then integrated into the initial process tracing.

Regarding the literature mobilized by this dissertation, few limits have been identified. As far as grand strategy is concerned, its traditional corpus is voluminous and has been the subject of substantial work by leading scholars, journals and collections. In addition, the 'modern' scientific corpus stemming from the work of Sciences Po scholar Thierry Balzacq allows for a renewed positivist approach that will prove valuable to our endeavor. The material used to conduct the content analysis is also solid thanks to a French public database

compiling interview and press conference transcripts for many stakeholders¹. The relatively 'weakest' point of this essay is certainly the 'testimonies' on the decision-making process of Operation Serval. They are fewer, which leads us at times to base important parts of our hypotheses on a fine variety of works. This goes for the contributions of Benedikt Erforth (2020a; 2020b) and Daho et al. (2022). However, this needs to be put into perspective as we have been able to incorporate a wide variety of more 'sober' testimonies that support our hypotheses. Furthermore, those two publications are reviewed contributions recognized for their methodological rigor and empirical contribution to the question which solidifies our approach (Bourgeois, 2022; Colomba Petteng, 2020; Shaffer, 2020)².

To facilitate this discussion. Two central parts are presented. Part I, comprising two chapters, aims at introducing the reader to the notion of grand strategy and bringing out an operational definition. Its second purpose is to link this definition to the context of the study, i.e. French grand strategy. Part II, which is more substantial given that it contains the core of the analysis, is divided into six chapters. The first of these presents the need for consistency in the implementation of Grand Strategy and analyses Operation Serval relationship with the French one. From this point onwards, the essay sets out to 'dissect' the decision-making process, looking for traces of the grand strategy. The second chapter therefore seeks to present our framework for the incoming analysis. The third chapter is focused on the organizational culture of the French military and its relations to grand strategy. In the next chapter, we analyze civil-military relations and the close advisory board of the Malian crisis to assess the presence and preferences of actors. The fifth chapter is based on a Leadership Trait Analysis of François Hollande, tracing the progression of positions defended by the actors up to the final decision in its most idiosyncratic features. In the last

¹ The website hosting this data base can be accessed here: <https://www.vie-publique.fr>

² (Richard Ned Lebow's, Valerie M. Hudson's and Tony Chafer's reviews of Erforth's work are unpublished but can be accessed at this link: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-17581-8>)

chapter, we build a theory stating how the discrepancy observed between the organizational culture of the armed forces and French grand strategy can survive. Since we find it difficult to undertake a reflection on grand strategy without attempting to analyze its consequences on the international system, we conclude our study with an examination of the impact of the implementation of French grand strategy on its position in West Africa and, more broadly, on its international relations. In these concluding remarks, we also summarize the key findings of our work, and briefly distance ourselves from its analytical and theoretical limits.

Part I

Operational Definition of Grand Strategy and the French Context

Chapter I

Grand Strategy Operational Definition

Grand strategy is at the heart of a quite heated academic debate (Brands & Feaver 2021, p. 559). Several accounts portray's it at best as a futile enterprise and at worst as a serious misconception of the processes by which foreign policy is conducted. Lukas Milevski, who has devoted a major volume to the analysis of successive waves of definition of grand strategic thought, sees in the heterogeneity of the notion an 'almost haphazard' evolution (2016, p. 145). For Daniel Drezner (2011, p. 58), 'history has shown that grand strategies do not alter the trajectory of great-power politics all that much'. Another equally regular criticism depicts the notion as 'illusory' or as one that 'makes sense abstractly but falters in application' (Betts, 2019, p. 7; 2000; 2021). David M. Edelstein and Ronald R. Krebs support this argument, arguing that the complex and changing international environment means that 'the consequences of foreign policy are consistently unpredictable' (2015, p. 110). This would be notably due to the emergence of unforeseen crises, yet also to bureaucratic frictions since these organizations 'tend to promote their own health, often at the expense of larger corporate or national goals' (Edelstein, 2021, p. 607).

Even among academics who readily acknowledge that grand strategy has both analytical and prescriptive power, the definitions they give are so heterogeneous that a consensual definition appears virtually unattainable. As we define it here, *grand strategy is the ongoing process by which policymakers refer, in directing the state's policies, to a previously defined theory that articulates and prioritizes, according to preferences of multiple origin, the pursuit of its most global interests in relation to its finite resources.* Such a definition involves several semantic and normative choices within a set of nonconsensual characteristics that profoundly alter the implications of the concept. We propose to define them briefly.

Grand strategy goes beyond 'military strategy'. For Edward Mead Earle, one of the first scholars behind the rise of modern conceptions of grand strategy, the latter 'is that which so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that the resort to war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory' (1966, cited in Deibel, 2006, p. 6). By adding 'the policies' of the nation, Earle was already participating in the 1960s in the future separation of grand strategy from an early Clausewitzian and militarized vision of it. Since then, two competing visions fight over its status along the war-peace continuum and the role of the military instrument. Some scholars like Barry Posen, argue that grand strategy is 'ultimately about fighting, a costly and bloody business.' (2014, p. 1). By contrast, some others see this approach as a central flaw (Collins, 1973; Hitchcock et al., 2016, p. 6). Our definition squarely falls into the latter which is defined as the 'international relations tradition' by Balzacq et al. (2018, p. 11). It clearly substitutes the primacy of military strategy and makes it one element *among others* (albeit a central one) of grand strategy. The notion now extends to 'all the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is, in wartime and in peacetime) best interests' (Kennedy, 1991, p. 5).

Grand strategy is a 'theory'. Unlike Stephen Krasner (2010, p. 1) who sees it as a 'set of policies' without distinction of means, many descriptions including our own consider grand strategy to be a 'logic that guides leaders seeking security in a complex and insecure world' (Brands, 2014, p. 3). Rather than being a result, grand strategy is an 'organizing principle or conceptual blueprint' that *guides policies, without fixing them in advance* (Taliaferro et al., 2013, p. 15). Policies are therefore a momentary deduction from grand strategy (Schwenninger, 2003).

Grand strategy is 'ongoing'. This refers to two conceptions of the concept, either as a 'plan' or as a 'process' (Balzacq & Krebs, 2021, p. 8). Contrary to Colin Dueck (2006, p. 1), who insists on 'the selection of a plan', we suggest that 'the constant and intelligent reassessment of the polity's ends and means' is central for grand strategy to be efficient (Kennedy, 1991, p. 4). It requires a certain degree of pragmatism (Edelstein & Krebs, 2015). Brands and Feaver

(2021, p. 563) provide a clear illustration of this when they suggest that ‘grand strategy helps leaders improvise intelligently’; if they ‘have done the intellectual tasks that are associated with grand strategy – setting goals, prioritizing among threats and interests, [...], they will have an intellectual framework that allows them to improvise in more effective and purposeful way’.

Grand strategy is ‘multifactorial’. For Charles Glaser (2021, p. 108), advocate of a rationalist approach, grand strategy ‘explores a state’s options for achieving its interests, given the opportunities and constraints imposed by its international environment/situation’. This implies that the formulation of grand strategy is derived from the relative material distribution of power and the incentives it gives to the state. For most realists sub schools, such a rationalist account is central (Waltz, 1979, p. 110; p. 172). However, ‘assessments focusing only on the narrow constituents of realism – material power, changes in its distribution, and external threat – are radically incomplete and do not account for what nations actually do’ (Rosecrance & Stein, 1993, p. 5). In line with this argument, we reject their primacy but without refusing to consider systemic variables in favor of domestic and ‘ideational’ variables. Which would imply a constructivist approach. (Wendt, 1992, p. 424). Conversely, we conceive ideational variables here as an ‘intermediary’ between structure and domestic determinants (agency) and not as the ‘source’ of the latter. Consequently, our demonstration is more akin to a neoclassical realist approach that will run through our entire demonstration (Kitchen, 2010; Ripsman et al., 2016). As Randall Schweller (2006, p. 46) shows, ‘once these “unit-level” factors have been established, they can then be treated as inputs (state strategies and preferences) at the structural – systemic level in order to explain how unit- and structural-level causes interact to produce systemic outcomes’.

Chapter II

France's Grand Strategy Evolution

Trying to capture the characteristics of French grand strategy as accurately as possible exposes us to a central bias. It consists of reclassifying *a posteriori* the consequences and actions of French policies as grand strategy (Lissner, 2018). Indeed, the aim here cannot be a 'normative' analysis as often conducted (Rieker, 2017). For instance, if France did indeed have a grand strategy since 1990 but it was wrongly implemented and policies were inconsistent, then our observations would be distorted and tend to depict a grand strategy that was never 'designed'. Nevertheless, the analysis of implemented policies cannot be dismissed. Quite simply, it must be carried out by systematically tracking policies in their supposed grand strategic context and verify their links (Balzacq et al., 2019, p. 12; Layne, 2006). Such context is partly drawn from official texts. In our case the '*Livre Blanc sur la défense et la sécurité nationale*' (White Book on defence and national security) of 1994, 2008 and 2013, as well as the 'Strategic Review' of 2017 which each endorses several major strategic orientations. These extremely detailed documents (160 pages in 1993; over 300 in 2008; 150 in 2013) are, by their authors' own admission, the expression of a 'state strategy' (*Livre Blanc*, 1993, p. 160). In addition, the *Livre Blanc* is also destined to be 'the foundation of concrete programming' and 'destined to become, to a large extent, a reference document' (Michaud & Tremblay, 2006, p. 18).

In fact, when criticizing the United States' elusive grand strategy documents, Eliot Cohen (2016, chapter VIII), notes that 'a single document, produced at irregular intervals, under the auspices of the president in his role as commander in chief, would make much more sense'. He adds, 'the French "*Livre Blanc sur la défense et la sécurité nationale*", issued by the office of the president of the republic, is a worthy model' (Cohen, 2016, chapter VIII). Here, these documents are supplemented by attempts aimed at uncovering French

grand strategy even if they remain rare (Balzacq, 2019, 2021; Schmitt, 2017; Simon, 2013; Tertrais, 2021). It should be noted, as mentioned earlier, that most of the ‘traits’ of France’s post-World War and post-Cold War grand strategy, whether designated as such or as ‘metadiplomatic objectives’ (Charillon, 2007, p. 147) are widely recognized and shared by involved scholars (Guitton, 2021).

Overcoming ‘Grandeur’

The ‘French *grandeur*’ cherished by the General de Gaulle refers, with varying degrees of clarity, to the foreign and defence policy forged by the General and maintained by his successors until the end of the Cold War (Debré, 1971). It is generally characterized by ‘the absolute need for independence in decision making’, which is supported by the development and maintenance of an independent ‘strike force’, the ‘refusal to accept subordination to the United States, the search for status and rank, the primacy of the nation-state, and the importance of national defence’ (Balzacq, 2019; Gordon, 1993, p. 3). For Edward Kolodziej (1974, p. 28), it requires France to position itself as a major power within the international system and that Paris shall have ‘the responsibility to define the hierarchical structure of international relations and the role to be played by lesser units, to determine and assure basic security arrangements, and to regulate the economic and diplomatic processes by which relations are to be conducted’. For Thierry Balzacq (2019, p. 99), who produced one of the most important contribution to research on French grand strategy, ‘Grandeur’ is more than a foreign policy and designates the grand strategy pursued in France from the beginning of the Fifth Republic to the end of the Cold War. In so doing, grandeur is no longer simply ‘a means toward national flourishing’ as Daniel Mahoney (2000, p. 17) notes, but an object per se as Alfred Grosser defends (cited in Gordon, 1993, p. 3).

As a grand strategy, Grandeur is particularly insistent on the role to be played by France in ‘pushing’ towards a multipolar system, which at the same time guarantees France’s independence, the cornerstone of Grandeur (Hoffmann, 1964, p. 2). Hence Grandeur involved conducting French foreign

policy in such a way as to refuse any 'bandwagoning' alongside the United States (Wolforth 1999, p.8). In so doing, and through a central rejection of institutionalized cooperation in favour of maintaining significant autonomous military capabilities, Grandeur leaved little room for multilateralism in the resolution of international disputes. Despite the surprising longevity of de Gaulle' grand strategy, structural changes to the international system at the end of the Cold War nonetheless rendered the lodestar of Grandeur unsuitable for France's future, thus calling for a recasting (Balzacq, 2019, p. 100; Schmitt, 2017).

A New 'Liberal Engagement'

The fall of the Soviet Union (Mearsheimer, 1990; Roberts, 2008), the reunification of Germany (MacLean & Szarka, 2008), American hegemonism and its partial withdrawal from Europe, the renewed role of NATO (Pannier, 2016), the rise of the new European Union and the widening scope of security (Buzan, 1997; Ullman, 1983) all are elements that have contributed to the maladjustment of Grandeur. These same incentives from the international system were accompanied or 'translated' by domestic determinants. Such push-factors are found in an unfavorable budgetary context and a lack of public consensus on France's high military spending (Richter & Foucault, 2021, p. 129), or in significant ideological shifts, in particular the 'possible victory' of neoconservative positions and liberal internationalist ideas within the French grand strategic system (Balzacq, 2019, p. 99). These observations are consistent, with our neoclassical realist approach of grand strategy which attributes to systemic factors 'only' the ability to 'significantly limit the menu of foreign policy choices considered by a states leaders at a particular time', 'rather than in forcing the selection of one particular item on that menu over another.' (Rose, 1998, p. 147).

Balzacq calls 'Liberal engagement' the grand strategy that gradually took over following the Soviet Union fall (2019, p. 99). In contrast to Tertrais (2021, p. 49), for whom the expression comes close to a 'barbarism' and who sees it as

‘an overly large basket with questionable content’, our observations are mostly in agreement with Balzacq’s. In his words, Liberal engagement ‘is predominantly concerned with consolidating France’s ties with a liberal international order’ and ‘shares the internationalism of neoconservatism but not the primacy it accords to the role of military action. For proponents of Liberal engagement, in contrast, France should primarily focus on entrenching powerful states within the constraining structure of world politics rather than pursuing unilateral options’ (2019, p. 100). Hence, Liberal engagement ‘clearly’ titled French strategy ‘toward [multilateral] integration.’ (Balzacq, 2019, p. 107). Summed up briefly, the main features of Liberal engagement are the constant promotion of a liberal international order; the pursuit of effective multilateralism; the maintenance of a central role on the international stage for France (a non-reductionist grand strategy); and the quest for influence. The liberal international order pursued and wished by Paris is based on the humanist values of the 1789 Revolution and France’s missionary self-understanding. ‘Being the “country of human rights”, France has to defend and promote these rights worldwide. This rhetoric is widespread in the political discourse and constitutes one of the cornerstones of France’s diplomatic ambitions’ (Irondelle & Schmitt, 2013, p. 126). What’s more, it places a central emphasis on respect for international law, both as a fundamental principle for regulating the international system and as a cornerstone of its security (*Livre Blanc*, 2013). Within this liberal international order however, in line with *Grandeur*, France is still ‘destined’ to play a central role, particularly in meeting the challenges of collective security (Tertrais, 2021; Simon, 2013). Balzacq (2019, p. 108), also notes that Liberal engagement is consequently ‘underpinned by a form of Occidentalism. The referent vocabulary, however, has varied between presidents: Nicolas Sarkozy theorized about Western civilization, François Hollande employed the idea of “Occidental solidarity,” and Macron now speaks of the preservation of an “international order” imbued with Western values.’.

The End of Power Maximization?

Unlike the theorist of Liberal engagement, we differ on one central argument. For Balzacq, 'unlike grandeur, France new strategy does not aim to maximize power but rather to enhance its security' (2019, p. 100). Conversely, we defend the idea that, in addition to seeking security, France has not abandoned the pursuit of power maximization. We recognize that Liberal engagement has effectively abandoned 'hard-balancing', centred on strategic, conventional forces and ad hoc alliances in favour of a multilateral 'soft-balancing' approach (Pape, 2005, p. 8; Paul, 2005). However, the fact remains that this new grand strategy still insists on the importance of power relations or, alternatively, 'influence'. Influence rather than power because Liberal engagement seems to conceive power no longer as 'control over resources' (Beckley, 2018) or 'over actors' (Lake, 2011), but rather as 'control over events and outcomes'. This view leaves more room for the non-material determinants of power in international relations, such as those defined by Joseph Nye, which are central to France's new grand strategy (Hart, 1976; Nye, 1990, 2009). Nevertheless, we agree that the quest for 'material' power is no longer a central objective of grand strategy.

For Liberal engagement, this essential feature of the quest for influence involves first and foremost a substantial, so-called 'universal' diplomatic network, which ranks third in the world (Lane, 2013). This network does not limit either its thematic or geographical action (Lequesne, 2021, p. 164). This quest for influence is also centred on the use of 'levers' through long-term, institutionalized cooperation, making multilateralism both a means and an end in itself (Tertrais, 2021). France looks for the best partnerships and instruments to multiply its power' both within and 'through' institutions (Ritcher & Foucault, 2021, p. 145). This view is expressly formulated in the *Livre Blanc* (1994, p. 23) for which France must 'seek the best alliances and the best instruments that would enable [it] to multiply [its] power'. European integration is a central element of these levers of influence (Germond & Smith, 2009, p. 584). Boris Johnson's 1991 account, then a casual observer of Brussels' political turmoil, illustrates the day-to-day implications of this trait. According to him, 'France, through EC institutions, can gratify its need for self-assertion on the world stage';

‘they are all somewhere in their early forties; they are French; many of them went to the Ecole Nationale d’Administration; they are members of the Socialist Party; they see France’s destiny in self-assertion through the European community’; and ‘the European Community, alas, is still ruled by France’ (Johnson, 1991, pp. 2–6). As Christian Lesquene notes, ‘it is no coincidence that the terms “Europe puissance” or “European sovereignty” are of French origin; they serve to legitimize a strategy aimed at ensuring France’s influence in world affairs, no longer by going it alone, but through participation in the European Union’ (2021, pp. 163–164).

Nevertheless, in this quest for influence, France ‘prefers forms of multilateralism and international cooperation that rely on a statutory hierarchy of states, as in the case of the UN Security Council or the Non-Proliferation Treaty – or, alternatively, that rely on informal political “directorates”’ (Irondelle & Schmitt, 2013, p. 132). This is particularly true of the UN Security Council, which France sees as a central lever of power, and where its proactivity is bearing fruit (Rieker, 2017, p. 22). As testimonies gathered by Niels Schia, who investigated within the institution, show, French representation is a master at using the Council; ‘while all the other countries have working groups and request instructions from the capitals and sit put wondering what will happen, France does this in ten minutes’ (2013, p. 143). He thus notes that ‘the threshold for influence was in many ways defined by the French’ (Schia, 2013, p. 143).

The French return to the transatlantic security framework is also an important marker of this quest for influence and multilateralism. From the mid-1990s onwards, France has been moving incrementally closer to the Alliance. This appeared necessary after noticing that its self-isolation from the Military Committee in 1966, as advocated by Grandeur, was now detrimental for political-military coordination with allies and to its influence both in and outside of NATO (Yost, 1993). Hence why France’s conditioned its return on the acquisition of influential positions within the Alliance. This was openly asserted by President Sarkozy (2009, para. XXIV) for whom ‘by concluding this long process, France will be stronger, France will be more influential. And why is that? Because those who are absent are always wrong. Because France must co-

lead rather than suffer'. To confirm Sarkozy's words, 2009 saw 'the return of the Prodigal Son', 'and the returnee seemed to have been feted right royally into the bargain, being given one of the top two commands – Allied Command Transformation (ACT) – and one of the three regional commands – Joint Command Lisbon' (Howorth, 2010, p. 16; Zuquian, 2002, p. 117).

Sanctuarized Multilateralism

France's renewed grand strategy, in addition to making it a lever of influence, gives a central political meaning to multilateralism. Under Liberal engagement, the nation-state, then 'the only entity' with 'the right to order and the authority to act', was partly replaced by the delegation of this power to international organizations (de Gaulle in Balzacq, 2021, p. 208). This paradigm shift is crucial as Grandeur seemed skeptical of multilateral approaches, characterized by General de Gaulle's description of the United Nations (UN) as '*le machin*' (the thing) (Bosco, 2017). Contrary to De Gaulle's approach, the *Livre Blanc* now insists that 'unilateralism has shown its setbacks, in terms of legitimacy as much as effectiveness.' (2008, p. 114). In so doing, multilateralism, as part of the promotion of the liberal international order dear to France, enables 'the legal regulation of the relationship between States' (*Livre Blanc*, 2013, p. 23). This echoes the multilateral soft balancing mentioned earlier as a response to 'the emergence of new contenders that may generate security dilemmas' (Balzacq, 2019, p. 108). This central discrepancy with independence, the condition of Grandeur, stems in particular from the long-observed fact that the 'French case illustrates the difficulties facing middle-range powers when they attempt to make basic changes in international relations through their own separate efforts' (Kolodziej, 1974, p. 13). French multilateralism can be divided into three central points, which Irondelle & Schmitt aptly describe as 'official claims' (2013, p. 126),

The political integration of the European Union perceived as being the key factor for peace on the European continent; A contribution to the Atlantic alliance and the organization in charge of materializing this alliance, NATO. The Atlantic alliance

is described as the cornerstone of European security, but a renewed strategic partnership with the United States should be established. ; The achievement of an effective collective security mechanism, in particular through the United Nations. *Multilateralism is officially recognized as a cornerstone principle to ensure international security* (emphasis from the author).

Nevertheless, this multilateral turn should not be viewed merely as an instrumental means of compensating for the deterioration in France's share of the international distribution of material resources, but rather as a 'political project'. As shown by Jacques Chirac's words reported by Louis Simon (2013, p. 417),

Advocating worldwide democracy, resisting the temptation of unilateralism and building a harmonious and balanced relationship between the major regional groupings is not a dream or pipe dream. It is a coherent political project, tailored to the challenges of today's world. Our approach to the Iraq crisis stemmed from this conviction.

With regard to the use of force, which is of particular interest here, the Liberal engagement places particular emphasis on the conformity of such action with the multilateral framework it intends to pursue (*Livre Blanc*, 1994; 2008 ; 2013). Interventions must pursue the promotion of this effective multilateralism but must also *be conducted* under a multilateral framework (Balzacq, 2019). This implies translating such commitment both into general military strategy (in the sense given by Lucien Poirier – 1983 – of the highest level of military strategy), but also into operational strategy. Lushenko, Raman and Kreps (2022), illustrate the magnitude of the internalization of this self-assigned constraint with the use of drone strikes by France. As the second worldwide drone strikes user after the United States, Paris, unlike Washington, systematically submits its drone strikes to the UN for approval (Lushenko et al., 2022). We shall be returning in greater detail to the importance of multilateral injunctions in France's grand strategy in a later section. For now, having defined the contours of our subject, our analysis turns to the breakdown of the decision process leading to Operation Serval.

Part II

Operation Serval and Liberal Engagement

Chapter II

The Need for Consistency

According to William Martel (2015, p. 339), ‘when the state pursues policies, including when it uses military force, its ability to succeed depends in part on whether these policies are directly related to, and consistent with, the state’s grand strategy’. The direct consequence of this observation for him is that ‘grand strategy should govern all decisions that operate at lower levels of strategy, and it should likewise be the case that lower levels never directly determine or influence the state’s grand strategy’ (Martel, 2015, p. 339). This chapter hence proposes to detail this need for consistency. In a second time, it is designed to present Operation Serval’s context and consistency with Liberal engagement.

Martel’s view is also echoed by Frank Hoffman, for whom ‘if a strategy [understood as grand strategy], employs a manner that is inconsistent with policy, or if policymakers provide too few means, then it lacks coherence’ (Hoffman, 2014, p. 480). Clausewitz (2007/1832, p. 66), spilled a lot of ink writing his conceptual ‘friction of war’ and represented it as follows,

Friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper. The military machine—the army and everything related to it—is basically very simple and therefore seems easy to manage. But we should bear in mind that none of its components is of one piece: each part is composed of individuals, every one of whom retains his potential of friction. In theory it sounds reasonable enough: a battalion commander’s duty is to carry out his orders; discipline welds the battalion together, its commander must be a man of tested capacity, and so the great beam turns on its iron pivot with a minimum of friction. In fact, it is different, and every fault and exaggeration of the theory is instantly exposed in war. A battalion is made up of individuals, the least important of whom may chance to delay things or somehow make them go wrong.

Just as the Prussian strategist observed for war, grand strategy is a composite whole made up of an infinite number of interlocking parts. Those pieces, if they are to work in unison, require both great craftsmanship and at least a good part of luck. Hence why the question of ‘friction’ between grand strategy and its translation into policy is a central inquiry point. Concretely, it calls for attention to the fact that a variety of actors operate ‘with contrasting timeframes, thus influencing decision-making; and various domestic obstacles, including the bureaucracy and the institutional structure of the political system’, which ‘influence the successful enactment of a grand strategy’ (Balzacq et al., 2018, p. 4). Former US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger ‘saw the need to devise a grand strategy’ since, in his words, ‘we can never contribute to a stable and creative world order if we do not first form some conception of it’ (Popescu, 2017, p. 17). Kissinger also had seen and experienced the need for ‘centralized control of foreign policy once in office’ to ensure its implementation with as little friction as possible (Popescu, 2017, p. 17). As his former collaborator Peter Rodman reported, ‘if Kissinger and his team did not strive to ensure that the instructions given reflected the president’s policies, all the brilliant West Wing strategy would be overtaken by the reality of the policy set out by the State Department in its cables’ (Rodman cited in Popescu, 2017, p. 18). This relationship of dependence of the ‘grand strategist’ on the foreign policy organs is at the paradoxical heart of grand strategy. The latter being sometimes more impeded by the interests of its own state agencies than by its external environment, however uncertain it may be. As Hal Brands (2014, p. 12) notes, ‘this fact has often been a source of grief to grand strategists.

Through his work on grand strategy, Hoffman distinguishes two types of inconsistency it may be subject. The first, vertical incoherence, corresponds to a situation in which the means employed are not those ‘planned’ or prioritized in the grand strategy, or are not quantitatively sufficient (Hoffman, 2014, p. 480). Horizontal coherence, on the other hand, refers to the consistency *between* different policies pursuing a grand strategic objective (Hoffman, 2014, p. 480). In the first case, the grand strategy is not applied through the right instruments or ‘in accordance’, producing an outcome that is likely to be inconsistent with

the grand strategy objective being pursued. In the second case, the results of several policies are mutually incoherent or mutually exclusive and fails to coordinate the state action. A sound testimony of this coherence can be found in the 2003 Iraqi crisis. Indeed, Jacques Chirac's refusal to engage French forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom as well as the virulent opposition campaign led by France within the UN Security council (UNSC), were highly aligned with french grand strategy of Liberal engagment. The pursuit of a liberal international order based on the rule of law; the recourse to the UN and more broadly to multilateral frameworks for international disputes and the clearly expressed rejection of military unilateralism, were particularly visible through the French authorities positions and actions. Discourse analysis (Bratberg, 2011) and analysis of the 'operational code' of Jacques Chirac and his two ministers (Malici, 2005; Marfleet & Miller, 2005), have significantly tended to confirm the referencing process and internalization of these grand strategic objectives by French decision-makers during the crisis.

When investigating the literature closer to our enquiry on the link between grand strategy and intervention, one will find substantial material primarily concerned with the relationship *from military institutions to grand strategy*. For Bernard Brodie (1973, cited in Martel, 2015, p. 38), who focuses on the coherence of defence and security policies with grand strategy, particular attention must be paid to the role distribution between civilian decision-makers and military elites. He argues that 'the skills developed in the soldier are those of a fighter, and not of the reflector on ultimate purposes' (Brodie, 1973 in Martel, 2015, p. 38). Consequently, civilian leaders seem better able 'to reach this unity' between grand strategy and policy than military leaders (Brodie, 1973, cited in Martel, 2015, p. 38). Risa Brooks (2021), one of the few scholars to have examined this precise issue also notes a tendency towards potential 'disintegration' of grand strategy as a function of the structure of civil-military relations. Hence, since civil-military relations influence greatly the means-end chain, a coherent implementation 'entails that military activity supports overarching political goals' (Brooks, 2021, p. 276). Although they do not all refer directly to grand strategy but nevertheless espouse its meaning, various leading

scholars defend the idea that a clear and efficient dialogue and task repartition between civilian and military authorities is essential to guarantee a consistent implementation of grand strategy when it comes to the use of force (Avant, 2007 ; Brooks, 2021; Cohen, 2002 ; Feaver, 1996, 200b; 2011, 2016; Posen, 1984; Snyder, 1984; Strachan, 2006; 2010; Van Evera, 1984). As Suzanne Nielsen aptly puts it, ‘when thinking about trying to develop a coherent relationship between military means and political ends, civilian control becomes essential’ (2015, p. 77–78).

Hypothesis formulation

These observations about the need for coherence and the risk of undermining it through unclear civil-military dialogue give a starting point for assessing the decision-making process that led to Serval. The French intervention in Mali in 2013 seemed to be the object of study most likely to provide a sufficiently rich framework. Indeed, the intervention was characterized by several factors that directly reflect the relationship with grand strategy in the decision-making process. The outcome of the Malian crisis (launching Operation Serval) is ‘ambiguous’ in how it relates to Liberal engagement. Neither is it entirely in line with it, since it is a unilateral operation without a UN mandate prior to its inception (Sheenan & Siegel, 2021; Stigall, 2015; Tardy, 2020), nor completely at odds since it benefited from significant political support (Boeke & Schuurman, 2015). This makes it a kind of ‘informal multilateral’ operation (Recchia, 2020). Arguably, even if backed by political support, it might be directly detrimental to one of the main features of Liberal engagement, i.e., the realization of ‘effective multilateralism’ (*Livre Blanc*, 2008, 2013). Nevertheless, rather than the outcome of the decision-making, we are primarily interested in the *process* itself. Whether it referred and pursued grand strategy or not.

Strikingly, the aforementioned ambiguity was clearly reflected in the management of the crisis. The French President’s position, from his arrival in power in May 2012 to December 2012, a week before the operation was launched, bears witness to a very high degree of compliance with the features

of French grand strategy. Francois Hollande position strongly revolved around the ideas that ‘a French intervention is not an option’; ‘the UN cannot be sidelined from the resolution of the crisis’; an intervention can only be pursued by an ‘African force’; ‘France is involved but should only play a political and logistical support role’; ‘the time for French unilateralism, particularly in Africa, is over’ (Erforth, 2020a). The final decision, however, is significantly at odds with these declarations.

Moreover, there also seems to be a correlation between this radical shift and earlier observations of civil-military friction in the inconsistent implementation of grand strategy (Brooks, 2021). Indeed, the unilateral Serval move has been described by many observers, both journalistic and academic, as the result of the ‘militarisation of French foreign policy in Africa’ or as being ‘driven by the military’ rather than by political realities or systemic incentives (Cantaloube, 2014; Carayol, 2019; Guisnel, 2013, Henke, 2017a, 2017b; Hugon, 2015; Marchal, 2013, Pouponneau, 2022). We argue strongly against such accounts and find compelling evidence that they provide a misleading picture of the process. However, these critics may implicitly depict a trend towards the ‘disintegration’ of grand strategy due to ineffective civil-military dialogue. Thus, this hypothesis posits that we have on the one hand an apparent effort at multilateralization, consistent with grand strategy, and on the other hand, a phenomenon of disintegration that we locate in the civil-military realm. We suggest that this phenomenon may lie at the heart of Serval’s ambivalence towards Liberal engagement and requires investigation. To carry out our analysis on this basis, we briefly show how Serval is ‘ambiguously’ located regarding France’s grand strategy. Adding a brief contextualization of the Malian crisis, we then discuss France’s multilateralization efforts during the crisis. Finally, we explore the disintegration process with Liberal engagement. At first glance, our demonstration might give the impression of a ‘segmentation’ of the decision-making process or a ‘schizophrenic’ decision-making. As if there were two groups and two hermetically sealed stages. Far from accurately depicting the process, this reflects the need for clarity in the analysis. In reality, the process is

largely iterative, and actors regularly move back and forth between the two dimensions described.

Our observations show that, despite its unilateral nature, Serval appears well aligned with France's grand strategy thanks to Paris's proactivity in securing political support both internationally and in the Sahelian region (Pannier & Schmitt, 2019). This proactivity has remained a constant, whether 'consciously or unconsciously', during the crisis management. We also contend the significant lack of empirical support for the observations of a military, or its political representatives, 'pushing' for intervention and we highlight the biases of such approaches. However, our theory test does illustrate a trend towards 'disintegration' of grand strategy linked to the decision-making process organization favoring unilateral action. Nevertheless, combined with Paris's parallel multilateral quest, the consequences of this tendency to disintegrate remains limited.

Serval's Context and Multilateral Status

The polymorphic crisis that gripped Mali from late 2011 and early 2012 is complex and quickly emerged as a priority for the two French administrations of the time. Following the fall of Gaddafi in October 2011, significant numbers of Touaregs recruited by the regime retreated heavily armed to northern Mali and started integrating with Touareg independence groups from the Azawad (a self-proclaimed area corresponding to the Sahelian or northern part of Mali) (Whitehouse, 2021, p. 131). Thus strengthened, the secular *Mouvement Nationaliste de Libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA) launched hostilities against the Malian army in northern Mali in January 2012. The MNLA declared Azawad's independence in April while allying itself with Salafist-jihadist groups associated with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), including *Gamâ'at Ansâr ud-Dîn* and the *Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO) (Lecoq & Klute, 2013, p. 431). Weakened by a concomitant internal *coup d'état* which proved 'fatal to the army chain of command', in the 'immediate aftermath Mali's three northern provinces (Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal), representing two-

thirds of the country's territory, fell into the hands of the insurgents' (Guichaoua, 2020, p. 897). The situation, already worrying for the region's stability, deteriorated further following the break-up of the Salafist-Laïc rebel bloc into multiple, volatile jihadist groups spreading in an soundly improvised and loosely governed area. France, already concerned since the mid-2000s by the progressive establishment of these armed terrorist groups; the multiplication of all types of traffics and the growing threat of kidnappings in the Sahel feared a vicious circle in an already weakened region and thus gradually took up the issue (Lecoq & Schrijver, 2007; Gaulme, 2013).

To ensure that the Malian crisis management outcome would have been unambiguously in line with French grand strategy, several elements would have been necessary. One could argue that different 'steps' of conformity with grand strategy appear (Brands, 2014). 'Ideally', it should have led to an 'African solution' supported by France and other nations concerned about the Sahelian security environment. This was coherently and regularly expressed by François Hollande³, even only two weeks before the intervention (2012),

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

Hollande's position is widely regarded in academic literature as defining the new French approach to the continent. Indeed, starting in the 1990s, 'the new directions of French security policy were to be multilateralism, regionalism, and African ownership.' (Charbonneau, 2008, p. 283). As Gordon Cumming (1996) notes, based on this African ownership, which is consistent with Liberal engagement, Paris proactively began to reduce its bilateral defence agreements and to actively promote and participate in the reinforcement of African forces.

³ Appendix 1, under "*Data used for the crisis LTA*" gives an exhaustive list of François Hollande interviews presenting spontaneous mentions of this argument.

As part of a series of high-profile initiatives, the *Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix* (RECAMP) program launched in 1997 contributed to this emerging vision of African forces endowed with real operational power ‘in the event of conflict’ (Adjovi, 2001, p. 428). Based on ‘continental and regional military exercises [...], several depots with available military equipment for underequipped African armies to draw on in case of need, and bilateral and multilateral training programs’, it notably played a central role in supporting African Unions (AU) forces after 2002 (Griffin, 2016, p. 901).

Nevertheless, as France naturally retains the right to use its forces should the situation so require, it remains in line with its grand strategy to intervene. Although ‘there can be no question of engaging in a risky, interventionist policy’ (*Livre Blanc*, 1994, p. 5). What is crucial, however, is the emphasis placed by Liberal engagement on the promotion of *effective multilateralism* as an objective *per se*. Such emphasis directly applies to the conduct of French operations, which must consequently seek to take place within a multilateral and legal framework (*Livre Blanc*, 2008, p. 114; 2013). In fact, combat projection is now only envisaged as the fifth strategic function of the French armed forces (*Livre Blanc*, 2008, p. 65; 2013). Both the last three *Livre Blanc* and the French rationale of the last twenty years are deeply imbued with this turning point (Balzacq, 2019). Indeed, France’s renewed grand strategy unveiled in the 1990s is under no illusions about the fragility of the multilateral model it promotes. As such, it insists on the ‘constant efforts’ of ‘all responsible States’ to forge an effective multilateral regime (*Livre Blanc*, 2008).

As Shaun Gregory (2000, pp. 440-443) shows, this seems to be particularly true in the case of Africa where this shift has undoubtedly been witnessed. Indeed, ‘there was a critical juncture in French military policy, specifically the Rwandan genocide, and this led to a new institutional configuration marked by a new path-dependent trajectory, multilateralism’ (Chafer et al., 2020, p. 20). This *état de fait* led the contributors to a special issue of the *Journal of Strategic Studies* dedicated to the matter to note that ‘all agree that since the mid-1990s, France has taken major steps to multilateralise its African interventions’ (Recchia & Tardy, 2020, p. 4). This multilateralization has sometimes been seen as an

instrumental tool to compensate for declining resources of French security policies, or to legitimize purely national interests (Olsen, 2009). Nevertheless, as Benedikt Erforth shows, ‘multilateralism has been internalized by decision-makers and become an essential driving force of French action’ (2020a, p. 23).

Based on the work of Sarah E. Kreps (2008), who reviews the literature on multilateral intervention, the latter is divided into two aspects: procedural and operational ones. In line with Martha Finnemore’s definition (2003, Chapter III), an intervention is considered multilateral from a procedural point of view if the ‘UNSC, NATO, or other regional organization formally authorizes an intervention and does so *prior* to the intervention’s inception’ (Kreps, 2008, p. 589) (emphasis is not original). The centrality of the need for legitimacy of an international organization, albeit not necessarily the UN, is also repeated in the last two *Livre Blanc* (2008; 2013). Secondly, contrary to the observations of Robert O. Keohane (1990), for whom only the need for ‘three States’ qualifies an intervention as multilateral from an operational point of view, the intervention must include several nations, but there must not be too great a concentration of troops or resources in one (Kreps, 2008). In this sense, the deployment of the Serval force cannot be formally recognized as a multilateral one. It also contrasts sharply with the French practice of the past 25 years, which has been guided by the observation that French voluntary policy ‘must fit into the multilateral framework that gives it its legitimacy’ (*Livre Blanc*, 1994, p. 43). Indeed, although its lawfulness is by no means contested, Serval received no explicit mandate from the UN prior to the intervention, nor from any other international or regional organization (Stigall, 2015). Furthermore, although Chadian troops fought alongside the French after a week or two and were later joined by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) forces, activity on the ground was overwhelmingly conducted by France (Bannelier & Christakis, 2013, p. 855). This is why, for observers, Serval is described as a ‘quasi-unilateral’ operation, insofar as it ‘has all the characteristics of unilateral interventions, particularly at operational level, but enjoys the political support of a broader alliance’ (Erforth, 2020a, p. 7). Although procedurally an attempt was made to base the intervention on UNSC Resolution 2085 and give it a multilateral aspect,

this was not recognized and is still ‘ambiguous since the UN only allowed the deployment of an African force in Mali’ (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 7). It is also worth noting that the anti-terrorist nature of Operation Serval is not an exception to multilateral injunctions since ‘evolutions in conflictuality – internal conflicts, private actors, asymmetry, terrorism – must not be the pretext for calling collective rules into question.’ (*Livre Blanc*, 2008, p. 115).

Hence, although Serval is perfectly legitimate due to its support, observers can hardly help noticing a discontinuity with the policy of French interventions in Africa that took root in the 1990s (Antouly, 2022; Erforth, 2020a; Tardy, 2020). Similarly, if one is looking at the consistence with French grand strategy, it cannot observe a complete consistency with the prior. In fact, perhaps the expression coined by Chafer et al. (2020, p. 18) of ‘hybrid intervention’ for which Serval amalgamates new practices and ‘old latent ideas’ is more accurate. Boeke and Schuurman (2015, p. 21) describe this situation noting that thanks to Paris ‘extensive diplomatic efforts’, ‘when France’s *unilateral military intervention began*, it was able to benefit from broad international support’. Some scholar’s views are more restrictive regarding whether this support was as strong as claimed or not. Sheenan and Sigel (2021, p. 301) for instance note that the ‘French government undertook Operation Serval unilaterally (albeit with *limited* support from a handful of allies)’ (2021, p. 301). The next section is dedicated to this question and analyses the multilateral quest of the French authorities. Its aim is to identify the influence of the grand strategic multilateral injunction on the conduct of the crisis, to see whether it was ardently followed, which actors were most in line with it and how they interacted in the French decision-making system.

Grand Strategy as an Effective Driver

The period of framing and gradual diffusion of the crisis saw Paris firmly seize the Malian dossier and transpose it, without delay, into the international fora mainly at the ECOWAS, EU and UNSC levels (Recchia, 2020). As early as May 2012, François Hollande called for such action, pressing nonetheless for it to be

led and conducted by the ECOWAS forces. France pictured itself and the EU as ‘facilitators’ with the mission that would later become the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) (Notin, 2014). However, Paris threat perception gradually increased from summer 2012 until it was described as a direct threat to France (Hollande, 2012b). Despite this, Gérard Araud (2012), then France’s representative to the UN, declared in October that ‘we need to act. We cannot wait any longer. But of course, it is up to the Malians to act, it is up to the Africans to act, and the Security Council must support them’. In this way, by transposing its discussions with ECOWAS members in favour of action to the UNSC, ‘France introduced all draft resolutions on Mali and coordinated negotiations to ensure they were passed unanimously’ (Boeke & Schuurman, 2015, p. 9; Weiss & Welz, 2014). The only multilateral advances in the 2012 Malian crisis, resolutions 2056 (July), 2071 (October) and 2085 (December), thus ‘provided the legal framework for the deployment of a multilateral peacekeeping force coordinated by ECOWAS’ and ‘illustrate the considerable extent to which France was invested in developing “African solutions to African security problems”’ (Erforth, 2020a, pp. 85–86). Perhaps Laurent Fabius (2016), who was then leading the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which was primarily responsible for multilateral diplomatic action during the crisis), best illustrates the internalization of the need for multilateral action. He shows how his institution was heavily mobilized to achieve this result and writes that ‘we [France] are raising the awareness of the international community, which until then had been passive or uninformed’ (Fabius, 2016, p. 195). He also insists on the fact that ‘this prior mobilisation of the international community requires [...], systematic work to inform and convince, because we sense that the situation is going to deteriorate and we want to be ready’ (Fabius, 2016, pp. 195–196).

Alongside this vigorous UN diplomacy, France also turned to the EU, its ‘new’ preferred venue for international crisis management (Martill & Gebhard, 2022). Somewhat frustrated by the hesitant commitment of their European

partners, French diplomats and decision-makers embarked on a 'Europeanization' of the threat (Chafer et al., 2020). Statements by France's foreign and defence ministers thus took great care to describe the Sahelian situation not as a threat to regional stability nor to France alone, but as a danger to European security (Petit, 2013). In spite of this, the reluctance and disinterest of the member states quickly made itself felt, provoking strong reactions from the French. As one of the French Defence minister policy advisors (cited in Erforth, 2020a, p. 96) notes,

With the exception of Germany, Italy, Spain, and Belgium, go and try to get the rest of Europe interested in Africa, well good luck. The Poles do not give a toss; neither do the Scandinavians or the rest of Eastern Europe. They do not have the means or the desire.

Combined with the inherent challenges of the intergovernmental approach to CSDP missions (Koenig, 2011), this divergence of views among member states had the effect of slowing down agreement on a European training mission, which was delayed by institutional procedures and *a fortiori* prevented a clear and firm EU position (Cold-Ravnkilde & Nissen, 2020). Throughout this process, few doubts emerged as to France's real determination not to get involved on the ground and to push for a multilateral solution. Thus, confirming the consistency with its grand strategy. Paradoxically, this attachment continued to be observed even after the unilateral launch of Serval. It is even surprising to see how Laurent Fabius (2016, p. 212), in his post-mandate book, hardly discusses the first 'non legally justified' part of the intervention and only describes it as an 'intervention under UN mandate' in reference to the later recognition by UNSC Resolution 2100 (almost 4 months after the intervention began). Indeed, it wasn't until April 25, that 'the Security Council implicitly recognized the legality of the intervention, praising the "celerity of the French forces" and stressing that it was being conducted "at the request" of the Malian authorities' (Antouly, 2022, para.

XIV). However, during the first months of the operation, this attachment to multilateral justification was more captured in France's rhetoric than on the ground, which was marked by Paris determination to 'retain political leadership' and military control (Guichaoua, 2020, p. 904).

In spite of such 'dedication' to a multilateral solution, how can one account for the unilateral French intervention, recognized only four months later in April by UNSC Resolution 2100? The central justification given by Paris was that 'French policymakers felt that 'black flags were at the doors of Bamako' (Wing, 2016, p. 60). Although this argument may be relativized by some observers owing to the very small number of fighters in the convoy threatening the Malian capital (Guichaoua, 2020)⁴, most reviews do not question the legitimacy of the French perception of an imminent threat (Bøas & Torheim, 2013; Erforth, 2020a, 2020b; Malejacq & Sandor, 2020; Pannier & Schmitt, 2019; Solomon, 2013). As Tardy explicitly notes, 'because France wanted to act quickly and decisively to counter the armed groups moving south, possibly to Bamako, the only credible framework was national. There, *France returned to past unilateral practices*' (2020, p. 19) (emphasis is not original). Contrary to Charbonneau and Sears (2014), who question the legitimacy of the French narrative, our observation also illustrates a 'real heightened perception of the threat' justifying the immediate recourse to unilateral military action. Alongside the jihadist offensive, a second variable of the international system also seems to have contributed to the French decision to launch its unilateral operation. Indeed, the lack of agreement and effective progress towards a multilateral solution, despite Paris's lobbying, is reputed to have weighed in the balance, and was regularly pointed out by policymakers. As Weiss and Welz (2014, p. 896) note, 'the AU's planning lagged as security deteriorated rapidly in early 2013 '. In fact, after resolution 2085 was passed on December, the UN immediately ruled out any deployment of the AFISMA 'before summer 2013 ' (Boeke & Schuurman, 2015, p. 9). Furthermore,

⁴ Guichaoua, 2020 is not asserting this view but develops the claims of some pundits.

the U.S also expressed deep concerns over both the merits of an intervention and the capacities of an 'African operation', referring to the French-led resolution as a 'crap plan' (Lynch, 2012; Tankel, 2020). However, fortified by the informal political support Paris developed during the crisis, France was indeed able to claim a kind of 'informal multilateralism', which partly explains Serval's ambiguity regarding Liberal engagement (Boeke & Schuurman, 2015). This observation lends credence to critics of grand strategy, showing that the latter even when closely followed cannot escape the reality that 'international politics is turbulent and unpredictable' (Edelstein & Krebs, 2015, p. 113). At the same time, however, we observe that the jihadist threat to Bamako is not entirely explanatory of the significant gap between the initial position and Paris's prompt intervention. As Erforth (2020a, p. 94) notes,

Although these were the most frequently advanced explanations of the French decision, in particular throughout the month of January 2013, they only touch the surface of the complex web of motivations that caused the intervention. While portraying the conditions that allowed France to intervene in this specific situation, they do not explain why the French president, together with his ministers and advisors, seized the opportunity and took a considerable moral and political risk when approving the military operation.

Additionally, while based on a rather 'limited' binary opposition of theoretical frameworks, Stephen Burgess suggests that 'the realist perspective on French intervention explains *when* France intervenes' (2019, p. 78). In contrast, he argues that domestic variables 'explain *why*' (Burgess, 2019, p. 78). The following chapter proposes to 'bridge the gap' by integrating our discussion within a neoclassical realist framework. In doing so, we aim to supplement both the failure of Paris's multilateral quest and the jihadist advancements on the ground with the previously mentioned civil-military relations theories to

enhance our comprehension of Serval's behaviour towards French grand strategy.

Chapter II

Serval's Inconsistency

In line with the neoclassical realist theoretical framework dear to our demonstration, it appears that the explanation based on a systemic deterministic assumption of a rational response to external incentives (the Malian situation on the ground and the weak international response to French multilateral lobbying), is not alone adequate to explain François Hollande's decision. This chapter therefore seeks to probe 'the range of domestic-level intervening variables that can complicate the national foreign policy responses to these external pressures' (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 57). As we mentioned earlier, the decision that led to *Opération Serval* has been 'described' as peppered with such intervening variables in the form of poor civil-military relations during the policy-making process. Given that the large corpus reporting the deleterious effect of such interferences on grand strategy, – it appears that this intervening variable is the most likely to be of analytical interest in our specific case (Avant, 2007 ; Brands & Feaver, 2016; Brooks, 2021 ; Cohen, 2002 ; Feaver, 1996, 2011; Posen, 1984; Snyder, 1984; 1991; Strachan, 2006; 2010; Zjaresko, 2020). Furthermore, it is the most likely to generate meaning since it is embedded in a broad and well-established field of research (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2013).

Hence, numerous observers have criticized the influence of the French military in 'dictating' the French intervention. Either by incriminating key military personnel such as President Hollande's Personal Chief of Staff, General Puga, or by casting doubt on the influence of a French army imbued with 'neo-colonial and warlike values. The otherwise serious French press has thus seen several evocative headlines such as : 'Benoît Puga, the general who conquered the Elysée Palace' (Rosso, 2014); 'Puga, the general who bewitched Hollande' (Cantaloube, 2014); 'The soldier who whispers in Hollande's ear' (Guisnel,

2013); ‘Sahel, the military oust the Quai d’Orsay’ (Carayol, 2019); ‘Hollande’s hawk’ (Wesfreid, 2015); ‘France – Africa: how the army took power’ (Boisbouvier, 2014). The main information one will get is that during the Serval crisis, ‘more than ever, it’s the military that makes African policy’ (Boltanski, 2014, para. I). The academic world is not exempt from such direct affirmations. Marina Henke (2017a; 2017b), for example, attempts to show at-length how the intervention would have been ‘pushed’ by ‘intervention entrepreneurs’ and in particular Defence Minister Le Drian to assert his ministry’s authority. Marchal (2013, p. 487), without offering any explanation, states that ‘the French military pushed for the “smart” [unilateral] military intervention. Though this was not the most important factor, they were concerned that the economic crisis in France would have negative effects on the defence budget’. Far from representing the reality of the decision-making process, these testimonies deliver a biased vision of the liberty that the institutional and functional structure of French defence and security policy governance allows to the actors involved (Irondelle, 2008).

Other analyses from the academic realm but based on qualitative research methods and stronger empirical data also investigate this phenomenon albeit without asserting that the military ‘pushed’ for intervention. Their observations point to a ‘dissociation’ within the decision-making process. On the one hand they witness the multilateralization effort we have mentioned, and at the same time they highlight a section of autonomous actors ‘creating the possibilities’ for unilateral intervention (Daho, 2022; Coutereel et al., 2022; Erforth, 2020a, 2020b; Notin, 2014; Pouponneau, 2022; Guichaoua, 2020). Ironically, François Hollande himself locates the origin of the proposal to intervene unilaterally by stating that ‘when on proposal of the minister of defence and the chief of staff, I had to decide a troop deployment to fight against terrorists [...]’ (Hollande, 2014). This is repeated by the President in his interview with Pouponneau when he states, ‘the ministry [of defence] had already worked and had therefore drawn up plans and modes of intervention. There was no debate about the decision’

(2022, p. 41). It also seems that as early as the summer of 2012, during a time of intense multilateral lobbying, 'the military were preparing for a war that the diplomats were doing everything to prevent' (Notin, 2014, p. 128). According to interviews conducted by Pouponneau (2022, p. 53), as the crisis progressed 'the Defence Minister's entourage and several military officials, including the Army Chief of Staff, have for some time felt that the dispatch of ground troops is unavoidable and that the sooner the better (action should be taken before the situation becomes too complicated)'. He also shows that 'for many, this offensive is a godsend', quoting an officer from the *Centre de planification et de Commandement des Opérations* (CPCO) who argues that 'for us, it's a blessing in disguise because a military force deploying in the desert is just what we've been waiting for militarily; there's nothing easier [to fight]'. (Pouponneau, 2022, p. 45). Drawing on a similar broad range of interviews, Erforth also notes that 'the majority of actors, who were more inclined toward unilateral intervention, were initially situated in the Ministry of Defence and among the military. In both institutions, actors soon were convinced that the degradation of the situation in Mali could only be brought to a halt with the help of French troops' (2020a, p. 109). Various observers also point to the French military authorities' lack of confidence in the ability of an African solution to manage the Malian situation and their inclination towards intervention. On the contrary, 'the African desk at the Élysée and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were concerned about the political implications of such an intervention [...]. Consequently, for a long time both decision units opposed this option' (Erforth, 2020a, p. 99; Daho, 2022; Fleury, 2013 cited in Erforth, 2020a, p. 88). Based on these observations, we seek to analyze whether french grand strategy implementation might have been altered by a 'preference for intervention' of some actors during the decision-making process. The next two section prepare the theoretical and methodological framework of this demonstration.

A Neoclassical Realist Framework

In their path-breaking work published in 1962, Snyder, Sapin and Bruck (Cited in Hudson & Vore, 1995, p. 213), noted that,

By emphasizing decision-making as a central focus, we have provided a way of organizing the determinants of action around those officials who act for the political society. Decision makers are viewed as operating in dual-aspect setting so that apparently unrelated internal and external factors become related in the actions of the decision-makers.

In endorsing this view, we refute the idea of ‘classical’ realists that systemic variables overshadow unit-level (or domestic) ones (Herz, 1981; Morgenthau, 1958; Parent & Baron, 2011; Rice, 2008; Williams, 2004). However, while we recognize the essential role of such domestic variables in the complex foreign policy decision-making, we assert that our independent variable is located *at the international level* (the ground situation in Mali and week international responses to French multilateral lobbying). This is a fundamental point of neoclassical realism. It allows us to integrate determinants that originate in the theoretical corpus of foreign policy analysis, since both schools, ‘pay careful attention to how the pre-existing belief systems and cognitive constraints on policymakers influence their perceptions and assessments of international stimuli, as well as to how organizational dynamics within the national security bureaucracy or the degree of institutional autonomy policymakers enjoy might delimit the range of options that they can pursue’ (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 36). Hence, by restating the respective weight of systemic variables and unit-level ones during the crisis, our analysis clearly illustrates that ‘decision-making theories are not reductionist; they are contextualist’ (Kaarbo, 2015, p. 208).

Thus, in line with the seminal work of Robert Jervis (1976), who highlighted the impact of ‘cognitive constraints on rational decision making within a realist framework’, we highlight the fact that grand strategy interacts with the decision-

making not only by establishing a rational approach to the external environment, but also with internal idiosyncratic determinants (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001, p. 68). For the reader's clear understanding, it should be noted that this approach cannot be characterized as belonging to a 'constructivist' perspective (Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1992). As Jeffrey T. Checkel (1998, p. 326) notes, constructivism 'reflects a view that material structures, beyond certain biological necessities, are given meaning only by the social context through which they are interpreted'. In contrast, for neoclassical realists 'there is an "objective" reality or environment (in this case, the international system)' which it is not dependent on actors and possess its own workings such as the relative distribution of material capabilities that defines possible path and outcomes (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 174). In our case, France's grand strategy was constrained by the fact that Paris was unable to proceed to its multilateralization. This can be partly explained by the material distribution of power that favors the United States in the discussions shaping the international management of a crisis. Indeed, as Stephen Tankel shows in the Serval case, Washington was initially opposed to a any kind of intervention (2020, p. 888).

Decision Units and Timeframes

Analyzing the decision-making process involves breaking it down into its various actors and their interactions. Given the informal practice of the Fifth Republic institutions, France lends itself well to this approach. Indeed, it witnesses a concentration of power in the hands of the President in matters of defence and security, and *a fortiori* in the decision to commit forces. The President is not institutionally constrained. He's control is not diminished either by the sharing of the decision with the Prime Minister – who although constitutionally in charge of national defence (Art. 21 of the Constitution) – is in practice eclipsed from it (Rynning & Schmitt, 2018, p. 38). Nor by Parliament, which has the weakest relative control on defence questions compared to other European democracies

(Forster, 2006; Koenig-Archibugi, 2004, p. 167). However, this presidential centrality should not distract the analyst from an in-depth observation of the various organizations and actors involved at one stage or another in the formulation of the decision (Gallagher & Allen, 2014). Since the President ultimately decides alone and is neither omniscient nor capable of gathering the information necessary for the decision by himself, the French decision-making process relies centrally on the capacity of autonomous bureaucratic actors to provide information, expertise, plans, solutions, and then in a second stage on the discussion of possible actions within a very fine bubble of advisors (Balme, 2009, cited in Erforth, 2020a, p. 40). This organization of the process can therefore be characterized by a sequence, more or less definitive and precise in time, of gathering and then transmission of information up the decision-making hierarchy. At each of these stages, participating actor or organization hold 'power' over the framing of envisaged solutions. Observing the distribution of these stages and their 'content' enables us to observe their interaction with grand strategy. Based on the typology of 'authoritative decision units' defined by Margaret G. Hermann (2001), the French decision-making process during Serval is thus made up of three types of units interacting in a linear fashion. At the top of the chain is the 'predominant leader', the President who 'has the ability to stifle all opposition and dissent as well as the power to make a decision alone, if necessary', then the 'single group' or 'group of close advisors' and finally a coalition of 'autonomous actors' who bring the bureaucratic and functional organization of the process into play (Hermann, 2001, p. 56). Figure 1. linearly defines the variables that are studied and their role in the process up to the final decision-making stage (the dates shown are indicative but reflect the general trend). Each of these stages is the subject of the following chapters. Hence in the next one, we will explore the 'autonomous coalitions or "bureaucratic" phase and focus on the role of military organizational culture in an attempt to

understand how the framing of options may have shifted in favor of unilateral intervention.

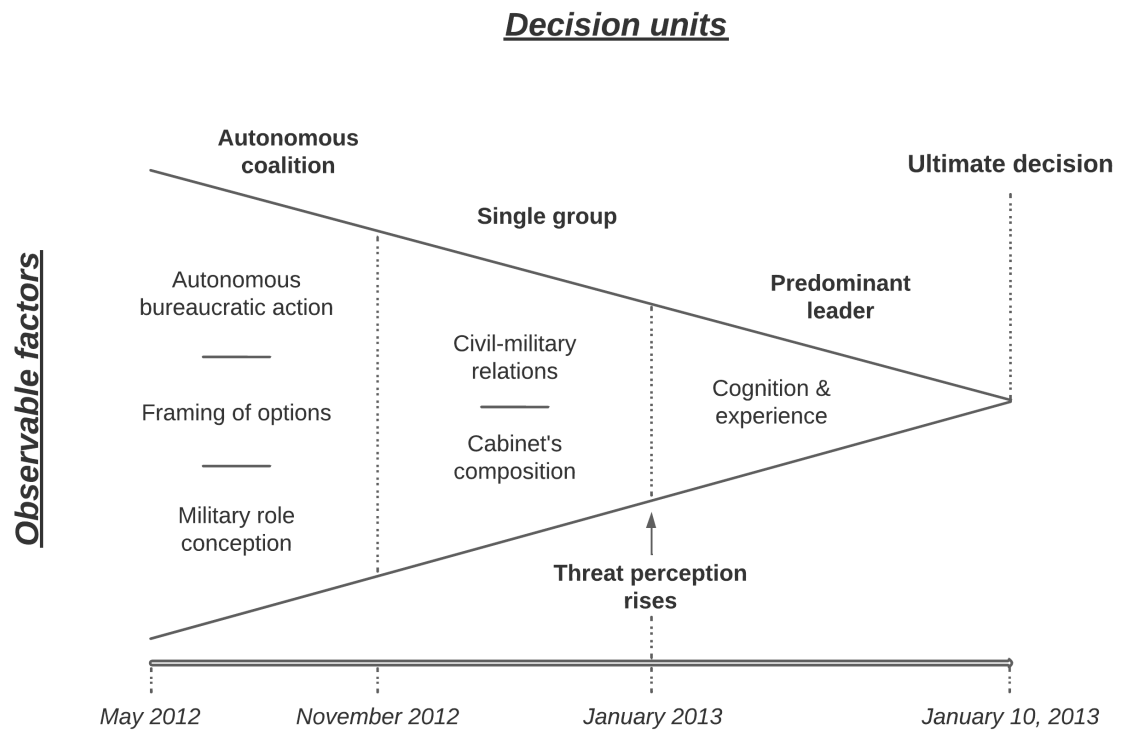


Figure 1. Serval's Decision Units and Timeline

Chapter III

Autonomous Coalition's Path

Graham T. Allison argues that “politics is the mechanism of choice. Each player pulls and hauls with the power at his discretion for outcomes that will advance his conception of national, organizational, group, and personal interests” (1971, p. 171). In line with this account, we examine how the solutions and information produced by the French army might have helped shape possible responses around unilateral intervention. Nevertheless, we differ from Allison in that we do not defend the idea that “governmental decisions and actions are unintended political resultants. That is, political bargaining produces outcomes that do not reflect what any one actor would have selected independently” (Jones, 2010, p. 5). Such an approach to decision-making profoundly ignores the idiosyncratic preferences of ultimate decision-making units and systemic incentives (Krasner, 1972).

Observations of the initial phases of the Serval crisis described it as being marked by a “divergence of preferences” with a military more inclined to define solutions around a unilateral intervention. We also know that the content of framing is “crucial, especially at the agenda-setting stage, since [their] definition and the identification of possible implications at that stage may affect the selection of solutions in the decision-making stage” (Sicurelli, 2008, 219). This is particularly the case in France, where centralization around the President of the Republic makes the latter particularly dependent on “bureaucratic constraints” that “determine the incomplete and deformed information the President receives on the Malian situation, the limited options open to him, and what the army carries out or implements, not necessarily adjusted to the specific situation” (Pouponneau, 2022, p. 56). Furthermore, in France, “the military tends

to benefit from a high degree of presidential autonomy in defence matters. As reference for defence and security questions, the military considerably contributes to the framing of an issue.” (Erforth, 2020a, p. 38). We integrate these observations to theories of the military organizational culture, which determines the content of this autonomous phase.

The Influence of Military Organizational Culture

Christoph Harig, Nicole Jenne and Chiara Ruffa (2022) show that the experience, the shared imaginary within the military institution, is a central determinant of military organizations’ preferences regarding the use of force. They use the term ‘role conception’, which they define as a ‘shared view, shared within one service or shared by all the services, regarding the proper purpose of the military organization and of military power in international relations’ (Harig et al., 2022, p. 9). More concretely, military organization’s role conception has an impact on decision-making because ‘it prescribes certain goals and action, and also because it rules out some policy options, making them implausible or even unthinkable. Embedded in a role conception is also a preference for particular processes of policy making related to the use of force’ (Veneson et al., 2009, p. 631). Other scholars prefer the term ‘military organizational culture’ (Legro, 1996), but all agree that it plays a key role in how these institutions see themselves in relation to both their internal and external environments. For Elizabeth Kier (1995, p. 69), ‘organizations perceptions of their world frames their decisions’. This seems all the more relevant in the case of ‘total institutions like the military’ since ‘few organizations devote as many resources to the assimilation of their members’ (Kier, 1995, p. 69). At the heart of this culture is a vision that forges preferences about how to approach foreign policy and the use of force. This vision, contrary to what the idea of ‘strategic culture’ would suggest by uniting both preferences forged in the civilian and military arenas, is, or can be, ‘divergent’ (Beenher et al., 2021; Bacevich, 2007, 2013; Brooks, 2003, 2019; Feaver, 1996, 2003a, 2011). Indeed, Peter D. Feaver and

Christopher Gelpi, – for whom the military are immersed in a set of beliefs not shared by outside actors – note that as ‘lawyers undoubtedly differ from the general public in terms of their attitudes toward the legal system. Academics surely have distinct views regarding universities’ and the ‘military too have a particular view of foreign policy and the use of force’ (2005, p. 4). In this regard, several scholars note that the adoption of offensive or defensive doctrines were influenced by their organizational culture (Kier, 1997; Snyder, 1984; Posen, 1984). Hew Strachan (2010) also contends this idea by mentioning a ‘bias’ regularly found among military organizations that overshadows strategic and political objectives in favour of purely operational concerns. Reflecting on Strachan’s work, Brooks (2020, p. 35) suggests that this bias might be the consequence of military organizational interests. It should be noted that, although it implies the recognition of a shared model, organizational culture does not imply perfect uniformity within armies (Herspring, 2009, p. 668).

Numerous observations tend to show that the organizational culture of the French armed forces, is largely marked by a reflection around intervention and rapid force projection, notably destined for African theaters (Rynning & Schmitt, 2018; Vennesson, 2008). Rooted in the experience of expeditionary corps engaged in the many French wars of decolonization, ‘*la colo*’ as it was nicknamed, this organizational culture of external operations was initially ‘always anchored in the foreign legion, the marines, the paratroopers’ before extending more widely to the remaining forces in the 1990s (Farrell et al., 2013, p. 237). It was first and foremost the experience of these colonial conflicts that forged the institutionalized image of a French army prone to unilateral, independent action, based on extreme mobility and a central doctrine of counterinsurgency designed for ‘political and human military conquest of territory’ (Shurkin, 2020). Such doctrines, tailored to the colonial context, have been updated to suit a changed political environment. Nevertheless, the conditioning of French forces remained largely marked by a culture that favored unilateral light engagements. Hence, Michael Shurkin depicts it as an ‘institutional expeditionary culture’ (2014). Similarly, this adaptation of expeditionary practices to the rest of the forces from the 1990s onwards, through

numerous post-cold war interventions leads Maj. Gen. Olivier and Lt. Col. Seigneur to conclude that ‘troops have developed an expeditionary mentality’ (2013, p. 42). However, it would be ill-advised to wrongly unify these interventions under the same concept and turn them into a single subject replicated throughout each external operation (d’Aboville, 2020, p. 556). On the contrary, these recent operations respond to different logics in terms of their framework – national (although this is increasingly rare), multinational – but also in terms of their objectives – counterinsurgency, humanitarian intervention, counterterrorism, peacekeeping. Nevertheless, they all helped crystallize the organizational culture of the French armed forces around force projection and the ability to unilaterally act swiftly (Harig & Ruffa, 2022; Vennesson et al., 2019). Tenenbaum and Schmitt’s (2023, p. 356) analysis, albeit lengthy, sheds light on the scale and extent of such archetype,

Participation in these military operations has shaped the culture within the Army and fuelled ‘a broader military imaginary around the idea of the use of military force as an effective tool of foreign policy’. Indeed, ‘military operations are a cornerstone of the French armed forces’ identity, quite unlike most of their European counterparts. The military considers itself combat-proven and has integrated a professional warrior ethos of delivering tactical results, regardless of the actual resources at its disposal.’ Of course, this cultural predisposition is perfectly aligned with the convergence toward the ‘colo’ that was described in the introduction. This culture of expeditionary warfare shapes the career trajectories and broader narratives and memories within the Army, with subsequent organizational consequences, for example favouring operational over analytical profiles when promoting officers, or overvaluing ‘field experience’ (despite its many documented flaws as a source of knowledge) at the expense of critical thinking in the symbolic hierarchy of valued qualities. [...] This focus on operations meets a long-standing cultural trait of the French army, shaped by the foundational experiences of infantry and cavalry combat: a fascination for the ‘great captains’ and the cult of the mission. As such, the French strategic preferences toward military interventions shaped, reinforced, and overlapped with the Army culture.

This vision of an organizational culture weighing in the decision-making process relating to the use of forces is also illustrated by Pannier and Schmitt (2019, p. 6; Rynning & Schmitt, 2018) for whom French interventions,

Create networks of veterans sharing memories and claiming expertise primarily about 'Africa' (as a whole), thereby helping to sustain patterns of military practices. These memories and networks fuel a broader military imaginary around the idea of the use of military force as an effective tool of foreign policy, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Olivier Schmitt and Antoine Maire (2022) who have extensively analyzed this issue address it from the perspective of professional military education. They note that 'France has developed strong expeditionary capabilities', making 'military operations a cornerstone of the French armed forces' identity' (Maire & Schmitt, 2022, p. 16). Far from dying out, this identity is fostered in what Hamelin (2003, p. 446) calls 'the enduring nature of the warrior archetype' which is perpetuated in the French officer corps selection and promotion system. Indeed, this culture of expeditionary warfare 'shapes the career trajectories and broader narratives and memories within the armed forces, with subsequent organizational consequences, for example favouring operational over analytical profiles when promoting officers, or overvaluing "experience" (despite its many documented flaws as a source of knowledge)' (Maire & Schmitt, 2022, p. 16). The structure of the promotion system then supports our observations and sheds light on the sources of this operational culture.

The mechanisms behind the influence of organizational culture on decision-making are subtle. For Jeffrey Legro, who comes to the same conclusions regarding the definition of military organizational culture, 'the internal beliefs of military organizations molded the way that states understood situations and how they viewed the desirability of different outcomes. Such views were not simply derivative of international conditions. In many instances, cultural preference conflicted with what realism would expect given the external situation' (1996, p. 133). This view is contended by Pouponneau (2022), for whom the centrality of military control of information gathering (and, as we shall

see later, the isolation of diplomatic information) during Serval helped to delimit decision-makers' understanding of the Malian situation. Through his seminal comparative study, Legro (1996, p. 133) shows that,

Culture also determined the response repertoire available to states. The preparations militaries made in peacetime had a decisive effect on the choices nations made in war. Leaders often faced an option funnel, that is, the variety of policy possibilities was actually limited to the central plan in which organizations had invested themselves. The weapons, plans, and skills developed according to cultural penchant often decided what national leaders would do even before they considered a situation.

In this sense, the French army's role conception would influence the decision through various predispositions to intervention. This can for instance take the form of plans, sometimes drawn up several years before by the CPCO and the Special Forces Command. Indeed, intervention scenarios to defend Bamako and defeat jihadist forces in the *Adrar des Ifoghas* had already been prepared as early as 2011 (Notin, 2014). The Joint Force and Training Staff had also envisaged a situation 'very similar to Serval', with a column of jihadists moving south (Poupponneau, 2022, p. 55; Erfort, 2020a, 2020b). Such a mechanism is also based on a predisposition to intervention, made possible by the maintenance of substantial resources and the tactical and operational divisions of the armies, which are light and rapidly scalable (Tenenbaum & Schmitt, 2023). This is also not least illustrated by the satellite imagery; communications interception and human intelligence capabilities deployed by the DRM (Direction du Renseignement Militaire) in west Africa which are unique in Europe and barely found outside the P5. It also includes the field proven *Guépard* troop alert system and the presence of a large network of French military bases (the second largest in the world), particularly in West Africa (Griffin, 2016). Similarly, it is induced through the continued presence of French military operations in the region (*Opération Licorne* in Côte d'Ivoire and a large detachment of special forces under the '*Sabre*' system based in Burkina-Faso who played an active role in gathering information prior to Serval). It should be noted, however, that this observation does not call into question the legitimacy of long-term planning and

forces predisposition. On the contrary, it is an essential activity that is widely viewed positively, both within and outside the armed forces. Quite simply, this same planning delimits and shapes the field of possible solutions. Ultimately, 'states learned to want what their armed services had already desired and done.' (Legro, 1996, p. 133). For Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell, who integrate the organizational culture of armies into the structure of neoclassical realist theory, 'through socialization and institutionalization (in rules and norms), these collective assumptions and expectations become deeply entrenched and constrain a state's behavior and freedom of action by defining what are acceptable and unacceptable strategic choices, even in an anarchic self-help environment' (2016, p. 67).

These results all help to understand *how and why the French army, with the autonomy it enjoys, seems to have opted for solutions geared towards unilateral intervention*. Our observations are consistent, albeit in a very different context, with the work of Barry Posen (1984), who suggests that military institutions tend to adopt offensive doctrines when they have the room to cultivate their own identity. In this same seminal work, Posen (1984, p. 226) also adds, with great interest for our purpose, that 'organizational factors work against integrated grand strategies. This is partly due to the reluctance to innovate. Statesmen may change the state's foreign policy; soldiers may not be inclined to change their doctrine to stay in step'. Hence, the underlying mechanisms of organizational culture's influence on decision-making are quite clear. The key observation, scholars suggest, is that organizational culture is embued in course of actions and plans that are directly 'fuelled' into the highest spheres of the decision process. Organizational culture *de facto* influences the decision with such mechanisms (Harig et al., 2022; Legro, 1996; Pannier & Schmitt, 2019; Tenenbaum & Schmitt, 2023; Vennesson et al, 2009). However, those plans, when being discussed, must be represented by leaders either civil or military (Martel, 2015). Hence, when courses of action are assembled and discussed, it is unlikely that organizational culture will bear significant influence if its 'relays' are institutionally sidelined or 'shunned' by decision-makers. Indeed, 'depending on the organizational salience of militaries, culture's role may be

less' (Legro, 1996, p. 133; Levy, 1986, p. 211). In contrast, other scholars argue that 'even when military advisors do not prevail, the relatively autonomous logic of military power constantly influences the political choices related to the use of force' (Vennesson et al., 2009, p. 629). We nevertheless advocate that, for greater validity, it is necessary to analyze the single group phase and see whether such 'relays' are observable. Thus, having shown how part of the actors involved seem to have been following a course of action disconnected from Liberal engagement because of their organizational culture, we now turn to the second decision-making step.

Chapter IV

A Favorable 'Single Group'

In line with the crisis model developed earlier, our analysis moves to the 'intermediate' level which, in the case of Serval, is the group of advisors closest to the President. By observing its composition, we look for relays or 'entry points' of the solutions and preferences fueled by the military's organizational culture and track their influence in the decision-making. As Martel (2015, p. 38) argues when referring to the risk of disintegration in grand strategy, it is difficult 'for military leaders to give strategic advice because their basic conceptual orientation is shaped by both their organizational bias and a deep sense of loyalty to their service'. This is the phenomenon we will focus on. If such relays do not appear, or if they play only a minor role, our hypothesis is not supported.

The study of the presidential advisory system is carried out in two stages. First, the analysis of a renewed framework of civil-military relations and second the transcription of the concrete composition of the Serval cabinet. Our hypothesis is based on a method of outcome observation favored by most researchers in this field. As Feaver & Gelpi (2005, p. 19) propose, our analysis consists in deducing from the composition of the 'decision-making community' the impact that the military's preferences could have on the decision'. Although impractical here and never carried out in a French context, the systematic analysis of divergent preferences and the test of influence through the composition of the cabinet during multiple international crises would provide further applicability. It should be noted that our thinking is not based on civil-military relations to portray a 'permanent gap' between French military and civilian views on the use of force (Feaver, 2003a). It is purely situational and prejudices only the Serval case. In other situations, the decision-making process may be organized in such a way that the influence of the military's organizational culture is sidelined by time limits or presidential personal views. Or it may be in initial agreement with civilian views. Furthermore, our analysis

seems to show that the role conception of a French army particularly favorable to the use of force is favored when it comes to Africa, and particularly within the army (land forces) (Pannier & Schmitt, 2019; Tenenbaum & Schmitt, 2023). For instance, the same observation is certainly not operant in the case of *Opération Chammal* in Iraq and Syria, in which the army is only marginally involved.

Atypical civil-military relations

Civil-military relations are a sub-field of political science and international relations as broad as their very names suggest. One of its main focuses, however, is centred on relations between senior military and high-civilian authorities. The notion of civilian's 'objective control', defined by Samuel Huntington (1957) as a system of compartmentalized decision-making with civilians on one side defining objectives and the military adapting its operational strategy to the latter has long dominated the conception of these relationships. It is depicted by Cohen (2002) as the 'normal' theory. Such an appreciation is based both on an institutional system that anchors the primacy of civilians over the military and on a tacit agreement to operate in silos. A classic objective control system is not suited to intense exchanges between military authorities and political decision-makers since it is 'transactional, rather than collaborative' and would not warrant our proposal (Brooks, 2020, p. 11). Nevertheless, recent literature seems to agree, particularly in the United States as well as in France, that Huntingtonian objective control is no longer a suitable yardstick for accurately representing the state of this relations (Avant, 1996; Croissant et al., 2010; Feaver, 1996, 2003a, 2003b; Golby & Karlin, 2017; Kohn, 2002, p. 16; Rapp, 2015; Recchia, 2015a, 2015b). Not least in an international context marked since the 1990s by a technization of warfare and an increase in long, continuous wars, which established renewed practices (Feaver & Gelpi, 2005; Golby, 2015).

Stefano Recchia (2015a), in his influential volume, refutes the idea of objective control and undertakes a similar reflection to that undertaken here, but

on opposite basis. He discusses how US policy-makers – ‘wilsonians, neoconservatives, and other interventionist hawks’ as they are termed – dismiss the need for burden-sharing and UNSC legitimacy for cultural reasons in the decision to use force (Recchia, 2015a, p. 38). He then proceeds to analyze the decision-making process, illustrating how military leaders – who would themselves advocate a multilateral approach – tip the balance towards nonintervention or multilateral intervention thanks to their position of proximity in the decision-making process (Recchia, 2015a, pp. 34–62). Peter Feaver (2016, p. 11), who refutes Recchia’s argument about burden-sharing and the multilateral will of the military, nonetheless praises the analysis of military ‘influence’ mechanisms on decision-making, which he calls ‘as good as anything written on the topic since Richard Betts’ classic study’.

Regarding these relations, France is witness to a ‘classic’ western liberal-democratic situation of objective control. It is marked by the pre-eminence of the Head of State over the armed forces of which he is the Commander in Chief, and the profound personification of his direct control over the nuclear dissuasion forces (Bernstein et al., 2008, p. 113). Samy Cohen (1994) referred to these developments in his eponymous book as the ‘defeat of the generals’, in reference to the sacralization under the Fifth Republic of civilian control following the attempted *coups* in 1958 and 1961. However, the clarity of this delineation gradually faded during the 1990s (Daho, 2014, 2019, 2022; Jankowski, 2020; Leroy, 2021; Maire & Schmitt, 2022; Pannier & Schmitt 2019; Pouponneau, 2022). As Louis Gautier (2018, p. 190) notes,

The first principle entails the strict subordination of the military to political power, even if we have gradually moved from a fussy and vexatious line of demarcation to very regular and nourished exchanges. On a day-to-day basis, and even more so when managing international crises, relations between military chiefs and political leaders since the 1990s have never been so intense – indeed, this is a point of singularity compared to what exists in many other Western democracies.

Although hardly traceable, this paradigm shift in France appears to be associated with the 1996 military professionalization reform as well as the fact that ‘the end of the Cold War and the growing importance of foreign military interventions led to a change of paradigm: the President established a direct collaboration with the Joint Chief of Staff’ (Maire & Schmitt, 2022, p. 2). This link between the growth in foreign operations and the shift in civil-military relations is a corollary of the theory proposed by Michael Desch (1999). His results, which support our neoclassical realist approach, illustrate how civil-military relations are ‘shaped fundamentally by structural factors, especially threats, which affect individual leaders, the military organization, the state, and society’ (Desch, 1999, p. 11). Thus, in his view, the low external and internal security threats that characterize the post-Cold War world, combined with a high level of activity by military organizations through low-salience wars, tend to bring civilians and the military closer together in a relationship of civilian dependence on military expertise (Desch, 1999, pp. 22–38). In France, this proximity has gradually gained institutional importance. First in 2005 with a decree consolidating the Joint Chief of Staff power over all the other Chiefs of Staff, and in 2009 with a second decree ‘transforming the Joint chief of staff into the key decision-maker within the ministry’, he then ‘received the means to deal with all the aspects of defence without having to refer to the minister’ (Maire & Schmitt, 2022, p. 8). These reforms have had a central impact, providing the Joint Chief of Staff with a formal, regular and unconstrained point of access to the President (Jankowski, 2020). Added to this is the presence of the President’s Personal Chief of Staff, ‘a very powerful and influential position in the French system’, who advises the President on defence matters on a daily basis (Rynning & Schmitt, 2018, p. 39). His position was also strengthened by his now systematic participation in restricted defence councils, which in turn further accentuated his role as the President’s personal military advisor in informal moments (Gautier, 2018, p. 197; Massot, 2020). As a result, the Minister of Defence is not the centre of

French defence policy after the President (although he may be, depending on the decrees adopted as we shall see). On the contrary, he constantly 'has to assert her/himself against the Chief of the General Staff' and maintain close relations with the President (Balzacq, 2019, p. 105). It should be remembered that France – and the United States –, are witness to an uncommon setting compared with most liberal democracies. The latter generally possess a much greater degree of institutional entanglement and formal sharing of decision-making, which tends to reduce the informal relations described here and are over-represented in Paris and Washington.

Commenting on this new proximity between civilian and military authorities, James Golbin and Mara Kalin (2017, p. 150) assert that 'there remains broad acceptance for civilian control and agreement that civilians make the final decision. [...] Nonetheless, the run up to that decision deserves serious examination' (2017, p. 150). The influence that stems from this proximity is defined according to different factors. The overwhelming majority of scholars define it firstly as self-explanatory. Influence thus stems from the central dependence on military resources, preparations and advice by civilians who are increasingly unfamiliar with military affairs; from a lack of consideration for advisors who carry non-military dimensions of the decision to use force; and from the disconnection that tend to exist between these senior military leaders and the broad political ends of grand strategy (Feaver & Gelpi, 2005, p. 65; Golby, 2015; Golby & Karlin, 2017; Kohn, 2002, p. 16; Rapp, 2015; Recchia, 2015a, 2015b, p. 52). As Douglas Bland (1999, p. 40) notes, the senior hierarchy of officers 'hold a near monopoly over the information their political leaders need to make critical decisions'. For Bacevich, influence also stems from 'constant bargaining' strategies to avoid or not fully commit to certain tasks due to diverging interests (2007; 2013). Others note that this proximity is a source of particular influence when civilians diverge between themselves on the policies to adopt, or when hesitation is present (Avant, 1996).

Finally, Barbara Jankowski, starting from the observation that such a position in the military hierarchy does not factually prejudice an influence on the decision, examined the resources available to French military authorities in the decision to use force (2020, pp. 57–95). Through numerous interviews with personnel who have participated in or observed these processes, she acknowledges that such influence is proven, but rejects certain sources of influence specific to the American system. The mobilization of financial resources; of personal networks shared between civilians and military personnel; congressional lobbying; partisan networks and public speeches that are all observed across the Atlantic do not seem to have a hold in France (Brooks, 2013; Feaver & Kohn, 2021; Kohn, 2002, p. 66; Liebert & Golby, 2016; Milner & Tingley, 2015). Nevertheless, she identifies three resources available to military authorities which, when combined, give them a significant foothold: politico-military expertise; proximity to decision-makers; and the ability to make themselves heard (Jankowski, 2020, p. 66). For our analysis, these characteristics are of interest as they illustrate a certain freedom that civil-military relations can provide for the emergence of relays of the organizational culture of the forces. However, even without the presence of these relays, these observations show the extent of the intricacy of the military and civilian worlds in France. They give a strong *prima facie* plausibility to our theory of disintegration through a decision-making process that would be too ‘open’ to actors whose culture leads ‘against’ the means of grand strategy.

However, these informal processes are largely situational. They depend more on temporary arrangements in the precise organization of relations during a specific crisis than on mechanical workings. There are no institutional constraints on the decision to surround oneself with this or that advisor, or rather to concretely call on their service even though they are formally available (Eymeri-Douzans, 2015). Hence, a vision based solely on civil-military relations is incomplete, as it fails to consider variations in civilian preferences and ‘mixed

coalitions' (military personnel adopting the viewpoint of civilian advisors, or vice versa). It may well be that, in each case, certain members of the single group exerting a particular influence run counter to the military's organizational culture, thereby diminishing its impact, or the contrary. For that reason, we shall shift our attention to the concrete cogwheels of the Serval decision-making cabinet.

Close Advisory During the Malian Crisis

Scholars who have conducted empirical studies to refine our knowledge of the serval's decision-making process offer multiple accounts describing the temporary distribution of roles and influence. Firstly, the Minister of Defence is unanimously described as having played a leading role (Daho, 2022; Erforth, 2020a; Maire & Schmitt, 2022; Marchal, 2013; Notin, 2014; Pouponneau, 2022). As interviews conducted by Sciences Po scholar Erforth (2020a, p. 43) shows,

There are those ministers who are eager to exercise their function to the fullest and at the same time are endowed with the necessary autonomy by the president. This third case reflects the situation at the time of the crises in Mali and the CAR. [...] Jean-Yves Le Drian was described as being very close to the president. French media repeatedly highlighted the three-decade-long friendship between the two men. Jean-Yves Le Drian has always enjoyed the president's full confidence. In addition to his loyalty to the president, pundits and collaborators stress the minister's technical expertise. In conjunction, these two traits made the minister of defence a dominant leader within the ministry and an influential player in the decision-making framework.

This is further reinforced by the fact that, under the personal impetus of the minister, his cabinet 'wrote a new decree giving the minister their place back in the chain of political responsibilities in terms of employment of the armed forces and intelligence. Compared to the 2009 decree, the decree adopted in 2013

transferred the responsibility for the employment of the armed forces from the Joint chief of staff to the minister.’ (Maire & Schmitt, 2022, p. 10). Surprisingly, this shift in power was ‘shared with all the actors, specifically with the Joint chief of staff’ (Maire & Schmitt, 2022, p. 10). This may explain why the latter was ‘relatively sidelined’ during the Serval process (Notin, 2014). Furthermore, observations show that Le Drian ‘was very sympathetic to the views of his Army’ (Marchal, 2013, p. 488), and that ‘the majority of actors, who were more inclined toward unilateral intervention, were initially situated in the Ministry of Defense and among the military’ (Erforth 2020a, p. 109; Notin, 2014; Pouponneau, 2023). Moreover, ‘given the friendship that joins François Hollande and Jean-Yves Le Drian, as well as the military nature of the two crises- the Ministry of Defense was in control during most phases of the problem solution acting as the president’s principal military and defence advisory unit’ (Erforth, 2020a, p. 49). As showed, the central role of the Joint Chief of Staff has been progressively merged with that of Minister Le Drian. The former nevertheless retains a certain importance, particularly in restricted Defense Councils, where he is the main actor to provide answers to the President (Biseau & Hofnung, 2013, cited in Jankowski, 2021, p. 262). He is thus also a relay, but one that plays a less powerful role due to his inability to possess the necessary proximity resources to carry weight (Jankowski, 2020).

The Personal Chief of Staff of the President also appeared to play a central role according to many observers – in line with its renewed institutional function (Daho, 2022; Erforth, 2020a; Gautier, 2018; Pouponneau, 2022; Siméant & Pierre, 2022). Puga, which held the Personal Chief of Staff grade under both Sarkozy and Hollande (a rare occurrence since incoming presidents normally appoint a new one), ‘embodies continuity in the handling of major defence issues’ (Gautier, 2018, p. 197). His observable proximity to President Hollande during the crisis makes him one of the key players in the advisor system and ‘creates trust between the different persons and makes for the opinion of the

CEMP carrying weight' (Erforth, 2020a; Notin, 2014). He himself an officer who led the 2nd Foreign Parachute Regiment, has extensive combat experience in overseas operations, and has headed the CPCO, the COS and the DRM, seems to be strongly imbued with the operational culture of the armed forces, making him a credible relay (Siméant & Pierre, 2022, pp. 66–69).

Moreover, diplomatic advisors—who were initially mainly opposed to intervention (Erforth, 2020a)—were 'largely excluded from the intervention decision-making process' (Coutereel et al., 2022, p. 110). As Johanna Siméant and Emé Pierre note, 'Elysée advisors and diplomats specializing in Africa were, if not absent, without a coherent strategy. Diplomats did not favor Africa, and the President's African advisors had no more to offer than their counterparts at the Quai d'Orsay in the face of jihadist threats in Mali.' (2022, p. 62). However, this comes as no surprise, since the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not usually responsible for designing foreign policy, but only for implementing it (Lefebvre, 2022). The Ministry's senior civil servants themselves seem to be aware of the limits to their influence (both on the framing of options and, later, on their discussion in the single group phase). As one member of the Africa department noted, 'there was a movement, I don't really see what else we could have done (...), we're in a system where an Africa director weighs what he weighs, where an Africa deputy director weighs what he weighs, and we're not necessarily asked for our opinion' (Coutereel et al., 2022, p. 113). This situation seems quiet contradictory since the political coherence of the operation is partly build at the Quai d'Orsay. Furthermore, the Ministry leads a large number of staff who are well versed in the regional specificities of operational theaters and work with local authorities through the vast network of embassies and French research centers abroad (UMIFRE), which provide valuable expertise (Charillon, 2015, p. 81).

Then, from the available literature devoted to the composition of the cabinet, it would appear that 'relays' of the organizational culture existed mainly

in the form of the Minister of Defence, the Personal Chief of Staff, and to a lesser, more formal extent, the Joint Chief of Staff. This illustrates how an organizational culture that favors a path of action inconsistent with France's grand strategy can be found in the options that are passed on by bureaucracies but can also benefit from a central role within the closest advisory group. Nevertheless, this does not prefigure of a 'willingness' to intervene, contrary to what is put forward by Henke (2017a, 2017b) or many French journalistic observers. No evidence emerged during our reading of the available literature to support such this hypothesis. The phenomenon at play is simply a role of 'representation' of their organization by military leaders. In fact, such dynamics makes up a large part of day-to-day public life (Edelstein, 2021).

Furthermore, while showing that the ultimate decision unit (François Hollande), has been strongly 'exposed' and has interacted at length with the military culture preferences, our observations do not show that such preferences are 'automatically' translated into the final decision. As Levy (1986, p. 211) notes when refereeing to the impact of organizational culture, its influence 'depends greatly on the receptivity of key political decision-makers, and this may vary'. Consequently, the next chapter will focus on an assessment of the psychological variables that dictates the final phase of the decision-making process. Such an endeavor is necessary if we want to fully isolate the organizational culture as a push-factor that participates in disintegrating the implementation of grand strategy.

Chapitre V

Hollande's Leadership Style Analysis

Both neoclassical realists and proponents of the Foreign Policy Analysis field place great emphasis on the design of foreign policy and its relationship with international politics (Schweller, 2006). Consequently, they focus on the decision-making process and, in particular, the organizational and bureaucratic characteristics whose theories we have tested (Kaarbo, 2015). Nevertheless, as Jean-Baptiste Duroselle and Pierre Renouvin noted nearly 60 years ago, the psychological variables of decision-making should not be neglected in our analyses (Sitzenstuhl, 2014, p. 6). Robert Jervis was the most influential to show as early as 1976 the cognitive limits that run through decision-makers and to highlight that they are limited 'in their mental capacities to process information and fully satisfy standards of ideal rationality in their attempts to maximize their interests. They adopt a number of cognitive shortcuts or heuristics' (Levy, 2013, p. 371). Indeed, 'theoretically speaking, it is impossible to divorce the actor from the action: human beings – with all of their psychological parts and pieces – make decisions' (Schafer et al., 2021, p. 151). In line with Jervis's work, which 'opened the black box of decision-making', a plethora of scholars are interested in how decisions are affected by political leaders belief systems; worldviews; conception of their nation; emotions or threat perception (George & Stern, 2002; Holsti, 1962, 1970, 1995; Janis & Field, 1956; Janis & Mann, 1976; Mintz, 1993; Stein, 2008; Tetlock, 2007). Among these, a body of literature has emerged on leaders' personal traits and leadership style (Heilbrunn, 1994; Hermann, 2002; Hermann et al., 2001; Hermann & Hermann, 1989; Hermann & Hagan, 1998; Hoffmann, 2009; Keller, 2005; Keller & Yang, 2008; Preston, 2001; Preston & t'Hart, 1999; Schafer, 2000; Schafer et al., 2021; Suedfeld & Granatstein, 1995).

Drawing on this corpus, we propose to analyze what François Hollande's leadership style illustrates about his information management and decision-making. Hypothetically, a president with an assertive and confident leadership

style might perfectly have been uninfluenced by the Malian situation on the ground or the proximity with a unilateral military organizational culture and remained firmly camped on his initial position of not intervening, since ‘for such leaders, policy decisions are far more likely to be driven by idiosyncratic factors than by external realities’ (Preston, 2001, p. 257). These personal variations in decision-making outcomes are described by Robert Kennedy (1969) with a profound historical perspective when he writes regarding the Cuban missile crisis,

The fourteen people involved were very significant – bright, able, dedicated people, all of whom had the greatest affection for the U.S.... If six of them had been president of the U.S., i think that the world might have been blown up.

Organizational culture is both a material factor (expressed in plans and proposals) and as illustrated above, is also embodied in the advisors and their proximity to the decision-maker. An analysis of leadership style enables us to determine the leader’s sensitivity to his material context, as well as to his advisory system (Pfiffner, 2005). ‘Indeed, not all presidents are equally dependent upon (or vulnerable to) the quality or characteristics of their advisers’ (Preston, 2001, p. 259) (Hermann et al., 2001; Hermann, 2002, 1989; Mitchell, 2010; Preston & t’Hart, 1999). Our hypothesis is therefore as follows. If one seeks to know how the decision-making process can incorporate actions paths that are inconsistent with grand strategy (organizational culture), the analysis must, in the end, be able to display a significant readiness on the part of the predominant leader to take it into account. By combining the earlier organizational analysis with the one undertaken here, our approach is therefore ‘completed’ by psychological variables since, as Jack S. Levy (2013, p. 303) notes, these ‘must be integrated into a broader theory of foreign policy that incorporates state-level causal variables and that explains how the preferences, beliefs, and judgments of the leading decision-maker (along with those of other key actors) get aggregated into a foreign policy decision for the state’ (2013, p. 303).

Leadership style analysis is largely based on the work of Margaret Hermann, who laid the foundations of a large corpus with her Leadership Trait

Analysis (LTA) method, which has now gradually found its place within various international relations traditions (Kaarbo, 2015; Ripsman et al., 2016). Indeed, Hermann (2002, p. 5),

Assessing the individual differences of 122 national leaders across the past two decades [...] has uncovered a set of leadership styles [...]. These leadership styles are built around the answers to three questions: (a) How do leaders react to political constraints in their environment – do they respect or challenge such constraints? (b) How open are leaders to incoming information – do they selectively use information or are they open to information directing their response? (c) What are the leaders' reasons for seeking their positions – are they driven by an internal focus of attention within themselves or by the relationships that can be formed with salient constituents?

To define what a leader's traits tells about these interrogations, scholars use a 'content analysis method' (Levine & Young, 2014). Since it is generally impossible to gain access to a leader 'so that we can use traditional methods of psychological assessment, such as paper-pencil responses or clinical observation', an alternative procedure had to be developed (Schafer et al., 2021, p. 152). Based on cognitive psychology, the idea is simple. Verbal behavior is an indicator of psychological particularities. Thus, the 'essential feature of content analysis is coding for the presence of certain categories in written text or transcriptions of verbal text' (Winter, 2013, p. 431). Through content analysis, one looks for seven variables that allow to statistically measure the prevalence of a particular personal trait. These include *conceptual complexity*, *need for power*, *distrust in others*, *self-confidence*, *in-group bias*, *task focus*, and *belief in ability to control events*. Each of these 'has two dictionaries of words, one marking the positive and one marking the negative manifestations of the trait' (Schafer, 2013, p. 3). We will return to the meaning of each of these variables and their operationalization. Thus, each trait is tested and scored to yield singular indications of leadership style when compared with a control variable (average scores of 87 leaders, Hermann, 2002). Furthermore, Hermann (2001) as well as Preston (2001) have built – based on systematic testing of scores and

empirical analysis of the style of hundreds of leaders – two typologies that cross-reference the seven traits to build comprehensive profiles that reflect the intricacies of the leadership. Thanks to the many studies carried out, LTA profiles now bear considerable empirical value (Schafer et al., 2021).

In our instance, no personality assessment at-a distance on François Hollande had ever been carried out. This is not surprising. In addition to a French theoretical tradition far removed from Anglo-Saxon approaches of international relations (although this is becoming less true), French political science ‘is reluctant to consider the role of affects in politics, finds it difficult to envisage the autonomy of the individual in relation to his or her environment and, above all, places a great deal of importance on sociological approaches to politics’ (Sitzenstuhl, 2015, p. 2). We therefore set about building this profile here and thank Michael D. Young once again for granting us access to the Profiler+ software, which automates content analysis and consequently simplifies it (Levine & Young, 2014). Conducting an LTA requires gathering a substantial amount of data to obtain significant results (Hermann, 2002). Qualitatively, these should be ‘spontaneous’ responses, or responses with as little preparation time as possible (Schafer, 2000). This implies that the answers cannot be prepared in advance, or written out, and so it is necessary not to resort to speeches or statements (although this can be useful in some cases). In quantity, one must gather a minimal number of 4000 words coming from those spontaneous answers to reach a significant result with the program (gradual augmentation of the numbers becomes exponentially insignificant) (Levine & Young, 2014).

Focusing exclusively on spontaneous responses, we conducted François Hollande’s LTA by coding the context of the data through different profiles. For example, the first profile is used by grouping responses around their thematic (international affairs, national economy, national politics, etc.); their situation (international crisis or not); and their date. Secondly, we compiled a ‘Serval LTA’, which includes all the spontaneous answers given on each occasion by François Hollande during the crisis period, and only concerning the situation in Mali (from September 2012). We ran various tests to statistically analyze the variance (ANOVA and Wilcoxon test) between scores in these different situations. For

instance, to observe whether François Hollande is more sensitive to the external context during the Serval crisis than in non-crisis times. However, the statistical analyses revealed no particular significance. This does not compromise our observation and we will then only focus on the LTA that was conducted for the Serval crisis period. Table. 1 display François Hollande's scores.

Leadership Trait	François Hollande scores	Control scores (Hermann, 2002)
Belief Can Control Events (BACE)	0.4608	Mean = 0.44
		Low < 0.30
		High > 0.58
Need for Power (PWR)	0.2922	Mean = 0.50
		Low < 0.37
		High > 0.62
Self-Confidence (SC)	0.3448	Mean = 0.62
		Low < 0.44
		High > 0.81
Conceptual Complexity (CC)	0.6089	Mean = 0.44
		Low < 0.32
		High > 0.56
Task Focus (TASK)	0.6324	Mean = 0.59
		Low < 0.46
		High > 0.71
Ingroup Bias (IGB)	0.1296	Mean = 0.42
		Low < 0.32
		High > 0.53
Distrust of Others (DIS)	0.1942	Mean = 0.41
		Low < 0.25
		High > 0.56

The analysis key-findings are significant and instructive, to say the least. François Hollande's leadership style during the crisis shows a significantly low Need for Power and Influence (PWR, 0.2922, low <0.37). This variable 'indicates a concern for establishing, maintaining, or restoring one's power or, in other words, the desire to control, influence, or have an impact on other persons or groups' (Hermann, 2002, p. 15). Preston (2001, p. 19), combines the need for power score with past foreign policy experience to establish a leader's control and involvement in decision-making. In the case of François Hollande, his situation when he took office in May 2012 was that of a former Secretary of the Socialist Party, leaving his position as President of the Corrèze Regional Council for the Élysée with no previous experience of international politics when the crisis broke in early 2012 (Rowdybush & Chamorel, 2012). This combination of factors appears to illustrate a collegial and informal leadership style that leaves room for group members (Hermann et al., 2001). In addition, 'instead of relying upon their own policy judgments when making final decisions, such leaders rely extensively upon (and usually adopt) the views of expert advisers' (Preston, 2001, p. 19). These observations are shared. David Mitchell (2010) and Steven B. Redd (2005), for instance, who have both studied the influence of context on the decision-making process of Clinton administrations (himself with a similar LTA profile than François Hollande), show how 'preferences emerged predominantly from Clinton's advisors' (Mitchell, 2010, p. 655).

On the other hand, Hollande scores relatively high for intellectual complexity (CC, 0.6089, high > 0.56). When complexity is high, Stephen Benedict Dyson and Paul 'T Hart (2013, p. 395) demonstrate, 'the individual perceives a greater variety and subtlety of actors, motivations, issues, and ideas. The person searches for longer, and from a wider variety of sources for relevant information'. Hermann (2002) combines complexity and self-confidence scores to obtain the leader sensitivity to contextual information which entails its sensitivity to a changing external environment and willingness to heed other members of the decision-making group. The French President's Self-confidence score is particularly low (SC, 0.3448, low <0.44). When leaders experience such a combination, they tend to 'seek to tailor their behavior to fit the demands of

the situation in which they find themselves' (Hermann et al., 2001, p. 87; Stein, 1994). In addition to the external context, these leaders also show great dependence on 'inputs from others', which makes their decision 'highly inconsistent, matched as it is to the nature of the setting' (Hermann, 2002, p. 20). Furthermore, this indicates that they tend to be 'interested in how relevant constituencies are viewing events and in seeking their support, open to bargaining, trade-offs, and compromise, and focused on events on a case-by-case basis (Hermann and Hermann, 1989). Keller & Yang (2008), who attempt to integrate LTA with the polyheuristic decision theories developed by Alex Mintz (2004), find similar results. Adding to these same observations a low level of foreign policy experience, Preston shows that these leaders "tend to limit their own personal role in the analysis of data or options. They want the expert advisers to make sense of the situation and recommend a direction" and adds that they "tend to possess advisory systems in which expert advisers play a significant role in the shaping and formulation of policies" (2001, p. 25). Finally, François Hollande has a significantly low score for distrust of others (DIS, 0.1942, Low <0.25) and a medium score for his ability to control events (BACE, 0.4608, Mean = 0.44/High > 0.58). This reflects both François Hollande's lack of desire to assert himself within the policy-making process, and his confidence when the process depends heavily on his advisors, which confirms the observations made on the main PWR, CC and SC scores.

Integrating these results in our inquiry, we first note how the scores obtained by François Hollande during the Malian crisis are both significantly consistent with each other (self-reinforcement is a criterion of test validity, Hermann, 2002), and consistent with the observations we made of the single group, which we saw to be informal and collegial. Secondly, and most importantly for us, all the scores and their interpretations unanimously illustrate a profound sensitivity to the external context, to the information received, and particularly, to the advisors closest to the President. While we must be careful not to assert this hypothesis, the results leave little doubt that organizational culture may have played a role in favour of unilateral intervention, even though François Hollande was initially opposed to it. This does not mean, however, that

organizational culture “made” the intervention. The LTA shows that François Hollande is particularly sensitive to context, which would well explain how the movements in the Malian ground situation could have played a major role in his decision. It is impossible, within the scope of this work, to distinguish which of these variables took precedence. This is a recurring limitation of such analyses (Kaarbo, 2015; Ripsman et al., 2016). Nevertheless, it seems difficult in view of the theories mobilized to reject the hypothesis that organizational culture did play a role in the decision, evoking an inconsistent relationship with grand strategy. Consistent with Friend and Karlin’s observations (2020, para. II), Serval’s decision-making process illustrated that, “regardless of views on its inviolability, military advice and the expertise that underwrites it have a tendency to overshadow civilian judgment in the policymaking process”. What this shows is the (caricatured) dichotomy that decision-making can present in relation to grand strategy. Even though the process was carried out in pursuit of the latter, a whole parallel sequence was derived from factors inconsistent with it. To further enhance our understanding of this phenomenon, the next chapter analyses the structure of the French grand strategic system and uses it to provide insights on the apparent lack of communication between the military institution and grand strategy.

Chapter VI

Grand Strategy and the Military

Why would military organizational culture fail to appropriate or “condition” itself to French grand strategy? While this culture is, by its very nature, an all-encompassing and visibly influential process (Legro, 1996), the fact remains that the French military institution is highly hierarchical and invests heavily in adapting its doctrines to the political and security context (Frias Sanchez, 2022; Sevaistre, 2023). In theory, this should make it possible to “remove” the potential “independence” of the services’ by standardizing them ‘from the top’.

To avoid repeating the Serval disconnection scenario, clear and effective ‘dialogue’ must be established between political objectives and the military chain of command. What’s needed is effective civilian guidance. As Alice H. Friend (cited in Golby & Karlin, 2017, p. 153) writes, “best civilian guidance’ can be developed by instilling clarity in national interests and how they can best be defended, looking across and accounting for the varying elements of national power, and placing clear lines limiting the parameters of military force’. As it happens in the French case, Paris introduced the *Livre Blanc*, a tool perceived from abroad as effective (Cohen, 2016) and reputed in France as the object of ‘reference’ for the implementation of France’s grand strategic action (Riolacci, 1994, cited in Buffotot, 2015, p. 2). Following the ‘spirit’ of the *Livre*, the renewed proximity between political decision-makers and military authorities should not pose any problem. Indeed, a ‘standardization of wills’ is supposed to be achieved through the *implementation* of the text, though its concrete translation into doctrine. Consequently, such an organization should in theory make it possible to apply the recommendations of Feaver and Khon (2021, p. 17), for whom ‘military expertise is indispensable. But fully considered military advice in the form of plans and options can only be developed with an awareness of the larger political context in which the president is operating’.

This is also the opinion of William E. Rapp (2015, p. 23), for whom ‘the best way to honor the traditions of American civil-military relations and craft the best possible policy and strategy’ is the ‘provision of multiple genuine options, expressed in a strategic context that explains how and why the resources requested can act upon the extant problems and help achieved specified ends at defined levels of risk’. However, despite the existence of the *Livre Blanc*, our observations on the organizational culture of the French armed forces and the course of the Serval crisis contradict such suppositions. On the contrary, we tend to observe a ‘decoupling’ between grand strategic formulation and the actions of military institutions. This, we suggest, is partly due to a lack of ownership of the *Livre Blanc* by the military authorities and, consequently, by some of the lower echelons of the command chain.

The 2008 Livre Blanc non-appropriation

Among other objectives, French White Papers ‘herald’ transformations in French grand strategy (Balzacq, 2019, p. 107). They focus in particular on defense issues, but this acceptance tended to fade in favor of a more global vision of security since 2008 that was fully confirmed by the 2017 ‘Strategic Review’. Their drafting is the opportunity to readjust grand strategy to a changing external and internal environment. ‘This implies a comprehensive reassessment of the strategic context as well as military capabilities, institutions and missions’ (Dieck, 2012, p. 232). However, this does not mean that the evolution of grand strategy in France is contingent on the writing of a White Paper. Outside drafting periods, and if the President deems it appropriate, major inflections in the formulation of grand strategy are crafted within the ‘*Conseil de défense et de sécurité nationale*’ (CDSN). It is responsible for the ‘*grandes orientations*’ and ‘deals with all defense and security issues, whether they concern military programming, deterrence policy, internal security programming, economic and energy security, the fight against terrorism or crisis response planning’ (SGDSN, 2022). To this end, it is chaired by the President and assisted by the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Defense, the Interior, Foreign Affairs and the Economy.

Military leaders, high-ranking civil servants and other 'experts' may be invited to attend. To ensure continuity among the participants, the Councils are coordinated by the *Secrétariat Général de la Défense et de la Sécurité Nationale* (SGDSN), which prepares the material common to all participants and handles follow-up. During the drafting of a White Paper, the CDSN also meets several times to define and monitor progress.

In view of this process, why should French grand strategy suffer from a lack of ownership by military institutions? In her contribution to the Rootledge Handbook on Civil-Military Relations (2012), Hélène Dieck provides interesting response elements based on the 2008 *Livre Blanc*. She notes that the Commission in charge of its preparation was quickly criticized by the military authorities for its lack of representativeness and its excessive openness to the non-military world. This may seem surprising when Paris lends itself to such an exercise. Patrice Buffotot (2015, p. 6), analyzing the composition of the workgroup, notes that 'the number of military personnel present in the commission in various capacities is relatively low, at 16.6% in 1994 and 2008, and peaking at 15% in 2013'. Dieck (2012, p. 234) quotes former Joint Chief of Staff Georgelin who argues that "those who are not required to bear the consequences of their decisions"; "members of think tanks and other military thinkers who have never been and never will be on the frontlines of a combat zone", those "thinking theoretically but without operational experience and responsibilities)", "should not be part of the decision-making process". The lack of legitimacy of certain participants in the eyes of the military, the low overall participation of militiamen and, more specifically, "the absence of a low-ranking military commissioner" therefore seem to have "alienated part of the military inside and outside of the Commission" (Dieck, 2012, pp. 236–237).

This disapproval even found its way into the public sphere. Firstly, in an article by General Officer Thomann (2008, para. III) who expressed his surprise that "this body hardly includes any military personnel for a subject that directly concerns them", and then in an anonymous article published in the daily *Le Figaro*, which attracted considerable media and political attention (Groupe Surcouf, 2008). The rarity of such outspokenness in the French army, which

deserves its nickname of “the great mute”, makes these oppositions all the more striking (Daho, 2014). Thus, under the name “Surcouf Group”, a committee of general and senior officers spoke out publicly to “denounce” the *Livre Blanc* both in its management and its consequences, such as “cutting African bases even though they represent a French comparative advantage on a continent that is likely to experience more crises in the years to come” (Moroney et al., 2011, p. 31). As Buffotot (2009, p. 10) notes, “discontent within the military is such that President N. Sarkozy sent a letter to all Ministry of Defense personnel” in an attempt to explain the text’s scope.

As a result, this ambitious document, which was to be one of the armed forces’ doctrinal sources for a number of years to come – in short a document that should ‘influence’ their organizational culture –, seems to be missing recognition from the very same military institutions responsible for its implementation. We suggest that this lack of appropriation of the 2008 *Livre Blanc*, and therefore the lack of appropriation of the military components of France’s grand strategy, may have contributed to the Serval disconnection phenomenon. With no ‘binding’ mechanisms and no sense of ‘belonging’ or ‘involvement’ on the part of the military to adapt the culture of the French armed forces to the renewed grand strategy, it seems hardly surprising that they continue to work in their previous patterns. If the substance of the *Livre Blanc* (which strongly distances itself from a French army with a unilateral expeditionary culture, particularly in Africa), is shared only within senior political circles or think-tanks, the ‘organizational resistance’ we observe with Serval may indeed be the product of poor ‘dialogue’ within the French grand-strategic system. As Dieck (2012, p. 237) explicitly notes,

All these problems did not facilitate the process of ownership in the military, and as a consequence the White Paper is not always considered a point of reference inside and outside the Ministry of Defense. For example, military doctrine should use the White Paper as the primary reference, but doctrine centers such as the joint concepts and doctrine center (Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrines et d’expérimentations, CICDE) do not feel obliged to refer to the document.

Reinforcing our hypothesis, the French authorities seem to have become aware of this lack of representativeness, appropriation and ‘follow-up’ of the *Livre Blanc*. In 2015, the *Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Stratégie* (DGRIS) was set up within the Ministry of Defence to remedy this shortcoming. The latter is responsible for foresight and strategic planning and the articulation with ‘military programming work, in close liaison with the Armed Forces Staff (EMA), the General Directorate of Armaments (DGA) and the General Secretariat for Administration (SGA)’ (Guitton, 2021, p. 29). It is also now responsible for ‘coordinating the preparation, updating and monitoring of the *Livre blanc sur la défense et la sécurité nationale*, and for drafting the *Revue stratégique* of 2017’ (Schlumberger, 2019, p. 107–108). In line with this mission, it also took on a task previously widely criticized by the military, namely the transposition of the transformations made in the *Livre Blanc* into military programming laws (Schlumberger, 2019, p. 108). Without touching on the representativeness of the redaction commissions, the DGRIS (co-directed by a military official and working with a large number of military personnel) now acts as an ‘effective relay’ between grand strategy and military institutions (Bronard, 2015). In this way, it strives to guarantee a coherence that seems to have been eroded over time.

Concluding Remarks

This work was born of the desire to explore grand strategy beyond the treatment it is most often given: a succinct mention without elaboration, sometimes synonymous with '*raison d'état*', other times with 'national interest'. To this end, it seemed to us that the search for the 'mark' of grand strategy in the decision to intervene militarily abroad was of singular interest. The first stage of our analysis could not ignore the theoretical debate surrounding the concept. In consequence, the recently structured positivist research field (Balzacq et al. 2018), enabled us to bring out a precise operational definition. Achieving this, however, means having to 'slice through' some of the notion's ramblings at the risk of it failing to make sufficient analytical sense. The central observation, confirmed by our work, is the evolving nature of grand strategy. Both the authorial debate on the subject and our analysis supports the idea that a fixed grand strategy is neither a good normative nor theoretical acceptance. The term 'lodestar', which we use on several occasions, seems best suited to describe it. With its presence overhead, the lodestar reflects the 'guidance of grand strategy over all other state policies. With the possibility of its disappearance behind the clouds, it reflects the limits of grand strategy, which is also sometimes rendered inaccessible by the complexity of the system. Nevertheless, its continuous presence over time reflects the durability of grand strategy and the long-term nature of its action.

The French grand strategy has demonstrated this long-term approach through a tendency towards continuity that is uncommon among Western democracies (Balzacq, 2019; Lissner, 2018). Clearly, Paris has never ceased to follow a grand strategy concerned by its rank and status in the international hierarchy, nor is this a common feature of liberal democracies (Renshon, 2017). For this purpose, Grandeur relied on the nation-state and the maintenance of its independence through the upkeep of large conventional and nuclear forces. In contrast, Liberal engagement, aware of the economic and financial weight of such a position and influenced by an ideological revival, turned to multilateral

integration and the downgrading of the unilateral military tool to settle its disputes.

Based on four observations, we then decided to test the hypothesis according to which the repartition of roles between the military and civilians' leaders in the decision-making process could tend to 'disconnect' it from the grand strategy. The first was the fact that the Serval operation showed characteristics at odds with French grand strategy (unilateralism with political support). The second was that the process was marked by a significant gap between the initial position and the decision. The third was the presence of a substantial body of academic literature pointing to the possible incoherence of the grand strategy in the case of a major role for the military. Finally, there were 'accounts' of a 'willingness' to intervene on the part of the French army and some of its decision-makers. Under a neoclassical realist framework, we turned to bureaucratic theories and organizational culture and found a proven presence of a culture 'favoring the use of unilateral force in foreign policy' particularly in Africa and thus contrasting with French Liberal engagement (Pannier & Schmitt, 2019). These theories also provided us with an indication of how organizational culture influenced the process through the framing of solutions (Vennesson et al., 2009). However, they also indicated that for organizational culture to be fully influent on the process, it was necessary for 'relays' to exist (Legro, 1996; Martel, 2015). To test the existence of such relays, we turned to the analysis of civil-military relations, which showed how a strong rapprochement had taken place in France between military decision-makers and decision-makers since the late 1990s and uncovered the known mechanisms of this new relationship (Feaver & Gelpi, 2005; Gautier, 2018; Jankowski, 2020; Maire & Schmitt, 2022; Rapp, 2015). By analyzing the composition of the 'Serval' cabinet, we have illustrated the effective presence of these relays and their pre-eminence within the single group to the detriment of diplomatic advisors (Erforth, 2020a; Notin, 2014; Siméant-Germanos, 2022). Levy (1986) and various neoclassical realist scholars (Schweller, 2003) argue that the influence of organizational culture, whether through relays or solution framing, depends on the disposition of the predominant leader to be 'open' to information and advice. Consequently, based

on political psychology, in particular the LTA developed by Hermann (2002) and Preston's typology (2001), we tested François Hollande's leadership style. Through content analysis, the results demonstrate the President's strong dependence on his advisors and the external context. Without being able to assert it, we nevertheless witness important support for the hypothesis of a 'contagion' of the process by the preference for intervention embedded in the military's organizational culture. We equate this phenomenon to the 'internal frictions' in the implementation of grand strategy. Finally, strong evidence is displayed of the inadaptability of the French grand strategic system to provide a clear dialogue from grand strategy to its appropriation by the armed forces. Such difficult communication, we believe, might be a key component of Serval's disintegration process.

Repercussions on the International System

Although it cannot be described as multilateral, owing to a lack of formal pre-intervention approval and an unbalanced division of operational tasks, Serval nevertheless benefited from political support and *ex-post* recognition by ECOWAS and the UNSC. This attempt at multilateralization, along the lines of the redefinition of the characteristics of French defense collaboration in Africa, was certainly necessary. It seemed essential to anticipate and address criticisms of interference, '*Françafrique*' and the general climate of opposition to the French presence that was already making itself heard in the early 2010s. Despite this 'effort', the Malian theater of operations quickly became the epicenter of a movement challenging France's presence in the region. Such protestation is based largely on French military presence in the form of pre-positioned or intervening forces (Pahimi Padacké, 2023; Pouillieute, 2023). Indeed, although it was greeted with loud cheers by the Malians in 2013, Serval is the source of an accelerating anti-French sentiment that no longer knows any borders in West Africa (Pigeaud, 2021). Driven by 'rumor and manipulation of information', these critiques that portray France as a paternalistic, neo-colonialist power are born of an 'alternative regime of truth, in which France is the object of attention commensurate with its current visibility and its colonial past' (Tull, 2021, p. 90).

Moreover, there is now little doubt that Russia's proactivity in the region, notably through the private military company Wagner, exploits and benefits from Serval's 'shortcomings' (Jacobsen & Larsen, 2023, p. 260). However, contrary to what these disinformation campaigns suggest, Operation Serval does not appear to illustrate the often evoked 'predation' of Malian resources by force. As Guichaïoua (2020, p. 902) notes after demonstrating the lack of empirical basis for these accusations, 'when scrutinized, the validity of this claim appears inversely proportional to its ubiquity on social media'. Marchal (2013, p. 489), bluntly puts forward a similar argument when writing that 'very lazy critics talk about a neo-colonial intervention and the reassertion of "FranceAfrique" interests, which is inaccurate and misleading'.

Of course, some would argue, Operation Serval was not the direct object of such criticism. It was the second phase of the operation, Barkhane, which attracted attention and criticism because of its lengthy presence and the concomitant deterioration in regional security conditions. However, Barkhane, a post-intervention stabilization operation, would not have been undertaken without Operation Serval, and was rendered necessary by the Serval precedent. What does that tell us about the implementation of France's grand strategy? Would Operation Serval have attracted a different outcome had it been perfectly multilateral and sanctioned by a UNSC resolution? Without getting into political fiction, it seems hard to imagine. As Bansept and Tennebaum (2022, p. 13) note, whatever the modes of intervention legitimization,

Over the past ten years, it is difficult to draw up a positive strategic balance sheet for France in West Africa. Admittedly, the Serval and Barkhane operations in the Sahel and Sangaris in the Central African Republic have achieved undeniable military successes. However, they have failed to halt the deterioration of the security situation in the French-speaking region. The return of coups d'état underlines the decline in democracy in many of the region's countries. This is now accompanied by a very strong anti-French sentiment, which is conducive to the advance of strategic competitors [...].

Consequently, a critical observer might question the relevance of following the self-limiting multilateral imperative of French grand strategy when resorting to military intervention, since this does not prevent rather limited political results. Does this disqualify the usefulness of grand strategy? We would argue the opposite, that the 'success' of France's African strategy is not one of the top priorities of Liberal engagement. Its objectives are 'broader'. Indeed, Paris has a central – some would say vital – interest in setting an example in the multilateral resolution of international tensions. This has been the case ever since it moved beyond its grand strategy of *Grandeur*, abandoning a conception of international politics based on the aggregate distribution of power to fully integrate itself into a system of interdependence and mutual vulnerability. A 'liberal international regime' (Ruggie, 1992). Like the overwhelming majority of so-called "postmodern" democracies, France is witness to a voluntary abandonment of its 'traditional' or 'Westphalian' sovereignty. The French nation-state has voluntarily shifted prerogatives, whether in terms of monetary regulation, trade policy tools, parts of its public policy and diplomacy, or control over its security environment, to interdependent management within the framework of the EU, NATO and, to a lesser extent, the UN. These elements, which are at the heart of what a 'modern' state considers to be elements of its national power, France therefore places them outside its direct sovereignty.

Similarly, by 'accepting' the extension of its security to 'global' threats, France is acknowledging its inability to handle its security on its own, and the need for mutualization. As Robert Cooper (2003, p. 43) notes, this is an inversion of the traditional security-sovereignty order: 'cooperative structures in Europe reinforce sovereignty by reinforcing security. If the postmodern system gives you greater security than the balance-of-power system, then it also strengthens your ability to exercise sovereignty'. Furthermore, unlike the United States, which 'could virtually ignore the United Nations as a center of multilateral activity' due to the maintenance of unparalleled economic and military power, France was both 'forced' and decided post-Cold War to forego this 'luxury' (Cox, 1992, p. 168). In short, like other 'postmodern powers' that 'depend so much on coordination and socialization', this means that France cannot do without this

multilateralized regime (Buzan & Segal, 1996, p. 10). Paradoxically, this implies that to analyze France's behavior vis-à-vis this new regime, it may be more propitious to seize upon realist rather than institutionalist theoretical frameworks. The reason for that being that the preservation of this regime has mutated into a security issue and a '2.0' westphalian interest (Keohane, 1988). Of course, Paris, having taken the nuclear path in the 1960s, it holds a *va-tout* that enables a lesser dependence on the system. Nevertheless, by the standards of deterrence, it remains vulnerable. In addition, the vital French interests "covered" by its strategic forces were and are not meant to protect the broadened threats hanging over France' economy, trade, industry, etc. (Courmont, 2007). To caricaturize, it seems highly unlikely that the unilateral imposition, say by China, of trade barriers on French cheeses or wines would trigger nuclear retaliation from Paris.

Naturally, it would be misleading to claim that Operation Serval, had it not been supported multilaterally, would have ushered the post-modern world back into an era of power competition to which France is no longer suited. Nevertheless, the international regime on which France depends is by no means everlasting. On the contrary, it is fragile and likely to be 'eroded by some of the strongest nations whose position behoves them to be at its vanguard' (Cox, 1992, p. 163). Cooper (2003, p. 53), makes this very clear when writing that 'a postmodern order requires postmodern states and vice versa. To create a lasting postmodern security system in Europe it is crucial that all the most powerful European actors should fit into the same pattern'. It is for this reason that a postmodern power has no interest, on the contrary, in unilateral military action. As Buzan and Segal (1996, p. 8) note, to maintain such a system it is necessary 'to ensure that the postmodern powers are both able and willing to cooperate with each other in the use of force', since 'by their nature, they will almost never attempt to use force alone', and they must first and foremost show that 'disputes should be settled peacefully'.

Again, how can this be integrated in our inquiry on grand strategy and its benefits for the conduct of foreign policy? The answer certainly ties in with Paul Kennedy's (1991, cited in Martel, 2015, p. 32) definition of grand strategy as

establishing ‘the proper balance of priorities’. In this sense, it seems plausible that the pursuit of multilateralism constitutes a more long-lasting and ‘sensitive’ priority when compared to the safeguarding of French influence in Africa. Similarly, if one adopts Stephen Biddle’s (2004) definition of the concept as ‘the state’s ultimate ends’, it’s rather difficult to understand how Paris’s ‘African’ strategy could be described as such. By contrast, as we have just shown, there is less doubt that the preservation of an international system virtually vital to France could fall into this category. This does not mean that France’s policy in Africa should be relegated to the periphery, or that it cannot have adverse consequences for the course of French history. Rather, it implies that such a concern belongs to foreign policy, not grand strategy. That it must draw inspiration from it, as it did in the case of Serval, but this does not prevent it from suffering from its own deficiencies.

Dissertation’s limits and avenues for research

Our findings suggest a central limitation. Indeed, it seems that our focus on the multilateral characteristic of grand strategy albeit relevant, may be insufficiently reliable. It is relevant since it can be observed both in the final decision and, as we have shown, in the decision-making process. Simply put, it’s a tangible variable. Equally valuable is the fact that it is a strong marker of a state’s grand strategy. Nevertheless, the injunction to multilateralism remains a broad variable that can be influenced by many factors. Our analysis places Serval’s ambiguity towards French grand strategy in the decision-making process and organizational culture of the armed forces. However, other observers would see in this ‘attitude’ the mark of an ambivalence that initially existed within Liberal engagement. Irdondelle and Schmitt (2013, p. 125) thus propose the idea that French strategic culture (which is not the conceptual match of grand strategy but can come close), ‘draws on two distinct and conflicting traditions: a self-understanding as the ‘country of human rights’, which is recurrently translated in passionate diplomatic attitudes on multilateralism and democracy; and an established tradition of self-reliance and independence. These contradictory normative incentives help explain France’s seemingly cynical or inconsistent

behaviour. This is also the opinion of Tertrais (2021), for whom France has not renounced *Grandeur*. Based on these comments, two interpretations are conceivable. The first would be to suggest that France's grand strategy, in its formulation (i.e., a top-down process), has not fully 'settled' this question. The second, based on our own observations, would be to say that the influence exerted by the path-dependence of major French institutions does not allow Liberal engagement to completely supersede *Grandeur*, hence the ambiguity.

These various observations deserve to be explored in greater depth and could point to alternative factors to our own. Another final hypothesis would hold that Serval's ambiguity is due neither to the decision-making process, nor to any ambiguity inherent in grand strategy. We would then have to consider that the variations observed in the decision-making process were 'dictated' or 'influenced' solely by multiple dependent variables with no direct link to grand strategy. After all, it would bolster a recurring criticism of the concepts which implies 'seeing' grand strategy everywhere, even when there isn't any. As Milevski (2016, p. 151) notes, 'the main continuity within grand strategic thought lay in similarities of context over time rather than in anything inherent in grand strategy itself'. Similarly, Avery Goldstein (2005, p. 18) proposes that there is no point in questioning grand strategy itself, and that the phenomenon can be explained by pre-existing theories. Overall, Serval underlines the need to understand grand strategy for what it fundamentally is. A lodestar which one clearly witnesses to be guiding policy, but which is influenced by so many internal and systemic variables that it ultimately only owes its survival to an inherently imperfect adaptation to the context. Serval illustrated this adaptation by being launched despite its multilateral imperfection.

This exemplifies the 'flexibility' of grand strategy that Eliot A. Cohen (2016) criticizes. Drawing on Isaiah Berlin works; Cohen relies on the philosopher's lifelong struggle against 'Procrustean violations of the world's complexity'⁵ to

⁵ Procrustes is a Greek mythological figure. He is told to have had an iron bed on which he compelled his victims to lie. Here, if a victim was shorter than the bed, he stretched him by hammering or racking the body to fit. Alternatively, if the victim was longer than the bed, he cut off the legs to make the body fit the bed's length. "Procrustean bed," has become proverbial for arbitrarily—and perhaps ruthlessly—forcing someone or something to fit into an unnatural scheme or pattern. – Encyclopaedia Britannica

illustrate the reductive shortcuts of grand strategy⁶. For Cohen, it would be the opposite of the practice of good policy makers as defined by Berlin, which 'do not think in general terms' but have the merit of 'grasping the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this particular situation-this and no other.' (2016, p. 203). However, Cohen here offers a somehow 'distorted' interpretation of Berlin's work and illustrates the most frequently observed misconception of grand strategy. Precisely because of the infinite complexity of international affairs, 'to represent reality helpfully, you need to be selective' and this is 'particularly true for the grand strategist, who seeks the kind of holistic perspective necessary for coordinating large-scale operations' (Carlsmith, 2012, p. 7). A central hurdle therefore appears for 'the Berlinian strategist': 'can you be holistic without becoming Procrustean?' (Carlsmith, 2012, p. 7). The answer certainly lies in what Berlin described as 'the Sense of Reality', which precisely illustrates the conception of grand strategy that runed through the whole of our demonstration. For Berlin, this 'Sense' is the capacity 'for integrating a vast amalgam of constantly changing, multicolored, evanescent, perpetually overlapping data, too many, too swift, too intermingled to be caught and pinned down and labeled like so many individual butterflies' (Berlin, 1996, p. 46). Grand strategy can no longer be about referring to a general and reductive vision in the conduct of foreign policy. For 'to integrate in this sense is to see the data as elements in a single pattern' (Berlin, 1996, p. 46). Grand strategy thus becomes the ability to create a relation between the whole (a State's vision) and an infinite number of observations and decisions (the complexity of the international and domestic systems) using an 'antenna of the greatest possible delicacy' (Carlsmith, 2012, p. 8).

⁶ For an in-depth discussion of Berlin's Anti-Procrustean Liberalism, see Allen, 2003

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Appendix

Appendix 1.

List of interviews and press conferences used to conduct François Hollande's LTA and their transcription.

Note that the data used in Table 1 includes almost 8,000 words belonging to François Hollande's spontaneous responses during the crisis and concerning the crisis (the figure being 4,000 to obtain significant results with Profiler+). These are listed in the first part of the appendix. The second part corresponds to the nearly 40,000 words used to conduct the statistical analysis of variance between two different "contexts". In so doing, these data are a "general" profile and do not target specific context or themes. However, all are spontaneous answers as well. As the results were virtually unchanged from the crisis period, the ANOVA and Wilcoxon tests showed no significant variance. Consequently, these data do not appear in Table 1.

Also note that for the press conferences, only responses and not statements were used, and only responses directly concerning the Malian crisis as well. Some resource titles do not mention the Malian crisis. A simple link visit and text search with the keywords "Mali"; "Sahel"; "Bamako"; "ECOWAS" or "intervention" will locate the answers concerned and used.

Data used for the crisis LTA

Hollande, F. (2012b). *Conférence de presse conjointe de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Mahamadou Issoufou, Président de la République du Niger, sur les relations franco-nigériennes, l'aide au développement et sur la situation au Mali, à Paris le 11 juin 2012.* Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185255-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

Hollande, F. (2012c). *Conférence de presse conjointe de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Moncef Marzouki, Président de la République tunisienne, notamment sur les relations franco-tunisiennes, à Paris le 17 juillet 2012.* Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185255-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

[publique.fr/discours/185546-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la](http://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185546-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la)

Hollande, F. (2012d). *Conférence de presse conjointe de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Thomas Boni Yayi, Président de la République du Bénin et Président de l'Union Africaine, sur les relations franco-africaines et sur la situation au Mali et en Syrie, à Paris le 29 mai 2012*. Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185134-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

Hollande, F. (2012e). *Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, notamment sur les relations franco-algériennes, à Alger le 19 décembre 2012*. Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/186731-conference-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique>

Hollande, F. (2012f). *Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur la situation politique au Mali, à New York le 26 septembre 2012*. Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185924-conference-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique>

Hollande, F. (2012h). *Conférence des presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, notamment sur la situation en Syrie et au Mali et sur le nucléaire iranien, à New York le 25 septembre 2012*. Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185921-conference-des-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republiqu>

Hollande, F. (2012i). *Déclaration à la presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur le retrait des troupes françaises d'Afghanistan et sur la situation en Syrie et au Mali, à Chicago le 21 mai 2012*. Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185101-declaration-la-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republi>

Hollande, F. (2012j). *Interview de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, avec TF1 et France 2 le 14 juillet 2012, sur les défis et priorités de son quinquennat*. Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185523-interview-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-avec-tf1>

Hollande, F. (2012k). *Interview de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, dans "El Watan" et "El Khabar" du 20 décembre 2012, notamment sur les relations franco-algériennes*. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/186715-interview-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-dans-el>

Hollande, F. (2012l). *Interview de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, par France 4, TV5Monde et RFI le 11 octobre 2012, sur la*

vie politique en République démocratique du Congo, les relations franco-africaines, le terrorisme au Mali, la présence économique du Qatar en France et sur la situation en Syrie. Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/186097-interview-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-par-franc>

Hollande, F. (2012m). *Point de presse conjoint de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République et Ban Ki-Moon, Secrétaire général de l'Organisation des Nations Unies, sur la situation au Mali et en Syrie, le nucléaire iranien et sur les relations franco-africaines, à Paris le 9 octobre 2012.* Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/186042-point-de-presse-conjoint-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la-repub>

Hollande, F. (2012n). *Point de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur les relations entre les deux rives de la Méditerranée, la Zone euro et sur la situation au Mali, à La Valette (Malte) le 5 octobre 2012.* Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/186025-point-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-sur>

Hollande, F. (2013a). *Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur les relations entre la France et les Emirats arabes unis et sur l'intervention militaire française au Mali, à Dubai le 15 janvier 2013.* Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/186803-francois-hollande-15012013-france-et-emirats-arabes-unis>

Hollande, F. (2013b). *Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur les relations franco-allemandes, la construction européenne et sur l'intervention militaire française au Mali, à Berlin le 22 janvier 2013.* Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/186868-conference-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique>

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Hollande, F. (2013d). *Point de presse conjoint de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Donald Tusk, Premier ministre de la République de Pologne, sur les relations franco-polonaises et sur l'intervention militaire française au Mali, à Paris le 28 janvier 2013.* Vie-publique.fr. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/186981-point-de-presse-conjoint-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republ>

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Hollande, F. (2012a). *Conférence de presse conjointe de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Mme Angela Merkel, Chancelière de la République fédérale d'Allemagne, sur les relations franco-allemandes, le traité budgétaire et le pacte de croissance et sur la place de la Grèce dans la Zone euro, à Berlin le 15 mai 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185069-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

Hollande, F. (2012b). *Conférence de presse conjointe de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Mme Aung San Suu Kyi, prix Nobel de la Paix et députée au parlement birman, sur la situation politique en Birmanie, à Paris le 26 juin 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185366-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

Hollande, F. (2012c). *Conférence de presse conjointe de MM François Hollande, Président de la République, Mario Monti, Président du Conseil des ministres de la République italienne, Mariano Rajoy, Président du gouvernement espagnol, et Mme Angela Merkel, Chancelière de la République fédérale d'Allemagne, sur la résolution de la crise de la Zone euro, à Rome le 22 juin 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185338-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

Hollande, F. (2012d). *Conférence de presse conjointe de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et David Cameron, Premier ministre du Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord, sur les relations franco-britanniques dans le cadre de l'Union européenne, à Londres le 10 juillet 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185515-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

Hollande, F. (2012e). *Conférence de presse conjointe de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Hamid Karzai, Président de la République Islamique d'Afghanistan, sur les relations franco-afghanes et sur le retrait des troupes françaises d'Afghanistan, à Kaboul (Afghanistan) le 25 mai 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185120-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

Hollande, F. (2012f). *Conférence de presse conjointe de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Mahmoud Abbas, Président de l'Autorité palestinienne, sur les relations franco-palestiniennes et sur le processus de paix israélo-palestinien, à Paris le 8 juin 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185120-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

[publique.fr/discours/185253-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la](http://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185253-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la)

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Hollande, F. (2012h). *Conférence de presse conjointe de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Vladimir Poutine, Président de la Fédération de Russie, notamment sur les relations franco-russes, le nucléaire iranien et sur la situation en Syrie.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185146-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

Hollande, F. (2012i). *Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, notamment sur la croissance économique, la régulation du système financier et sur la cohésion de la Zone euro, à Los Cabos (Mexique) le 20 juin 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185301-conference-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique>

Hollande, F. (2012j). *Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur la préparation d'un pacte de croissance et sur l'avenir de la Grèce au sein de la Zone euro, à Bruxelles le 25 mai 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185124-conference-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique>

Hollande, F. (2012k). *Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur les mesures prises pour résoudre la crise de la Zone euro et sur la politique budgétaire en France, à Bruxelles le 29 juin 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185416-conference-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique>

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Hollande, F. (2012m). *Interview de M. François Hollande, député PS et candidat à l'élection présidentielle 2012, à "France 2" le 11 avril 2012, sur ses priorités gouvernementales s'il est élu, sur la politique étrangère, notamment la situation au Mali.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/172912-interview-de-francois-hollande-premier-secretaire-du-ps-accordee-la>

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Hollande, F. (2012n). *Interview de M. François Hollande, député PS et candidat à l'élection présidentielle 2012, dans "l'Express" le 10 avril 2012 sur la fonction et les qualités d'un président de la République, et sur ses priorités gouvernementales en cas de victoire à l'élection présidentielle.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/184912-interview-de-m-francois-hollande-depute-ps-et-candidat-lelection-p>

Hollande, F. (2012o). *Interview de M. François Hollande, député PS et dandidat à l'élection présidentielle 2012, à "France 2" le 12 avril 2012, sur le bilan économique de Nicolas Sarkozy, et la nécessité de rassembler la gauche pour le 2ème tour de l'élection présidentielle.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/184918-interview-de-m-francois-hollande-depute-ps-et-dandidat-lelection-pr>

Hollande, F. (2012p). *Point de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, notamment sur la France et l'OTAN, le retrait des troupes françaises d'Afghanistan, les relations franco-américaines et sur la construction européenne, à Chicago le 21 mai 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185102-point-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-not>

Hollande, F. (2012q). *Point de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur les relations franco-américaines, le retrait des forces françaises d'Afghanistan, la crise de la Zone euro, le nucléaire iranien et sur la situation en Syrie, à Washington le 18 mai 2012.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/185075-point-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-sur>

Hollande, F. (2013a). *Conférence de presse conjointe de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Martin Schulz, Président du Parlement européen, sur la construction européenne, à Strasbourg le 6 février 2013.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/187090-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la>

Hollande, F. (2013b). *Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur le budget de l'Union européenne, à Bruxelles le 9 février 2013.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/187104-conference-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique>

Hollande, F. (2013c). *Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur les relations franco-indiennes, à New Delhi le 14 février 2013.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/187153-conference-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique>

Hollande, F. (2013d). *Point de presse conjoint de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Président de la*

République du Nigeria, notamment sur les relations franco-nigériennes et sur l'intervention militaire française au Mali, à Paris le 11 février 2013.
<https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/187123-point-de-presse-conjoint-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la-repub>

Hollande, F. (2013e). *Point de presse conjoint de MM. François Hollande, Président de la République, et Jean-Claude Juncker, Premier ministre du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, notamment sur les relations franco-luxembourgeoises et sur le budget de l'Union européenne, à Paris le 12 février 2013.* <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/187135-point-de-presse-conjoint-de-mm-francois-hollande-president-de-la-repub>

Abstract

Through an analysis of the decision-making process that led to the French intervention in Mali in 2013, this work attempts to put into perspective the notion of 'grand strategy' and its interactions with the implementation of French foreign policy. A vague concept sometimes disparaged but consistently put forward in leading international relations journals, grand strategy raises questions about its polymorphic scope. By returning to the genesis of its *raison d'être* (to act as a lodestar for the shepherd-State lost in the storm of international politics), we propose to track the influence that grand strategy holds on different decision-making steps. Was grand strategy apparent in the French authority's management of the Malian crisis? Yes, our analysis suggests. Drawing on a neoclassical realist framework and borrowing from the tools of foreign policy analysis, we highlight the tensions between the various players in the crisis, caught between organizational divergences and inescapable systemic incentives, all of which shaped the implementation of French grand strategy as much as the latter shaped the French response.

Key Words

Grand strategy; *Opération Serval*; Organizational culture; Civil-military relations; Leadership Trait Analysis