Tipping the Scales: Short-Term Interventions and Counterinsurgency

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Most studies have identified in one form or another the normally lengthy time element involved with counterinsurgency. To adapt Thomas Hobbes, insurgencies and the campaigns against them tend to be ‘nasty, brutish, and long.’ This chapter certainly will not argue against this basic reality. There might, however, be variations on this basic theme. One such variant that has been used with at least some apparent success has been relatively short-term interventions by well-trained military forces (thus far, typically European) designed to stabilize the internal security situation, either together with or followed by more traditional peacekeeping forces that are able to at least retain base levels of security. With this basic security, internal development arguably then can follow. In somewhat traditional military terms, the intervention force is intended to break the initiative of the insurgents or other groups threatening stability, with other forces then able to mop up.

Ideally, of course, such interventions would occur under the direct auspices of the United Nations or formal regional organizations. This can make turnover of responsibilities from the ‘hard’ forces to more traditional-type peacekeeping forces and civilian agencies much easier, together with providing greater legitimacy. However, due to national caveats or broader national strategic interests, unilateral (to a greater or lesser degree) interventions may be the tool nations choose to use. These combined operations – under the category of “hybrid operations” (not to be confused with hybrid warfare) – may become more widely accepted as a common strategy.
This chapter will focus on the British intervention in Sierra Leone and the French intervention in Cote d’Ivoire as somewhat prototypical examples of these types of interventions. Also, the more recent (and continuing) French interventions in Mali and Central African Republic will be discussed for ongoing issues. There are a number of factors to be addressed and lessons to be drawn from these operations. Perhaps the key issue is whether in the future further countries may view these forms of missions as a potential alternative to more traditional counterinsurgency strategy.

Each of the environments discussed in the case studies had similarities. Each country faced an environment in which there were multiple armed groups – typically a mix of insurgents, criminals, and warlords of various stripes – creating massive insecurity. The countries’ militaries were corrupt, weak, ill-trained, of questionable loyalty, or all of these simultaneously. The individual governments failed to achieve or maintain popular loyalty, either broadly or with particular critical groups. In fact, in one case, Cote d’Ivoire, the intervention forces assisted in forcibly removing a government to restore internal stability.

**Sierra Leone**

Post-independence Sierra Leone faced coups, counter-coups, and “democratic” governments that ruled with a notable lack of democratic credentials. Largely as a result of military involvement in politics, the Sierra Leone army became what Woods and Reese called “a ceremonial army”. It remained very small (about 3,000 soldiers), largely untrained, and extremely poorly equipped. As Sierra Leone began facing economic collapse in the 1970’s and 1980’s, in large measure due to governmental ineptitude and corruption, multiple rebel groups began emerging against which there were no prospects that the military could counter. One
continuing major issue for Sierra Leone was the long-standing illegal diamond trade. Many of the ‘rebel’ groups – and many purported pro-government forces, including some senior officials and military officers – based their operations on efforts to control the diamond mining areas.

What emerged as the most significant insurgent group was the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh. Probably the major reason for its strength was the high level of support it received from Charles Taylor of Liberia; Liberian fighters in fact formed a significant portion of its strength, particularly in the early days of the movement. The RUF did not espouse any particular ideology, but initially was relatively popular due to the number of public grievances; in a real sense, virtually any movement that proclaimed opposition to the very unpopular government would receive a significant base of support.3

By late 1991, the RUF controlled most of the diamond mines in Sierra Leone and operated within 30 kilometers of Freetown, the capital. Both in response to the security crisis and to dissatisfaction with the government overall, the Sierra Leone military conducted a coup in April 1992. Subsequent to this, the military junta significantly expanded the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) to over 17,000 troops. At the same time, however, training and organization of these new troops were minimal to nonexistent.4 The military units also were as brutal as the rebels they were facing. The situation was so dire that the government hired a private military company, Executive Outcomes (EO), to both train its forces and to conduct offensive military operations. During the course of EO’s presence in the country it at least temporarily shifted the military balance.5

Despite the success on the ground and the signing of a peace treaty, the situation then deteriorated sharply in 1997, after a newly installed military junta invited the RUF into the
government. Human rights abuses by all sides became endemic. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) already had ECOMOG (Military Observer Group) forces stationed in Sierra Leone; these forces overthrew the junta and drove its RUF allies from Freetown, but had little influence over the rest of the country. Even this limited success was reversed in January 1999, when with extreme brutality the RUF and allied Sierra Leone military forces re-seized Freetown. With considerable civilian casualties – with estimates of up to 10,000 deaths – ECOMOG retook the capital, but with outside criticism of its own human rights abuses. Shortly after this offensive, a fresh power sharing agreement was signed, but Nigeria, the linchpin of ECOMOG, indicated that it wanted to cut its troop contributions, leading to significant questions as to the force’s future effectiveness.

Concomitant with the ECOMOG operations, the UN established the UN Observer Mission to Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL), with 70 military observers to monitor the security situation and the disarmament and demobilization of combatants. Given the overall environment and the minimal number of observers, this force was absolutely ineffective. As a result, the UN concluded that a more robust force was required. On 22 October 1999, the Security Council passed Resolution 1270 to create the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). This force was authorized 210 observers and 6,000 armed military personnel. UNAMSIL was authorized under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, meaning that it could use military force.6

Although this resolution was authorized under Chapter VII, its mandate was relatively narrow, with authorization for use of force limited to self-protection, maintenance of freedom of movement of its forces, and to protect civilians under “imminent threat of political violence.”7 Also, “…in reality, the majority of the contributing countries effectively operated under a
Chapter VI mandate whereby their forces would only operate where all parties gave their consent.\textsuperscript{8} The UN coordinated with ECOMOG for maintaining its forces in Sierra Leone, but Nigeria was reluctant to remain, in part because of financial stresses. Its government did, however, agree to commit some forces for UNAMSIL.

General Vijay Jetley of India was selected as the commander of UNAMSIL. Troop contributors included Nigeria (with about half the force), India, Jordan, Guinea, Kenya, and Zambia. The Nigerian presence was particularly problematic, since its activities as part of ECOMOG had created a very negative image of its troops. Also, the initial UNAMSIL deployment was plagued by problems, including having many of its early-arriving supplies stolen. As noted, for a Chapter VII mission, UNAMSIL had a relatively narrow mandate. This was even further narrowed by General Jetley’s decision making. Even though UN freedom of movement was restricted by various armed groups and some demobilization camps were attacked, UNAMSIL forces did not respond militarily and remained relatively passive to the deteriorating security environment.

UNAMSIL soon found itself in even greater difficulties with the withdrawal of Nigerian forces and a lack of ECOMOG cooperation. Given the continued lack of security in Sierra Leone, the UN Security Council passed UNSCR 1289 on 7 February 2000, expanding UNAMSIL to a authorized strength of 11,100 (which later was increased by a further 2,400 soldiers) and with a broader mandate.\textsuperscript{9} Despite this significantly stronger mandate, General Jetley continued a relatively passive policy, with UN forces allowed to use force only if they or civilians were under direct attack. Despite (or in part, perhaps because of) these rules of engagement, UNAMSIL became increasingly besieged by the RUF. In May 2000, the RUF seized over 500 UNAMSIL soldiers and essentially held them hostage. As the RUF began a
fresh advance towards Freetown, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan requested on 4 May 2000 that foreign countries, particularly the United Kingdom (UK) intervene with military force.

Although Annan did not receive particularly eager commitments from any country, on 5 May the British dispatched a small Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Team (OLRT) led by Brigadier David Richards. Among other missions, this team was ordered to plan for noncombatant evacuation. It also was intended to control follow-on British forces that were alerted during the same period. By 8 May, elements of the Special Air Service (SAS) and the Parachute Regiment arrived at their forward base in Dakar, Senegal for potential use in Sierra Leone. Together with some helicopter assets that flew into the area, the British had about 5000 available troops within the region. There also were British naval units that were moving into the area.

Under the operational name of Operation Palliser, the British forces began operations on 7 May by seizing Lungi International Airport near Freetown, followed by key areas of Freetown itself. Almost entirely on his own initiative, Brigadier Richards began sending his officers to conduct liaison with UNAMSIL and Sierra Leone Army (SLA) units stationed around Freetown. Although there was a fresh upsurge of violence in Freetown, necessitating evacuation of some 500 British citizens, both UNAMSIL and SLA forces began an offensive against the RUF. The British supported these operations with military advisors and planning support. As with many situations, a seemingly small tactical operation helped change the perception of the security situation. On 17 May, a small group of about 40 RUF engaged a British Para unit and was repulsed with heavy casualties. 10 Although strategically minimal, this had major psychological impact on both sides, and it changed the dynamics significantly. In a real sense, having a small
force that showed resolve and a high level of capability even at tactical level provided reasons for opposing parties to re-assess the chances of their long-term success.

On 30 May, the Para element was relieved by Royal Marines, but the British command and planning staff remained the same. British officers continued liaison operations with both UNAMSIL and SLA units. Operation Palliser formally came to an end on 15 June. The British did however leave a training element of about 200 officers and troops, charged with training SLA soldiers in basic infantry skills. Although the operation appeared to be a success, one incident threatened to change the psychological advantages gained by the UK forces in Sierra Leone.

On 25 August 2000, a British training team – using poor operational security – deviated from their normal travel route and was seized by a group called the West Side Boys. The West Side Boys were somewhere between rebels, a militia, and an organized crime group. The group issued a number of demands for the release of the British troops, including being provided various supplies and equipment and for the release of RUF leader Sankoh (who earlier had been arrested). British officers and Sierra Leone government officials acceded to the first demands, but refused to release Sankoh. As a result, the West Side Boys released five soldiers, but continued to hold six. Due to the continued standoff, the British launched Operation Barras to free the remaining troops on 10 September, using both the SAS and the Paras. This very quick raid against the West Side Boys camp in which the British were being held was very successful, with only one British soldier involved in the raid dying of his wounds and with some 25 West Side Boys killed and 18 captured. Although the seizure of the British soldiers could have led to a disastrous outcome for overall British strategy, the success of the raid likely reinforced the image of British resolve and competence.
By late 2000, General Jetley turned over command of UNAMSIL to his deputy, General Garbe from Nigeria. Having a Nigerian commander of UNAMSIL appeared to have stiffened RUF resistance, and UN and SLA operations began to show increasingly less progress. In response, the British launched yet another operation, Silkman, as a show of force. Although of minimal direct impact, this probably helped reinforce the view that the UK was serious in its intentions. Combined with larger regional issues – most importantly, the withdrawal of open support for the RUF by Charles Taylor – and some local tactical victories by UNAMSIL, the situation in Sierra Leone finally began to stabilize. By January 2003, the war officially was declared over.

Cote D’Ivoire

In Cote D’Ivoire, the country was generally divided by ethnicity and religion between the north and the south. A combination of rising economic problems and a view by northern Ivorians that they were increasingly being disenfranchised by the government led to increasing unrest. This became particularly pronounced after elections in 2000, in which Laurent Gbagbo of the Front Populaire Ivorien (FPI) became President. In response, the opposition Rassemblements des Republicains (RDR) supporters took to the street, with these protests brutally put down. By 2002, armed opposition movements began operating; after some time, these coalesced into the Forces Nouvelles (FN), which controlled about 60 percent of the country.\(^\text{12}\) After a series of cease fires and peace agreements, the country remained de facto divided, but with a ‘national unity’ government of President Laurent Gbagbo and a new Prime Minister, Guillaume Soro, the leader of the FN. Along with this putative unified government, an Integrated Command Center was established; although both sides retained their own forces and leadership, this center was intended to provide some means of coordination between each force.
Foreign intervention in Côte D’Ivoire dated to September 2002, when the Ivoirian government called on France for military intervention to step the rebel advance on Abidjan. This request was based on the French-Ivorian defense agreement of 1961. This agreement was intended to protect against external invasions, but the Côte d’Ivoire government argued that the rebels were receiving external support, thus justifying the implementation of the treaty. Although Paris initially refused, it finally deployed troops to protect the capital and possibly to conduct noncombatant evacuation if required. The latter was a particular issue for France, with some 20,000 French nationals and an additional 20,000 Ivoirians holding French citizenship in Côte d’Ivoire.

Under the rubric of Operation Licorne (Unicorn), France dispatched about 4,000 troops to Côte d’Ivoire on 6 February 2003. This deployment was supported by UN Security Council Resolution 1464. These troops were spread widely throughout the country, particularly around the borders. Beyond border protection, French forces interposed themselves between the main warring parties in the “confidence zone.” Overall, it is probably fair to say that Operation Licorne was more akin to traditional peacekeeping, particularly initially, than were the British operations in Sierra Leone. The French also provided 26 liaison officers directly to United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI).

This French approach led to two significant issues. The first was that for an extended period the deployed French forces typically were viewed by both sides to the conflict as favoring the other side. Government officials charged that the French secretly were supporting the rebels. On the other side, in 2003, the FN military commander stated, “If France had not interposed its forces and asked us to negotiate, I am sure we would be in Abidjan today.” The second issue was translating the political strategy into clear operational guidance. The rather vague mandate
of Licorne was noted by one unattributed French officer in Sierra Leone, “In hindsight, it might have been better if we had a clear mandate to tip the scales.”

Along with the French forces, both the United Nations and ECOWAS provided troops in the country. An ECOWAS force (ECOWAS Mission in Cote d’Ivoire or ECOMICI) with an authorized strength of about 2,400 was agreed to in January 2003; the actual force finally deployed was comprised of units from Senegal, Ghana, Benin, Togo, and Niger. This force was slow in deploying, and it also had significant logistical difficulties with supplies and transportation in its area of operations.

The initial UN mission to Cote d’Ivoire was the United Nations Mission in Cote d’Ivoire (MINUCI), authorized under UN Security Council Resolution 1479 on 13 May 2003. MINUCI was small and under-resourced, and was replaced by United Nations Operation in Cote d’Ivoire (UNOCI) in 2004 under UN Security Council Resolution 1528 as a Chapter VII mission. It was authorized a strength of slightly over 6,000 personnel, many of them “rehatted” from ECOMICI. During the planning of the UN mission, specific attention was paid to its relationship with French forces of Operation Licorne already in country, including Licorne providing “guaranteed quick reaction forces (QRFs) in support of the UN; these QRFs would be under the tactical command of the UN sector commanders, and a permanent liaison structure would be established.” These planning aspects were clear in UNSCR 1548, which provided very broad authorities for French operations, including intervening either at the direct request of UNOCI or unilaterally.

One interesting aspect of UNOCI was that it also trained members of the FN as so-called security auxiliaries. In effect, (and at least in part due to a lack of cooperation by government
security officials), UNOCI helped create two competing internal security forces. Although justified in terms of trying to maintain law and order in areas in which there were no governmental security services, none of this particularly helped the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process. It also almost certainly led to feelings among Ivoirian senior government officials that the UN forces might not have the interests of the Cote d’Ivoire government at the top of their agenda.

The French position of neutrality became increasingly difficult as peacekeepers began having ever-expanding problems with the Gbagbo government. Relations between the Ivoirian government and the French reached a nadir on 6 November 2004 when Ivoirian aircraft attacked a French base at Bouake, killing nine soldiers. The French then attacked and destroyed the entire Ivoirian air force (such as existed), followed by some low-level fighting with Ivoirian soldiers and civilians. The situation was even further exacerbated on 7 November when pro-government Ivorian mobs began attacking French military positions, a French school, and residential districts in Abidjan in which a number of French citizens lived. As the violence increased, the French responded with considerable force, killing somewhere between 20 Ivoirians (by the French count) to 60 Ivoirians (by the Ivoirian count).

Finally, as noted above, both French and United Nations forces supported the Ouattara forces in their final assault on and capture of Gbagbo. Both the French and UN roles in this operation remain somewhat controversial. The French certainly provided significant (in comparison with Ivoirian capabilities) military forces to this operation, with one report noting “French military columns, made up of armoured personnel carriers, reconnaissance vehicles, trucks and 24 tanks.” Also, both French and United Nations helicopter gunships struck targets in Abidjan. This assault was justified by both the UN and the French government as a means of
ending civilian suffering. Obviously, of course, the Ivoirian government’s stance was rather different.

Although the major operations of the French forces appear to be largely a thing of the past, the French continue to maintain a presence in Cote d’Ivoire. Many of their troops are involved in advising Ivorian military units. As of 2014, French military strength in the country was down to 450 – from its peak of about 1600 in 2011 – but the French commander earlier stressed that the force could be reinforced rapidly if the need arose.21 As of the date this chapter was written, there appears to be little interest in Paris in removing its residual force in Cote d’Ivoire.

**Mali**

There has been a pattern of minor and major uprisings by the Tuareg for many years. These have included uprisings in 1962, 1990 (with small-scale unrest until 1996), and 2006. In all these episodes of violence, there was little evidence of either a particularly strong strategic vision among the Tuareg or a unified leadership. It probably is most accurate to view these rebellions as a series of tribal uprisings rather than a ‘nationalistic’ struggle. Likewise, the number of Tuareg actually involved in armed operations appears to have been relatively small; one author estimates that there were no more than about 1,500 at the height of the rebellions.22 The pattern of the government reactions followed a similar trajectory after each upsurge of violence. The military launched counter-offensives – commonly including destruction of villages and some reported massacres – and then the government promised increased assistance to the affected areas as part of peace agreements and treaties. A major result was that even though the government promised improvements in local conditions, few if any of these promises
were kept, in large part due to budgetary problems. The Malian government had minimal resources, and foreign supporters provided more promises than long-term support. In fairness, the bulk of the population in Mali lived in the non-Tuareg south; given the poverty throughout the country, it was very justified to spend the majority of available funds in the southern areas. Integration of the Tuareg into the political, social, and economic systems of the country remained weak. As an official of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs noted in reference to the 1996 agreement, “The peace agreements signed after the Tuareg rebellions were not fully respected, reintegration was not adequately implemented and the political systems did not take into account the aspirations of the inhabitants.”

One result of the military operations was that many thousand Tuareg became refugees in neighboring countries. Also, a significant number had moved to North African states out of economic necessity. This particularly was the case of migrating to Libya. In the case of Libya, although many Tuareg found work in the oil industry, many others joined the Libyan military, either in the regular forces or in the Libyan Islamic Legion, where they gained valuable military skills.

Major unrest erupted once again in 2012. Four major Tuareg groups have been involved. These groups are the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), Ansar ad Din (best translated as Guardians of the Religion), Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the Movement for Monotheism and Jihad (MUJAO). The largest of these groups by size and the progenitor of the uprising was the MNLA, founded in late 2011. The fact that the formation of a new Tuareg group coincided with the collapse of the regime in Libya certainly is not coincidental. As Gaddafi fell, many Tuareg who had been in the Libyan army moved back into northern Mali. Although it is virtually impossible to determine the ratio of ‘Libyan Tuareg’
versus ‘Mali Tuareg’ in terms of foot soldiers in the MNLA, much of the leadership came from Libya. Even the MNLA has acknowledged the role of former Libyan military members.  

One aspect of the 2012 uprising that makes the situation particularly complicated is that each of the Tuareg groups stated differing ideologies. The stated strategic goals of the MNLA have differed sharply from those of Ansar ad Din and MUJAO. In particular, the MNLA called for an independent Tuareg state, while Ansar ad Din and MUJAO did not emphasize independence but did stress their Islamic credentials. Also, throughout the conflict, the MNLA repeatedly stated its opposition to AQIM in particular.  

Actual numbers of Tuareg fighters is impossible to determine with any precision. This particularly is the case since many of its combatants almost certainly have been opportunistic, fighting when they have seen fit. The largest group by numbers seems to have been the MNLA, but again, this likely was not more than about 1,000 to 1,500. Estimates of the strength levels of the other groups are even more difficult to establish, but it is probable that Ansar ad Din did not exceed a few hundred active members, AQIM perhaps 150 to 200 fighters in the general region of Mali, and probably a similar number for MUJAO. Despite the strength discrepancy, as the split developed between Ansar ad Din and the MNLA and they began fighting, Ansar ad Din seemed to have few problems in beating the MNLA. This likely resulted not from relative strength levels in terms of raw numbers of fighters, but was a reflection of more cohesive Ansar ad Din elements and its more motivated members.  

The MNLA launched its offensive on 17 January 2012. The first attack was against an army garrison in the town of Menaka near the Nigerien border. By March, MNLA leaders announced that their forces had seized control of most of northern Mali.
they received little resistance from the Malian army in the area. In part, this was due to the very small size of the Malian security forces. As of 2009, the army had about 7,350 personnel, the air force 400, and a navy of 50. Other security forces include a gendarmerie of 1,800, 2,000 Republican Guards, and 1,000 police. These clearly are very small numbers for the entire country, and included a number of Tuareg who had been integrated (with uncertain results) into the military following earlier peace accords. Alongside this, there are no indicators that the military was at all well trained, and reporting suggests that many troops and officers generally did everything in their power to avoid assignments in the north. Likely both as a symptom and a cause of the Malian government’s collapse in the Tuareg region, the Malian officer corps conducted a coup on 22 March (with a new civilian government reinstalled in 2013), putatively largely in response to the government’s security failures.

As the MNLA and Ansar ad Din advanced through the area seizing towns and military posts, both groups tended to spend almost as much time fighting each other – albeit with occasional truces – than they did fighting the government. On 15 July, the MNLA formally withdrew its earlier demand for total independence. Since then, it reportedly has made some rather quiet offers to the Malian government to increase joint cooperation against Ansar ad Din and MUJAO. These putative offers almost certainly became moot after a fresh flurry of fighting around the city of Kidal in May 2014 between the government and Tuareg identified as belonging to the MNLA.

As the situation in Mali continued to deteriorate, officials in Bamako requested assistance from the French, but Paris initially was reluctant to deploy troops. After the Tuareg insurgents seized two towns closer to the capital Bamako in January 2013, however, the French government changed its stance, publicly stating its concerns that the insurgents were trying to seize the entire
country. The accuracy of this claim may be subject to some question -- the Tuareg would seem to have little strategic rationale for actually seizing areas too far outside their home territory, and their attacks may have been more a matter of raids than actual attempts at permanent invasion -- but Paris began deploying around 2,500 troops to Mali; Paris then increased the strength level to about 4,000 under the name of Operation Serval. On 9 April 2013, the French government announced at least some initial withdrawals, with about 100 ground troops redeploying to Cyprus. Paris reportedly planned to have only 1,000 troops in Mali by the end of 2013, with the principal ground forces in Mali to be provided by African countries. However, as of March 2014, the French continued to have about 1,600 troops still in country.\(^\text{32}\)

Initial French operations consisted primarily of re-seizing towns in the north, together with patrolling operations and attacks in the more remote regions of the north.\(^\text{33}\) Although the French have deployed a number of combat aircraft to the operation, the French Ministry of Defense website suggests that there were very limited airstrikes after those used at the start of Serval. These appear to have increased somewhat in 2014, however. Overall, major combat as a result of the deployments has appeared to be rather minimal. In general, it seems fair to say that operations have been relatively small-scale rather than sustained combat. What fighting there has been has been typified by car bombings, some suicide bombings, ambushes, and low-level infiltration attempts.

As of mid-April 2013, the French and other forces claimed to have killed several hundred insurgents or terrorists, including several leaders. For its part, the Malian military announced on 27 March 2013 that it had lost 63 troops since January 2013 and claimed that about 600 insurgents had been killed.\(^\text{34}\) The latter figure should be viewed with considerable skepticism, since the military spokesman noted that “The deaths among the Islamists are an estimate,
because the Islamists generally take their dead away for burial.” There also have been seven
French, 34 Chadian, 28 Nigerian, two Togolese, and one Burkinabe soldiers killed as of 2014.35

France has received support from most other NATO countries in its intervention, but such
support has generally been limited to small-scale air transport and the like. The European Union
itself has announced that it will provide about 200 troops for a training mission for the Malian
army.36 In announcing this decision, the EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign
Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton said, "On the military support, there were a
number of countries who made it very clear to France that they would be willing to help France
in every way…They did not rule in or rule out any aspect of that including military support."37

Prior to the French intervention, both the United Nations and the African Union had held
discussions on some form of peacekeeping or military force. Although both organizations
labeled the situation as a crisis, each was subject to the normal bureaucratic problems in
mounting an immediate (or even relatively quick) response. The Economic Community of West
African States (ECOWAS) stated its willingness to provide a joint force. Initially, this was more
rhetorical than practical, with few steps actually taken to provide the necessary troops and
command structures. Discussions centered around a force of some 25,000 to 30,000 troops to be
provided in September 2013.

With the French intervention, this time frame was compressed significantly, with the
creation of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). A small
detachment of about 100 Togolese troops arrived shortly after the French, soon followed by
Nigerian soldiers. As is common with such regional or international joint military forces,
AFISMA’s strength never reached the identified requirements. At its peak, it likely reached a
strength of about 7,500 members from some 21 countries, with the largest single national contributor being Chad, with some 1,800 troops. On 1 July 2013, this force was ‘re-hatted’ as the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Again in theory, this force will have 12,640 soldiers and police at full strength. As of the end of January 2014, its actual uniformed strength level was about 6,800. Although certainly considerably larger than available Malian army units, the current and promised troop commitment still is a very small strength level for counterinsurgency operations in an area roughly the size of France. This particularly is the case given the brutal terrain in the area, along with the minimal to nonexistent lines of communications (which in part were one of the reasons for the rebellions to begin with).

The actual security situation in northern Mali is in a state of considerable flux. As a result, specific outcomes are impossible to predict. Much of the ‘play book’ for the French intervention appears to have come from earlier interventions such as those of the French in Cote d’Ivoire and the British in Sierra Leone. One potential significant difference is that the admixture of insurgent and terrorist groups in Mali may have brought a much more complex environment in terms of transnational involvement

**Central African Republic**

The other ongoing French operation is in the Central African Republic. This was in response to extreme violence between Christian militias and the Muslim portion of the population following a civil war. Beyond this etho-religious violence, “criminal gangs, bandits and other violent actors had proliferated to a disconcerting extent.” Likewise, leaders on both sides reportedly had little to no control over individual militia bands.
The French mission, dubbed Operation Sangaris (Sangaris being the name of a local butterfly), began in December 2013 shortly after the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2127 (drafted by the French) which authorized the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA), with 5,400 African troops authorized. MISCA was intended to protect civilians; restore security and public order “through the use of appropriate measures”; and to stabilize the country and restore State authority. There have been some reported issues with the impartiality of some MISCA components that have subsequently been deployed. The resolution also specifically authorized the French forces “to take all necessary measures to support MISCA.”

France already had about 600 troops in the CAR; Paris then deployed about 1,000 additional troops, with some 400 following later. As of April 2014, most French operations have been relatively low-scale, with such missions as joint patrolling, convoy escorts, search operations, and weapons seizures. Initial European support for the French mission was extremely limited. On 20 January 2014, the EU approved a follow-on mission called EUFOR RCA Bangui. This force was intended to last about six months with about 800 troops. It reportedly will be limited to the capital Bangui, but reported “would relieve the 2,000 French troops in the country to an extent that allows them to be deployed outside Bangui.” In the EU statement, the foreign ministers emphasized that this would solely be to “provide temporary support, for a period of up to six months…” This EU decision came shortly before the French Parliament renewed its approval for continuing its military intervention, despite some reported unease among ‘mission creep’ among French politicians.

**Issues with Hybrid Operations & Unilateral Operations**
The British and French interventions offer a number of issues through which hybrid operations can be examined and some factors that can impact this somewhat middle ground between peacekeeping and counterinsurgency. The first note that should be made is that these forms of hybrids can be inherently awkward. The UN and most regional organizations such as the African Union will couch these missions in terms of peace operations, even though they can specify more ‘military’ aspects such as in the cases of Cote d’Ivoire and the Central African Republic. The countries providing the combatant forces typically will view their missions as involving something closer to traditional tactical counterinsurgency operations. Trying to square this circle can lead to some analytical confusion, and more importantly, practical difficulties in understanding the possibly competing expectations by the forces actually on the ground.

Perhaps one of the major advantages of having intervention forces from outside the usual peace operations-contributing roster is that many of the countries with the most capable militaries largely have opted out of serving directly under UN command. One of the basic, albeit not always acknowledged and not always palatable, truths about UN missions is that they must rely on the troops that countries actually offer. This certainly was the case with UNAMSIL. As Richard Connaught notes:

UN Security Council Resolution 1270 was framed under the enforcement Chapter VII of the UN Charter and attracting for its policing essentially African and Asian troops of a standard required to monitor a Chapter VI-type peacekeeping agreement where the consent of both parties was in place. The better trained Indians and Nigerians were exceptions to this rule but their bitter rivalry severely damaged the peacekeeping effort.\footnote{48}
This has led to a second issue for many of these missions. Internal leadership dynamics of course are a critical issue for United Nations missions. In the case of UNAMSIL, relations between General Jetley and some of his senior officers were strained at best; this particularly was the case with his Nigerian Deputy Commander:

General Jetley [claimed] that his activities were being sabotaged by some of his UN colleagues. In a private letter to the United Nations Secretary General, Jetley alleged that there was a strategic alliance between the rebels and key Nigerian officers of ECOMOG and the United Nations. Specifically General Jetley alleged: “… keeping Nigerian interest was paramount even if it meant scuttling the Peace Process and this also implied that UNAMSIL was expendable. To this end the Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG) and the Deputy Force Commander (DFC) cultivated the RUF leadership – especially Foday Sankoh – behind my back.”

Although General Jetley’s decision making and lack of aggressiveness led to a significant level of outside criticism, he may well have had a realistic assessment of how far he could go in using his troops. For example, after a decision was made by UNAMSIL to conduct expanded offensive operations, both Jordan and India withdrew their forces due to “[t]he shift away from impartiality towards support for the government of Sierra Leone…” The larger lesson is that even when a UN mission is fielded, political and diplomatic factors can create continued uncertainties as to be its operations and the limits to its actual operations in the field. In terms of successful restoration of internal stability, these limits can cripple an operation.

These types of situations have led to an increased willingness to build what essentially are counterinsurgency operations under some form of hybrid structure in which UN forces ‘cohabitate’ with other armed forces. One version of this – and somewhat common in the past –
is for UN elements to work with regional coalitions. Of course, using multiple coalitions can increase their complexity exponentially. Another issue with using regional forces in African operations in particular is that there is a relatively widespread suspicion as to other countries’ motives for participating in such missions. Much of the populace in affected countries tends to look for ‘hidden agendas’ and many are very skeptical of the intentions of other African countries’ militaries. Also, although it might seemingly sound logical that African troops are more attuned both to the culture and the terrain of the region, this likely is an over-simplification. As two authors noted, “Most ECOMOG troops were unfamiliar with the terrain of Sierra Leone and with jungle warfare.” On the other hand, an unattributed source claimed the opposite in the case of ECOMICI: “ECOMICI gained a lot of strength from the fact that troops shared a common cultural background and had knowledge of the region in general and the host country in particular. All contributing countries were from the West African region, and many members of the force had previously visited Côte d’Ivoire.” The same source also argued that there were specific forms of African conflict resolution and that African forces had a unique capability for these types of missions. Given some of the issues with ECOWAS deployments, however, such claims might be viewed with some level of skepticism.

The other form of multi-coalition operations can involve out-of-region coalitions working with the United Nations. Within Africa, the European Union has been involved in several of these military missions. The largest and most prominent have been in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chad, together with a number of smaller training missions for police and other security forces. The major missions have involved between 1800 and 3700 personnel. The EU has regularized such operations to the extent that it has activated a EU Operations Centre; at
present, this is coordinating operations only in the Horn of Africa, but certainly could expand to other missions.\textsuperscript{55} The EU brings some advantages to hybrid operations, most importantly modern militaries with strong logistics capabilities and adequate funding. At the same time, however, EU willingness and capabilities for these out-of-area missions will almost inevitably be subject to remaining questions. Although as a military alliance, NATO might seem to be even more suited to these missions, the recent sharp – and very public – splits within NATO over the operations in Libya suggest similar issues.

A further advantage to unilateral deployments may be the increased opportunity for their commanders on the ground to conduct operations based on their own initiatives. Although it is certainly not guaranteed that unilateral forces’ commanders will do so (or that UN force commanders will not), politically and diplomatically, it is likely exponentially more difficult for UN commanders to conduct shifts in missions without at times laborious coordination with New York. Without considerable initiative shown by Brigadier Richards and his officers, it is very unlikely that Operation Palliser would have been so significant in changing the security calculus. Contrary to some level of ex post facto triumphalism by the British government, London’s guidance to the British military in Sierra Leone was at best slow, at worst nonexistent.\textsuperscript{56} As one rather small, but telling, example, the Ministry of Defence failed to issue initial rules of engagement, critical for such an operation. The British commanders on the ground “defaulted to the guidance they used in Northern Ireland which seemed appropriate in this case.”\textsuperscript{57} Overall, this factor can lead to quicker and more decisive tactical operations.

One aspect of the difference between coalitions and unilateral forces is somewhat difficult to measure directly, but is likely significant. This is that of military culture. Countries’
militaries normally develop their own ethos that can be critical in developing internal cohesion, at best leading to much more effective tactical operations. One particular ‘cultural’ issue likely helped the success of the British forces:

The ground deployment in Sierra Leone was largely drawn from units within 16 Air Assault and 3 Commando Brigades. In general, they were familiar with working together and were thus far more integrated, operationally, than they might otherwise have been. They were also familiar with the Special Forces because, historically, they had been the latter’s main source of personnel.  

Even if countries have worked together fairly regularly (such as NATO countries or nations that have previously worked together in UN missions), it is very unlikely that they will develop these levels of close ties. Certainly, a number of coordination and cooperation issues in Afghanistan would add support to this argument.

Even if overall goals are similar, operations by nationally deployed forces may or may not contribute to larger goals. The point here is that any armed action, whether offensive or defensive, will impact the security situation. In the best cases, such as the major firefights by the British in Sierra Leone, the results were positive overall for the UNAMSIL mission. They reinforced the seriousness of the peace operations forces and provided a counter to the parties most opposed to restoring stability. The response (however justified) by the French to the mob violence in Abidjan likely made the UN’s job tougher. Combatants and the public in these countries were unlikely to distinguish between the UN mission troops and the deployed national forces. As such, there inevitably are potential opportunities to hurt a coalition’s larger missions.
A larger element of legitimacy is involved with this. One diplomatic issue that has been different for the British and French has been external views of their underlying motivations. Fairly or unfairly, some analysts of French intervention in Cote d’Ivoire and (to a lesser extent Mali) have argued that these operations are a form of neo-colonialism. This is based at least in part on significant French economic interests in the countries. In part, also, this was based on earlier French operations in Africa. One author has argued that the close French cooperation with the United Nations was an effort to show that its policies had in fact changed and that interventions such as this were ‘purer’ than earlier ones. To a greater or lesser extent, charges of neo-colonialism likely will almost always continue to plague Western powers in these missions. One lesson from the British operations might be that short-term interventions are less likely to bring such diplomatic problems. Even though the British continue a small-scale training mission in Sierra Leone, their ‘footprint’ certainly is lighter than that of the French in Cote d’Ivoire and Mali. Ultimately, this probably makes their activities more palatable.

One further issue might be future capabilities of many forces, even Western militaries. In an era of financial austerity, the willingness and capacity for future deployments may be increasingly difficult. Even before the Sierra Leone mission, Geoff Hoon, the Secretary of State for Defence, noted problems with “overstretch.” European and North American governments (with the notable exception of Canada, although even it has retrenched from most UN missions) typically have been less than enthusiastic about participating in UN-sponsored peace missions; further budgetary problems may make this willingness even more unlikely.

A potential future problem may be somewhat of a throwback to earlier missions, particularly those common in the 1990’s. This is the potential for “mission creep.” In May 2014, the French government announced that it intended to retain about 3,000 troops in the Sahel
region to “fight militant Islamists.” This level of continuing deployment certainly does not seem to reflect Paris’s initially announced goals of relatively short-term interventions, with very limited follow-on troops for training missions. From a military standpoint, as exemplified by the US decision making in the early days in Vietnam, it is all too easy to decide that the solution to the failure of small military elements to make a strategic difference in a relatively narrow time window is to either extend the mission, reinforce the troop levels, expand the scope of operations, or all the above.

Finally, there is the issue of the best missions to be assigned to nationally-deployed forces. The British and French examples provide a good illustration of this issue. The British forces engaged in what might be considered more traditional military missions, albeit ostensibly in support of peace enforcement. At least initially, in Cote d’Ivoire the French units were employed in a more common form of essentially peacekeeping, separating combatants along the “confidence zone.” Given a well-supported and well trained organized military force, the latter use may not have been the maximal employment of the French, which may have been a lesson incorporated in their operations in Mali.

Given these positives and negatives, how can such hybrid missions maximize their effectiveness in internal stability operations? Probably the most effective single method is through extensive liaison, which both the French and British conducted. Beyond simply ensuring good communications with all the other elements in the country, liaison officers can serve several other purposes. If properly equipped, liaison elements may in fact have better communications than UN or local forces. As such, they can provide the tactical backbone communications structure for the overall mission. At least according to British accounts, their liaison officers also served as “stiffeners” for the other components in Sierra Leone. Although
some of these claims may have been somewhat overstated, it is probable that well-trained and well-selected liaisons can be very useful in providing guidance to any number of tactical command posts.

A somewhat logical spinoff from the liaison role is that of more formalized training missions. These again are somewhat a staple of most Western militaries, and have been used to good effect. In reality, in fact advisory missions have become routine. In cases such as El Salvador, the US advisory effort was critical in resolving the war in something approaching success. Likewise, the US and other countries remain very active in small-scale advisory missions in many countries under stress. The distinction of the French and British missions was that they combined advisory missions with actual combat forces (albeit of limited size), providing a ‘stiffener’ for their overall mission. This not only provided immediate forces available to reinforce or protect the advisors, but likely gave the overall advisory and training missions more credibility in the eyes of local forces.

An aphorism widely credited to US officers during Vietnam (but almost certainly a sentiment shared by many earlier counterinsurgents) was “Grab them by the balls and their hearts and minds will follow.” However much hearts and minds concepts are incorporated into doctrine, most Western military officers likely will remain more focused and more comfortable with the ‘harder’ aspects of counterinsurgency. Also, as noted, many Western militaries retain a difficult to quantify but likely very real image internationally for effectiveness. When this is combined with decided advantages in logistics, movement, and firepower, the ideal use for these types of intervention forces what might be called the maneuver warfare component of counterinsurgency. Conversely, peace operations-type coalitions using forces that have become experienced in recurring peace operations missions bring their own value. Such forces can
provide the ‘softer’ assets required for security. Perhaps more importantly, they are much more likely to provide a base for incorporating non-military support from international organizations and non-governmental organizations, which inherently normally are more effective at providing critical population support programs. This of course is particularly true for UN-authorized missions. Hybrid systems combining military units focused on the ‘harder’ forms of military operations focused on counterinsurgency, together with more traditional-style peace support operations, do appear to have considerable promise. Clearly, there are pitfalls in having two separate forces in a particular operational theater, but if coordinated properly – particularly on the ground – these differently constituted missions can build off each other to increase the chances of ultimate success in restoring internal stability.

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1 There is not sufficient space to cover in detail the rather convoluted security situations in all the countries. For details on the environments, see Lawrence E. Cline, “Nomads, Islamists, and Soldiers: The Struggles for Northern Mali”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36/8 (August 2013): 617-634; Lawrence E. Cline, “Muscular Peacekeeping on Steroids”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 2014. Portions of these articles appear in this chapter.


4 Woods and Reese, *Sierra Leone*, Kindle location 481.

5 EO used a few hundred mercenary troops in its operations from May 1995 to January 1996. It succeeded in pushing the RUF from Freetown, destroying the RUF headquarters, and securing the key diamond mining areas. For a broader discussion of private military companies in these types of environments, see Christopher Spearin, “Private Security Companies and Humanitarians: A Corporate Solution to Securing Humanitarian Spaces?” *International Peacekeeping* 8/1 (Spring 2001), pp. 20-43.

6 UN Security Council, Security Council Resolution 1270 (1999). In the context of UN missions, Chapter VI missions under the UN Charter deal with “Pacific Settlement of Disputes”, and have been used primarily for unarmed or lightly armed missions. In practical terms, these typically have not succeeded unless both sides want some type of ‘overwatch’ as part of a mutual desire for a settlement. Chapter VII missions, “Action with Respect to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace and Acts of Aggression”, normally have been approved for something more akin to actual military operations. In UN informal lexicon, so-called Chapter VI and a half missions have become more common; these have been authorized under Chapter VI authority, but either were expected to be or became through force of circumstance to become more involved in quasi-combat operations.
Even this last provision included the caveat “taking into account the responsibilities of the Government of Sierra Leone and ECOMOG.”

Dorman, Blair’s Successful War, 49.


For details, see Dorman, Blair’s Successful War, 94.

For full details of this operation, see Richard Connaughton, “Operation ‘Barass’”, Small Wars and Insurgencies 12/2 (Summer 2001), pp. 110-119.


One author has argued that the initial French approach of impartiality was at least in large measure based on previous diplomatic firestorms erupting over supporting questionable African governments. See Maja Bobic, “France’s Conflict Resolution Strategy in Cote d’Ivoire and its Ethical Implications”. African Studies Quarterly 11/1 (Fall 2009): 7.


ibid, 18.

Actual strength was lower since some countries backed out of the mission. For details, see unpublished proceedings from a conference held on Cote d’Ivoire held at the Koffi Annan International Peacekeeping Center 31 May-2 June 2004, 28. Available at http://dspace.cigilib.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/31453/1/Mono105.pdf?1. Accessed 12 May 2014.


Koffi Annan International Peacekeeping Center 31 May-2 June 2004, 28.

Boutellis, The Security Sector in Côte d’Ivoire, 6. Interestingly, throughout this entire period, Cote d’Ivoire continued to provide police to UN missions.


A note on transliterations and translations of group names. The abbreviations are based on French. Ansar ad Din in particular is subject to multiple transliterations, most often Ansar Eddine or Ansar Dine, both based on French. The transliteration used in this paper is based on the closest to Arabic, which would seem to be most appropriate. Likewise, the common translation for the Movement of Monotheism and Jihad is the Movement of Unity and Jihad. Based on similarly-named movements in the Middle East, however, ‘monotheism’ is a more accurate description than ‘unity.’

“They are not mercenaries”, 22 January 2012 at http://www.mnlamov.net/documents.html


Pascal Fletcher, ‘AU Sees Mali Military Intervention as ‘Last Resort”, Reuters, 13 July 2012.


Twenty-two of the Chadian fatalities came as a result of one car bomb; after this incident, Chad announced that it intended to withdraw all its troops. Full up-to-date casualty figures are difficult to ascertain. As of January 2014, a total of seven MINUSMA troops had either died or been killed, suggesting that casualties remain relatively low.

The French, among others, have had active training missions already established in Mali. The flare-up of fighting in 2014 suggested the pressing need for such training and advisory support. By the Malian government’s account itself, its units “were forced ‘to retreat under heavy fire’ after problems with ‘coordination and intelligence’.” BBC, “Mali: Tuareg rebels ‘defeat government army in Kidal’”, 21 May 2014 at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27511448. Some 30 Malian troops were casualties in this burst of fighting, and the army reportedly quickly abandoned many of its positions.


Weber and Markus, SWP Comments, 2.


“Chadian members of the AU mission are accused of liberating and evacuating detained Séléka leaders without authorisation from mission command. Concurrently with the resignation of President Djotodia, Séléka forces began withdrawing from Bangui, and are currently regrouping in the north of the country. There too, observers report, they receive support from Chadian MISCA members.” Weber and Kaim, SWP Comments, 2. Also see Africa Research Bulletin, “Central African Republic: Operation Sangaris”, 1-31 December 2013, 19959.


Weber and Kaim, SWP Comments, 4.

Council of the European Union Press Release, “Council Conclusions on the Central African Republic”, Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Brussels, 20 January 2014. It should be noted that in a separate press release of 10 February 2014, the EU foreign ministers noted that the EU force would appoint a French general as the Operation Commander, likely making coordination easier.


Similar disquiet apparently is increasing among the French public. According to a poll quoted by Reuters, “Only 41 percent of those questioned were in favor of the operation, down from 51 percent shortly after Paris deployed 1,600 troops in the country, according to an Ifop poll.” Reuters, “French support for Central African intervention fast eroding: poll”, 4 January 2014 at http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/04/us-centralafrican-france-idUSBREA0306M20140104. Accessed 12 May 2014. Interestingly, the same polls indicated that a majority of
French still support the Mali operation; this might reflect the ability of the French government to couch this in terms of counterterrorism.


52 Woods and Reese, Kindle location 821.

53 Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Center 31 May-2 June 2004, p. 16.

54 It should be noted that one other major mission, Operation Atalanta for counter-piracy off the coast of Somalia is not listed since this is much more a ‘pure’ security mission. For earlier EU missions in Africa, see Major General Boguslaw Pacek, Polish Army, Ph.D., The European Union Military Operation in Chad and Central African Republic”, Military Review (January-February 2010), 26-29. For a detailed operational description of the EU mission to Chad, see Dan Harvey, Peace Enforcers (Dubboine, Ireland: Book Republic, 2011).


56 Dorman, Blair’s Successful War, p. 67-85.

57 Dorman, Blair’s Successful War, p. 68.


61 As one study noted, “France’s engagement in Africa is deep. It intervened militarily in the continent 19 times between 1962 and 1995. But gradually, budgetary concerns and a changed strategic climate have encouraged France to adopt a new multilateral approach. Structural changes to the armed forces, including sharp reductions in the size of the military and base closures between 1997 and 2002 meant France could no longer maintain the dominance that it had in the 1960s and 1970s.” Paul Melly and Vincent Darraqu, A New Way to Engage? French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande (London: Chatham House, May 2013), 4.


63 Dorman, Blair’s Successful War, p. 63.