MASTER'S DEGREE
FINAL THESIS

Ending *Barkhane* - story of a French downfall
An awareness campaign project for a permanent commission on exit strategies for military interventions under the supervision of the French National Assembly

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Abstract:

In the context of an increasingly complex situation on the ground, French president Emmanuel Macron announced the withdrawal of *Opération Barkhane* from Mali after ten years of military deployment. This thesis presents a public campaign which will spread audiovisual material from Mali in order to create awareness about the importance of exit strategies and the responsibilities of intervention. With the participation of university students and in cooperation with NGOs and media outlets, the campaign aims to form a petition to commit the French National Assembly to form a permanent commission tasked with the elaboration of clear exit strategies for future military interventions.

En el contexto de una situación cada vez más compleja sobre el terreno, el presidente francés Emmanuel Macron anunció la retirada de la *Operación Barkhane* de Malí tras diez años de intervención militar. Esta tesis presenta una campaña pública que difundirá material audiovisual de Malí para crear conciencia sobre la importancia de las estrategias de salida y las responsabilidades de la intervención. Con la participación de estudiantes universitarios/as y en cooperación con ONGs y los medios, la campaña pretende crear una petición para comprometer a la Asamblea Nacional francesa a formar una comisión permanente encargada de elaborar estrategias de salida claras para las intervenciones militares.

Dans le contexte d'une situation de plus en plus complexe sur le terrain, l'actuel président français Emmanuel Macron a annoncé le retrait de l'Opération Barkhane du Mali après dix ans de déploiement militaire. Cette mémoire de fin d'études présente une campagne publique qui propagera du matériel audiovisuel du Mali afin de sensibiliser à l'importance des stratégies de sortie et aux responsabilités de l'intervention. Avec la participation d'étudiant.es universitaires et en coopération avec des ONGs et les médias, la campagne vise à créer une pétition afin d'engager l'Assemblée nationale française à former une commission permanente chargée d'élaborer des stratégies de sortie claires pour les futures interventions militaires.

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Abbreviations

AEME	Asociación Española de Militares Escritores
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CO	Military operations centre (Centre opérationnel)
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of combatants
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECP	Escola de Cultura de Pau
EU	European Union
EUTM	European Union Training Mission in Mali
FAMa	Malian Armed Forces (Forces Armées Maliennes)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat)
IEP	Institute for Economics and Peace
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
JNIM/GSIM	Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin)
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali
MNLA	Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UN/UNO	United Nations Organisation
US/USA	United States of America

1. Introduction

When the United States completed their hasty military withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 after 20 years, many of their prior local employees were still on the ground. Sure to face suppression and violence by the Taliban now in power in the Central Asian nation, thousands urgently applied for visas to leave their country. Not only did the visa process take too long, it also turned out that the US soldiers had left important technology and data behind. Among these leftovers were devices that facilitated the identification of their local staff.

Following this resounding failure of a military withdrawal, caused by the absence of a clear and realistic exit strategy, international observers turned their regard to Mali. In the Sahelian country, the second coup d'état in only one year in May 2021 gave way to a military junta strongly opposed to "Opération Barkhane", the French military deployment in Mali. The persistent diplomatic quarrels between the junta and French authorities which followed this change left room for speculations about a potential end of the mission.

Half a year later, they proved to be right. In the context of high levels of instability and violence in the Sahel, French President Emmanuel Macron announced the end of *Barkhane* on 17 February 2022. The country's currently biggest military intervention started under the name of "Operation Serval" in 2013 to fight against a separatist-turned- jihadist insurgency in the north of Mali. Nine years later, violence has spread out across the region, where public opinion has turned against the French. Instead of a complete withdrawal, Macron wants to redeploy part of the troops, notably to Niger.

According to analyses notably on the French newspaper *Le Monde*, the decision for this reorientation came after a long struggle of finding a possible exit to the mission. The apparent absence of elaborated exit strategies for the different scenarios on the ground further complicated this effort. Taking this into account, critics have voiced concern over a possible repetition of the situation observed after the military withdrawal from Afghanistan, with civilians suffering the consequences. In the case of Mali, the Russian Wagner group and various jihadist groups are already starting to fill the void left behind by the French troops. It now depends on the French exit strategy to limit the negative consequences on the ground.

The present paper aims to raise awareness of the importance of exit strategies via a public campaign to be organised in France.

To do so, it first contextualises the situation in Mali and the factors which pushed Macron to take the decision of an early exit in the case of *Barkhane*. In the second part, it then gives an overview of the general military decision making progress in France and the relevance of exit strategies. On this basis, the third part proposes a public campaign for the formation of a permanent commission attached to the French National Assembly with the task to elaborate exit strategies for current and possible future military interventions.

1.1 Theoretical framework

For the elaboration of the presented arguments and as the basis for the public campaign, the paper works with the following definitions and theories as its theoretical framework, further elaborated in the second part.

Definition of military interventions

Closely related to the general understanding of war, Wunische (2019) describes military interventions as "the most complex, destructive, and uncertain activity humans can engage in". A military intervention is the deployment of military troops in a foreign country with the goal of achieving certain political objectives. Due to the need to justify the intervention in the face of international law, military interventions with the main objective of protecting civilians from a threat are often referred to as *humanitarian* interventions. The difference between both terms lies namely in the argumentation of why the use of force in a foreign country is legitimate. According to Pozo (2010, 323), the Spanish branch of the French non-governmental organisation *Médecins Sans Frontières* proposes to distinguish between the terms on the basis of the actors which execute the intervention. Following this idea, humanitarian interventions could only be realised by staff of humanitarian organisations, while all operations carried out by military members would be referred to as military interventions.

Definition of exit strategies

In line with Gromes (2021) and Wunische (2019), a bad exit can reverse previous achievements and success of a military intervention, although no exit can save a failed mission. Exit strategies are supposed to prevent military interventions from turning into endless wars. Furthermore, they force decision makers to define clear political objectives for the intervention and prevent the mission from getting out of hand. Exit strategies can set timelines for the mission (end dates) or fix specific benchmarks (end states) to be achieved. Considered as unrealistic by some authors (e.g. Kampf 2019) because of the unpredictability of war, the authors cited above see exit strategies as an important, non-static concept to prevent an uncontrolled exit or an unnecessarily prolonged deployment.

Military decision making in France

Different to systems in which the parliament plays a rather important role in military decision making, as is the case in Germany, in France the President decides about possible military interventions. However, he depends on the military structures which are under the administration of the Prime Minister. As specified in the French Constitution (Art. 35), the President has to inform the French Parliament, composed of the National Assembly and the Senate, in the span of three days after the start of a military intervention. The consultation is

merely informational, the Parliament has no voting rights. Only if the mission exceeds a duration of four months does the President need the one-time approval of Parliament.

Ethics of an intervention

Most authors, see for example Pozo (2010, 299-303) and Powers (2014, 119-120), focus on the legitimacy of the intervention by regarding the justifications of *going in*, which is indeed important for international law. The long-term responsibilities which a started intervention should suppose for the intervening forces are rarely considered. Yet, especially in the case of longer military interventions, the presence of the military and the structure of the bases - including the material and technologies available at the bases - create a new security structure. This creates dependencies and can give way to a security vacuum if the withdrawal is not organised in a clear and prepared manner.

1.2 Outline of the project

The aim of this paper is to organise a public campaign in France to prevent future failures of military withdrawals. Objective of the campaign is the introduction of an instance of control, attached to the legislative body, for a more pronounced implication of the French National Assembly. Making use of the media and public attention towards the consequences of the French military withdrawal from Mali, the campaign proposes the formation of a permanent commission tasked with the elaboration of clear exit strategies. This is supposed to help the National Assembly evaluate the objectives and the feasibility of the military interventions. A realistic evaluation of this is crucial especially after the first four months of an intervention, when the extension of the mission relies on the approval of Parliament.

The main requirement for the formation of such a commission is public awareness. The campaign will therefore focus particularly on the use of social media and the cooperation with media and organisations to raise awareness. Thanks to a cooperation with a university, the campaign will be effectuated in a university seminar with master's students. With the help of NGOs, a petition for the implementation of a commission will be organised.

On a personal note, this campaign with its focus on the French system is important to me as a German citizen. Since the end of the Second World War, Germany and France have increasingly grown closer on a political and cultural level. This includes military involvement. While France is more likely to get involved militarily in international affairs, the close link between both countries puts pressure on Germany to send its own troops as well. The German Parliament plays a much more important role in military decision making than is the case in France. During the annual consultations of the German Parliament, its members specifically ask for exit strategies. The debate is then followed by a vote. If the mission is led by France, however, the main impulse has to come from French authorities.

Part I - Story of a French downfall

2. Context of the mission

For more than ten years now, the population of Mali lives in the context of armed conflict. A peace agreement signed in 2015 in Alger has not shown effect. Instead, the violence has long spread into neighbouring countries in the Sahel and the number of armed actors has augmented. Despite or, as some would argue, because of international military interventions, violence in the Sahel is at an all time high. Meanwhile, the Malian government and growing parts of the population blame France and the French for the situation. In this section of the present paper, a contextualisation of the armed conflict and the French military intervention *Opération Barkhane* will take place.

2.1 A compact history of the conflict of Mali

The Republic of Mali is situated in West Africa. Landlocked between Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal and Mauritania, the surface of the state totals roughly 1,24 million kilometres. Geographically, Mali is stretched across three very distinct areas: the desertic Sahara in the north, the arid Sahel in the centre and the more fertile Sudan in the south. From Niger to the east of the centre, the Niger River flows into the southwest of Mali, where the capital Bamako is located. Along the lifegiving river, old trade routes from the north and northeast have long turned cities like Timbuktu and Gao into economic and cultural centres. Also a reminder of century-lasting Arabic influence, nearly 95 percent of the 20,3 million Malians

Source: OnTheWorldMap

practice Islam. As a heritage of nearly a century of French colonialism (from 1895 to 1960), the official language of the nation is French. Due to the ethnic diversity in the country, however, regional and local languages like mandingue and tamasheq are commonly used. Bambara, a mandingue language, is spoken by nearly half the population (France Diplomatie 2022; François 2015; Oficina de Información Diplomática 2022, 1).

Because of the geographic circumstances, estimatedly 91 percent of the Malian population live in the southern part of the country. In the vast, hot territory in the north, the remaining 9 percent have adapted their way of life to the harsh conditions of the desert. Despite the existence of natural resources, the north accounts for only two percent of the nation's GDP (François 2015). Thus, the Malian governments since the independence from

France in 1960 were not too interested in this part of the nation. In consequence, state structures in the north were and still are scarce. The main ethnic groups in this part of Mali are the Arabs and the Tuareg people. The latter are a heterogenous nomadic group with a large history, various languages and dialects and their own script. Their traditional territory stretches over the Sahel and Sahara between Algeria, Libya, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali (Braccini 2020, 76-77; Claudot-Hawad 2002, 14-21; Normand 2019, 69-73).

When Mali became a sovereign state with its independence from France in 1960, some traditionally aristocratic groups among the Tuareg, especially the Ifogha, refused to accept the borders that separate their traditional territory (Normand 2019, 70). In several rebellions, this minority violently opposed the Malian state in the north of the country, most notably in 1963 and 1990-91. A peace agreement between the government and five Tuareg armed groups in 1992 saw no implementation of agreed measures such as a special administrative status for northern Mali and economic and social investments in the region (Normand 2019, 122). The resulting sense of marginalisation was coupled with a lack of security and basic services following the withdrawal of the national army and state institutions. As a consequence, the region turned into an uncontrolled zone (ECP 2022, 35).

Three main actors took advantage of this power vacuum during the first years of the current century. From Algeria, from 2000, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) entered the region to escape the control and restrictions imposed on it by the Algerian state during and after the Algerian civil war (1991-2002). As they were not disarmed upon their arrival in Mali, they financed themselves over the following years through kidnappings and trafficking in drugs, illegal goods and migrants. Militants of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) followed the GSPC's lead. A non-aggression agreement with the government in Bamako to end kidnappings allowed them a free hand in illegal trafficking between 2010 and 2012 (Marshall 2021, 231; Normand 2019, 122-123).

Meanwhile, the Libyan president Muammar al-Gaddafi harboured plans to unify northwestern Africa under his control with the help of his oil wealth. As part of the plan, he "was happy to sow division in Mali by pitting groups against one another and weakening the country, thus allowing him to dominate it" (Marshall 2021, 232). During the first part of this century, thousands of Tuareg from Mali enlisted for Libyan military service, where they received arms and military training (Marshall 2021, 232).

In 2011, France led a NATO intervention in Libya and overthrew al-Gaddafi and his government. The intervention destabilised the whole region and is considered to have been the trigger of the current crisis in the Sahel. When Gaddafi fell, his Tuareg fighters fled back to the north of Mali, where they were neither disarmed nor demobilised. These conditions set the ground for the "subsequent separatist-then-jihadist insurrection in Mali" (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 2): Some of the returned fighters created the National Movement for the

Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). The name Azawad refers to the idea of an independent Tuareg state in northern Mali. In cooperation with Ansar Dine, an armed islamist group created by the leader of the 1990 Tuareg rebellion[1], the MNLA launched a new rebellion in January 2012, starting in the Kidal region. They were soon joined by various islamist armed groups, including AQIM. It was to their advantage that the Malian army carried out a coup d'état on 22 March of the same year, as there was little resistance from the capital against the advance of the secessionist armed groups. Together, the rebels quickly took control of the three northern administrative regions of Mali. On 6 April 2012, the MNLA declared the independence of Azawad (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 2; ECP 2022, 35; Normand 2019, 70, 123-124).

It wasn't until December 2012 that a freshly formed transitional government asked for external help. By then, the separatist groups had advanced towards the centre of the country and were moving towards Bamako. However, the first discrepancies between the diverse armed groups had already emerged at the expense of civil society. Islamist groups began to apply harsh Sharia law with executions and very little freedoms for civilians in the occupied villages, which did not sit right with the MNLA (ECP 2022, 35; Normand 2019, 124).

Most European nations were reluctant to react to the transitional government's call for assistance. Help finally came in the form of a French military intervention from January 2013 onwards, authorised by the UN Security Council (Powers 2014, 120). The French *Opération Serval* was supported shortly afterwards by regional forces. Especially in the first months, they were successful in pushing back the armed groups towards the north. In June of the same year, the *Ouagadougou agreements* paved the way for general elections and peace negotiations. At the same time, the United Nations began the MINUSMA[2] peacekeeping operation (Normand 2019, 124-125; Oficina de Información Diplomática 2022, 3).

While the armed conflict raged on, meetings took place between the Malian government, armed Tuareg separatist groups and some pro-Bamako Tuareg self-defence groups between July 2014 and May 2015 in Algiers. The result was the Algiers peace agreement, signed in June 2015 (Oficina de Información Diplomática 2022, 3-4). It is divided into three main parts: short-, medium- and long-term measures. These include humanitarian measures (to enable the return of displaced persons and refugees to their land), economic and social measures (with emphasis on education), reconciliation, justice and security measures (such as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants, DDR), focused on the northern region (Accord pour la paix et la réconciliation au Mali 2015).

However, the numbers of fatalities, human rights violations and displacements increased significantly in the years following the agreement (ECP 2022, 35; Normand 2019,

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[1] The talk is of Iyad ag Ghali, who converted to Islamic fundamentalism in 1998 (Normand 2019, 123). As a matter of space, I will not focus on this actor, who continues to play an important role today.
[2] United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali.

126-130). One reason for the failure of the agreement is the refusal of the Malian government and international partners to include jihadist groups in the negotiations.[3] Consequently, the ceasefire agreed between the signatories did not apply to them (Normand 2019, 126). A more important factor is the problem of structural weakness.

The Malian state is fragile, and sometimes even considered to be a failed state. Susceptible to corruption and abuse of power, the focus of the strongly centralised state is led by diverging interests. The remaining regions and communities are neglected by the state and suffer from an absence of basic services like a functioning education, health, justice and security system. Missing infrastructure further complicates control of the terrain (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 12-13; IEP 2022, 59; Normand 2019, 126-130). A disproportionate focus on security "often translates into violence toward local civilians" (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 12-13) and minorities are excluded from decision making processes. In combination with impunity and low economic productivity, these characteristics cause rage among the population and make trust in the state impossible. This, in turn, increases the risk of coups d'état (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 16-19; IEP 2022, 57).

Concerning the violence, the state response up to date is considered to be too weak, undecided and unwilling (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 16-19). When the international military regained ground and pushed the fighters back up to the north, the Malian state did not re-establish its structures in the freed centre, notably the Mopti region. Neglected for too long, the region soon turned into the new centre of violence. Characterised by the coexistence of various ethnic groups, the region had already been the stage for tensions long before the start of the 2012 conflict. Most of these tensions were and are due to ecological changes related to climate change and rapid population growth. Two of the biggest ethnic groups in the region are the nomadic Fulani, who traditionally tend to practise pastoralism, and the Dogon, who majoritarily are farmers. The southwards advance of the Sahara, the absence of regular precipitation and water sources as well as the growing need of space for housing increasingly reduce the potential to practise both professions. Cattle herds of the Fulani sometimes feed on Dogon cultivations or trample them down. Seen from the other perspective, some Dogon cultivations block the access to water sources and limit the space for the cattle. Before the armed conflict, the resulting disputes were solved according to a book of rules and penalties (Bernau 2018, 76-77; Tobie 2017, 1, 9). But when the state structures and security forces were withdrawn at the beginning of the armed conflict, these measures of justice fell away,

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[3] After the coup in 2020, some communities in the centre of Mali, for example in Niono in the Ségou region, negotiated with jihadist groups and came to local agreements in spring 2021. The transitional government then indicated its willingness to engage in dialogue with these groups in the future, much to the discontent of France (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 13).

and violence and tensions brought by the conflict further aggravated the situation. Some ethnic groups and communities formed self-defence groups (Vincent 2022a).

Additionally, jihadist groups successfully offered their services as providers of education, justice, social services and protection in a structural way. Tolerated or ignored at first because of the general focus on the north of Mali, these jihadist groups - including the regional offshoot of the Islamic State - managed to build a significant base in the centre of Mali (IEP 2022, 46; Tobie 2017, 3, 10-15; Vincent 2022a). By the time the various international troops and the Malian army finally intervened, it was too late to stabilise the region. The state first tried to regain control by assigning local self-defence groups to fight on its behalf and inform the government about the identity of the rebels. Some of these selected groups accused innocent members of the opposing ethnic group for personal revenge, which further added to the cycle of violence (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 6-7; Tobie 2017, 11-12).

Today, the centre of Mali and the adjoining *three-border region* with Niger and Burkina Faso are the zones most affected by violence. Terrorist activity has long exceeded Malian borders. Niger and Burkina Faso are especially affected, with signs of spread into other West African countries (IEP 2022, 47-48; Vincent 2022a). Border regions are especially hard to control for the government and the military, which usually is limited by mandate in its operation territory (IEP 2022, 46). When the interventions first pushed the fighters across the borders to Burkina Faso, a popular insurrection had just managed to overthrow president Blaise Compaoré, causing "a breakdown of the security apparatus, which facilitated the spread of jihadist violence from Mali" (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 2).

As a result, the conflict is characterised by constantly changing dynamics between existing, merging and new non-state armed groups. In line with IEP (2022, 49) and Englebert and Lyammouri (2022, 4-7), these groups can be broadly divided into three different types:

1. Local or transnational islamic groups with official links to the Islamic State or to al-Qaeda, which often compete between each other or are in conflict.
2. Local self-defence units and ethnic militia, which often use the general violent setting to settle scores with other groups or to gain an economic advantage.
3. Traffickers and outlaws, which act along historical trading routes in the Sahel and Sahara for illicit trade, trafficking and kidnapping.

The jihadist groups use kidnapping, illicit trade, trading taxes, protection money and the exploitation of natural resources as financiation methods (IEP 2022, 51; Marshall 2021).

In 2021, Mali recorded a new peak in the number of terrorist attacks and deaths (IEP 2022, 49). Since the start of the conflict, political instability, demographic growth, increasing food insecurity, ecological degradation due to climate change, and high numbers of displaced people have only become worse and, in turn, serve as aggravating factors for the conflict. For the following years, the conflict is expected to only become worse (IEP 2022, 49, 53-56).

2.2 The French military intervention: From *Serval* to *Barkhane*

The initial French military intervention in Mali, called *Opération Serval*, achieved its objectives. As requested by the Malian transitional government in December 2012, the French president at the time, François Hollande (2012-2017), took the rapid decision to deploy his military from January 2013. Hollande's previous attempts to find strategic partners for the intervention failed, as this didn't happen quick and convinced enough among other EU states or the EU itself, partly because the decision for the EU to intervene has to be agreed on by all member states (Deitelhoff, Dembinski and Peters 2018; Vincent 2022a). Two main considerations were decisive for the French intervention. Firstly, the jihadist pratice of taking Occidental hostages - twelve at that time, among them various French citizens - was getting too costworthy. Secondly, the preparation of attacks on the whole subregion was taking place rather localised in the Ifoghas mountains in the Malian desert, which led to believe in a clear and quick operation. As a former officer is cited, "[i]n two months, with 2,000 men and 200 million euros, it was estimated that the clean-up was possible" (Vincent 2022a).

More hidden reasons were geopolitical interests in the region, affected by the conflict. The exploitation of natural resources is one. The Sahel holds important oil and uranium reserves, crucial for the French nuclear industry and power supply. In neighbouring Niger, the mines of the French state-owned company Areva are a possible cible for jihadists (Marshall 2021, 247-249). Another reason is migration. If Mali fell into the hands of jihadists, parts of the population would most likely search refuge elsewhere. While the biggest part of migration from West Africa never leaves the African continent (RFI 2019), some would probably make their way to the old colonial power France, which has kept close ties with Mali since its independence. This would also raise the issue of terrorism, as jihadists might blend into the flux of migrants to make their way to Europe and execute attacks (Marshall 2021, 233-234). So, Mali quickly became "the new front in the global 'war on terrorism'" (Powers 2014, 121).

Opération Serval was only presented to the French parliament for debate after it had already started. Later, the French parliament was consulted only once during the first few years, namely when it had to authorise the extension of the intervention after the first four months. The approval for its extension was easy to achieve in the face of the clear military victory of *Serval*. With about 6000 French military members deployed, the intervention made important progress within days and was "a clear success, nearly perfect, like one learns on the school bench of a war school" (Vincent 2022a), with about 6000 French soldiers deployed and important progress within days. By April 2013, terrorism seemed to be contained, with very few terrorist cells left in the north (Normand 2019, 124; Vincent 2022a).

In spring of the same year, the French intervention finally received support. The involvement of neighbouring countries Burkina Faso and Niger, as well as Tchad, the European Union with its military training mission to Mali (EUTM) from February, and the UN

Security Council's deployment of its blue helmets (MINUSMA) from April, gave the French advances a push. The francophile Ibrahim Boubacar Keita won the Malian presidential elections in July and became an important partner for France (IEP 2022, 49; Vincent 2022a).

With the decision to prolong the intervention came the decision to change its name. While this was partly due to internal organisational and administrative considerations, some changes in the mandate and image concerns, it also had a lot to do with "a fierce concern to preserve the initial victory of 'Serval' and to isolate it from any possible future disappointments"[4] (Vincent 2022a). Born was *Opération Barkhane*, which started in August 2014 as a longer-lasting military intervention with a broader operation zone, extending from Mali all the way to Chad and Mauretania, including neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger (Marshall 2021, 235). According to Didier Castres (cited by Vincent 2022a), back then the chef of the Centre of planification and conduct of external operations, *Barkhane* needed to focus on four aspects: "Shutting down the flow of traffic to Libya, securing a genuine peace agreement between northern and southern Mali, securing real support from Algeria and tackling the problems of governance." Out of these four aims, none has ever been achieved.

The reverse of the military success story started in the same year. During the beginning phase of Barkhane, civil war broke out in Libya as a consequence of the instability caused by the French intervention in 2011. The French government was decidedly not interested in an American-style complete reconstruction of the state. Partly because it knew the pitfalls, partly out of worry of being connected to the heritage of *Françafrique*[5]. Instead, it attempted to restore the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa), fragilized by recurring or even structural problems with corruption and abuse (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022). In 2015, terrorist attacks in France and Europe put a stronger focus, nearly an obsession, on the fight against terrorism. The same year, the Algier peace agreements became a source of misunderstanding between the French and the Malians, who see the agreements as a fixed partition of their country, with Kidal deliberately left to the Tuareg rebels (Vincent 2022a).

When the centre of Mali was left behind with no state nor military presence, France did not intervene. Out of capacity and as not to meddle with ethnic conflicts, they deployed the military there for very few operations. As it is not customary for the army to reveal precise zones of intervention, the Malian government did not mention the absence of the FAMa in the region. Hence, jihadists had free rein to build their influence and found new armed groups like the Katiba Macina in 2015, now the main al-Qaeda branch in the Sahel, and the GSIM in 2017, only two months before the French presidential election (Vincent 2022a).

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[4] Own translation from French original: "un souci féroce de préserver la victoire initiale de « Serval » et de l'isoler de toutes les éventuelles déceptions futures."

[5] Françafrique is the concept of a post-colonial game of French influence on its previous colonies.

Under the new French president Emmanuel Macron, the focus of *Barkhane* shifted. The "neutralisation" of jihadists was no more considered a solution to the conflict, although the practice didn't stop. Instead, a cooperation with the French Agency for Development (AFD) started in 2018, with an AFD counsellor permanently attached to the intervention in order to support the securisation measures with development projects. Again out of fear of being accused of neocolonialism, the French administration made no publicity for this nor managed to impose conditions for its aid towards the Malian authorities. Away from public attention, France has invested, for example, various hundreds of millions of euros for a big part of electrification in southern Mali and the creation of a sanitary system in Bamako. Little has been done in the north, were jihadists take a share of project funding via tolls. In general, development aid processed slowly and workers on the ground increasingly worried for their security because of growing general dislike for Barkhane connections (Vincent 2022a).

Meanwhile, the cooperation with Sahelian military forces left room for improvement. Similar to the Malian army, their rather weak possibilities of action are paired with regular accusations of war crimes. In addition, European funding is coupled with administrative hindernisses which slow down or even block some deployments, as a *screening* needs to take place before operations can actually start as a measure of control (Vincent 2022a). The screening proved not to be very effective. The European Training Mission, for example, which included a class in international humanitarian rights and human rights in reaction to cases of abuse by the FAMa, is a "non-executive" mission (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022), which means that it does not accompany the soldiers on their missions. The resulting inability to control or follow the soldiers' progress on the field translates to shockingly high numbers of civilian deaths caused by the FAMa, namely 1000 since 2018, with a growing tendency. These extrajudicial killings by members of the Malian army are long considered as systematic by the United Nations (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022). Because of the close cooperation between the French military and the Sahelian and Malian forces, *Barkhane* sometimes seemed accomplice in the eyes of the Malian population (Vincent 2020; 2022).

In other cases, Barkhane itself was at the centre of such accusations. In January 2021, a French military airstrike on Bounty in the centre of Mali hit a wedding celebration and killed at least 22 people, out of which 19 were civilians (UN 2021). French authorities have neither admitted to the error nor arranged investigations (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022).

However, most of the difficulties France faced during the intervention were logistic. The long distances between the military posts or bases and the executed operations were further complicated by the scarce and run-down infrastructure. Because of the heat, the need for water increased significantly per person and needed to be transported towards the bases or the localities of the operations. The cooperation with regional armed forces meant very different levels of training, military resources and discipline among the ranks. Also,

environmental changes due to climate change further complicated the already harsh conditions for the operations and their planning (Vincent 2020).

Then, in 2019, considered the "annus horribilis" of *Barkhane*, the intervention received armed drones, multiplying the results (Vincent 2022a). However, the availability of these new means shifted the focus more to aerial operations, causing "an imbalance on the ground where JNIM and ISGS's face-to-face strategy is better at gaining support" (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 11). In novembre of the same year, the death of 13 French soldiers during a helicopter accident during an operation became *Barkhane*'s worst human bilan since the start. This changed the original consideration that this intervention had a relative or understandable body count (53 between 2013 and 2022) in relation to the dangerous nature of the mission. Following the accident, Macron increased the French troop strength on the ground from 4800 to 5100 soldiers and took initiative to gain more partners. Five European countries, Belgium, Danemark, Estonia, the Netherlands and Portugal, agreed to get involved in the form of the European Task Force *Takuba*. Lighter than a conventional unit, this was considered to be more precise and to have a better cost-effectiveness factor. At the same time, the focus of *Barkhane* and other interventions shifted towards the *three border region* to stop the spread of terrorism into neighbouring countries and the Gulf of Guinea, zone of high economic and geopolitical interest (Marshall 2021; Vincent 2022a).

In June 2020, the neutralisation of the historical founder of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel, by the French forces was celebrated as a big success. Observers consider that this would have been a good context to end *Opération Barkhane* before diplomatic tensions and public opinion got out of control (Vincent 2022a). France did not use the opportunity. The death of Droukdel gave way to a new chef of AQIM, Abu Ubaidah Youssef al-Annabi, proving that killing terrorist leaders can open the path to new, even more ruthless leaders (IEP 2022, 51). In fact, a *Le Monde* article in December 2020 states that the military successes had been plenty during the previous few months, but that terrorist capacities did not go back. Instead, they spread out even further, with six terrorist attacks in Ivory Coast (IEP 2022, 59; Vincent 2020). In consequence, criticism on the "military-first counterterrorism approach" of the French involvement seems reasonable. As Englebert and Lyammouri (2022, 9) put it:

> *While the Barkhane strategy addresses governance, justice, and development, these critical components of stabilization are more like afterthoughts, with French President Emmanuel Macron saying at the February 2021 summit that these efforts will be emphasized "once military victory is obtained."*

During the following two years of the intervention, the circumstances of the mission and the conditions on the ground only turned less favourable for the French forces and their Western partners. The end of *Barkhane* was only a matter of time.

2.3 A pandemic of coups d'Etat, and Wagner in the Sahel: The current situation

Civil society is at the frontline of the Malian conflict and the first one to suffer the consequences. More than 40 percent of the Malian population is assumed to live in extreme poverty, 1,2 million people in a situation of food insecurity. Since 2012, some 12.000 Malians have lost their lives during fights, due to direct violence against civilians and due to landmines (ECP 2022, 35-36). The centre and north of the country, where infrastructure is scarce, living conditions are especially harsh and numerous armed groups operate, civilians are especially affected. In the capital in the southeast, most people are barely affected and often lead rather normal daily lives. Yet, that's where one of the biggest displacement camps is located. By the end of 2021, 400.000 displaced people had registered, with 154.000 Malian refugees in bordering countries. At the same time, Mali hosts refugees from the conflict areas in neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger, where the situation is similar (ECP 2022, 35-38).

In fact, Burkina Faso (4th), Mali (7th) and Niger (8th) are among the ten countries most impacted by terrorism worldwide and among those, they are the ones which have experienced the most important deterioration since 2011 (IEP 2022, 19). But islamists are still expanding their influence. The declared aspiration of big jihadist groups in the Sahel is to gain access to important economic and political centres such as Dakar in Senegal and Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as to the Gulf of Guinea, a key hub to global trade, notably for oil and gas. This advance of jihadist groups is facilitated by the increase in political instability in the region (Bensimon, Ricard and Vincent 2022; Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 8).

At the same time, the *terrorist* approach leaves out of sight the reasons behind the affiliation of civilians to islamistic groups. This criminalises every member and collaborator in general, including those who see no other option for survival. As Vincent (2022) analyses, the growing influence of jihadist groups in the Malian centre from 2015 onwards is also a sign of a growing islamisation of Malian society, including elites and young people in Bamako, which has not been understood for a long time. Islamistic groups are not necessarily understood as violent perpetrators at the origin of all problems. In fact, the separatist aspirations of some Tuareg groups cause more general unease among the population (Bensimon 2022).

Thus, an increasing openness to dialogue with jihadists is perceived. This can be traced back to a long history of empires in the region, which has led to a "distinctive religious identity" (Tobie 2017, 11) with diverse interpretations of Islam present in the region. Especially the Fulani consider traditional customs and religion incompatible with "the secular state, considered to be a recent import" (Tobie 2017, 11) with state institutions judged illegitimate. Following this argumentation, local branches of jihadist groups, which often make use of this rethoric, seem like the lesser of two evils compared to the state.

In August 2020, persistent popular manifestations in Mali gave way to a military coup against the democratic government. French and other international diplomats and military first

welcomed the change, seeing in the new authorities competent military members with good knowledge of the security situation in their country. But the situation of poverty and no security did not change and once more the population voiced its discontentment. In May 2021, a second putsch, led by Assimi Goïta, who had already been responsible for the previous coup, toppled the first transitional government (ECP 2022, 96; Vincent 2022a). Under interim president Goïta and his prime minister Choguel Maïga, Mali started "a strategic reorientation in direction of Moscou" (Vincent 2022a) to the detriment of France. Among the Malian population, the new military junta and its actions are highly popular. This has incited similar popular uprisings which also led to celebrated military coups in Guinea in September 2021 and Burkina Faso in January 2022 (ECP 2022, 95-96; Vincent 2022a).

This time, however, international and regional actors condemned the Malian coup in a joint statement. Mali was suspended from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In autumn 2021 the transitional government voiced its intention to disrespect the timeline of elections, originally set for February 2022, due to security and organisational issues. Economic sanctions were inflicted on Mali and its borders closed (ECP 2022, 96; Tull 2022, 4), further worsening the humanitarian situation (Guterres 2022, 16/20).

Meanwhile, the military junta embarked on the very publicised prosecution of corruption among the previous political elite, which further weakened the population's trust in the democratic state system, its structures and actors. Diplomatic tensions with regional and Western partners increased. The growing political and economic isolation of Mali and the effective use of propaganda inside the country against the French, democracy and in favour of the junta, set the perfect ground for the arrival of a new actor (Delorme 2022; Tull 2022, 4).

In September 2021, rumours about a possible agreement between the Malian interim government and the Wagner group started (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 11). The group of Russian mercenaries is financed and led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close friend of Vladimir Putin. They have previously been deployed in Syria, the Central African Republic and Libya, among others, where they are accused of major human rights violations (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022). Although the Kremlin officially denies any connection to the Wagner group, it is firmly assumed that the latter acts in the direct interest of Putin (Vitkine 2019).

Only two months later, various sources announced the arrival of Russian military instructors and up to 1000 members of the Wagner group in Mali. The Malian authorities first denied this, then admitted to the presence of Russian instructors. The cooperation between the mercenaries and the Malian military forces has been criticised internationally and allegedly been especially violent in the fight against terrorism, with grave consequences for civilians (Delorme 2022; Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 11; Vincent 2022a).

3. Ending Barkhane: Geopolitical interests, public opinion and diplomatic tensions

On 17 February 2022, French president Emmanuel Macron announced the withdrawal of troops from Mali and the end of *Opération Barkhane*. The statement was the result of a long discussion the evening and night before with the presidents of Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Tchad, the European Council and government members of European nations. In his statement, Macron assured this would not mean an abandonment of the Sahel, as troops would be partly redeployed to neighbouring Niger (Bensimon, Ricard and Vincent 2022). Still, observers and military members saw in this step "the end of a strategic cycle" and the "death of a political, diplomatic and military utopia" (Vincent 2022a).

Less than a month later, the Nigerian journalist Seidik Abba (2022) published a book titled "Mali-Sahel, notre Afghanistan à nous ?". This comparison to the American failure in Afghanistan is a clear message that for him, the French intervention and its end had been a failure with a wide range of consequences. Abba analyses that the intervention failed due to the political blindness of French authorities and military leaders regarding the reasons for the advance of jihadists, society's worries and the frail state of democracy and justice in Mali.

The downward spiral of the intervention had been visible long before. Yet, Macron waited until February 2022 to announce its end. Geopolitical interests were one main reason behind this delay. *Barkhane* notably defended French security interests and the access to important natural resources, including for French state-owned companies (Gère 2013, 5; Marshall 2021, 247-249). Additionally, it originally stabilised a francophile government, which helped maintain historic influence in the region (Powers 2014, 119). The prevention of possible major migration which could reach Europe and the threat of terrorists using this context to enter the continent also mattered (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022): "If you can no longer go towards your opponent, he will come to you. It's an old principle" (Gère 2013, 5).

The Malian transitional government under president Assimi Goïta knows about these interests and uses them to stir up Malian society against the French (Tull 2022). With the argument, for example, that the French intervention only acted against the symptoms of the problem, not against its causes, and only got involved out of its proper interests, they hit too close to home (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022). In addition, the French government is strongly criticised for missing accountability concerning human rights violations by French military members, and for its incapability to protect civilians. In recent months, Malian civil society groups have repeatedly called for France to leave. An overall dislike of everything French has developed in the country (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 9-10). In France, public support for the intervention has also been weakening, mainly due to the increasing number of dead French soldiers (53 in total) in the last few years and the high financial cost of the mission (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022; Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 10).

Another issue is the credibility of French values and impositions. From the start, France had defined negotiations with islamistic groups as a clear red line which would lead to a direct end of its intervention. The Malian authorities crossed the line.[6] After successful local agreements between communities and jihadist groups in 2020 and 2021, the transitional government announced it would dialogue with jihadists on a bigger scale. *Barkhane* continued on (Englebert and Lyammouri 2022, 13; Tull 2022, 5; Vincent 2020; 2022).

Given the increasing French criticism of military coups in West Africa, the diplomatic acceptance of the one in Chad cost France additional credibility: The sudden death of dictator Idriss Deby, who had been a strategic partner of France during 30 years, gave way to a non-democratic shift of power to his son. France did not voice any criticism, probably due to its dependence on Chad's important strategic position for military matters in the Sahel. Only one month later, the coup in Mali was subject to direct French criticism, which set off a diplomatic downward spiral between France and Mali (Bensimon 2022; Vincent 2022a).

From there onwards, one diplomatic incident followed the next, and "[a]ll attempts on behalf of the French to find an honourable way out will be rejected one by one" (Vincent 2022a). *Barkhane* first was suspended, then announced to be reorganised with a decrease in its troop force in July 2021. The nations participating in Task Force Takuba were attacked verbally. Denmark was said to be present without Malian authorisation, which effectively was wrong. It didn't matter, Denmark pulled out and France had one European partner less. For France, every partner was crucial in order to not appear as the only intervenor, but part of a multilateral approach. The tone between both countries' authorities turned increasingly hostile. In January 2022, the Malian government declared the French ambassador a *persona non grata* after the French minister for foreign affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, had judged the Malian military junta to be "illegitimate" and "out of control" (Bensimon 2022; Vincent 2022a).

For the Malian authorities, the diplomatic quarrels were more of a game to test French limits and call out bluffs. There wasn't much to lose. Malian public opinion is on the junta's side and the security risk the conflict supposes for Western partners is well-known. "Instability and terrorist risks inevitably bind the partners to the country [which] undermines diplomatic pressure in the form of sanctions or withdrawal threats" (Tull 2022, 5). The Wagner group, which has been present in Mali since at least December 2021, serves as a security back-up for Goïta's government. At least for the moment. The support is limited to military measures and just as or even more connected to geopolitical interests as the French intervention. It is clear that Russian interests do not include further aliviation for Mali's pressing issues, as "[i]ts activities are more likely to serve to negotiate issues with the Europeans that have little to do

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[6] This imposition touches on the sovereignty of the Malian state, which should give its government the right to decide on its own with whom it negotiates or not. Even the French general Lecointre assumed that for peace in Mali, "a broad reconciliation beyond Western criteria" is unavoidable (Vincent 2020).

with Mali itself" (Tull 2022, 6). In the long run, it is clear that the military junta will not be able to maintain a favourable public opinion if it continues to isolate the country on an international and regional level. For France, the arrival of the Wagner group closed the "cycle of defiance" (Vincent 2022a) and finally served as the ultimate impulse to end the military engagement.

Concerning questions about an exit strategy for Barkhane, the French government has been rather evasive (Bensimon, Ricard and Vincent 2022). Already in 2020, French general François Lecointre, at the time head of the armed forces, admitted to not yet envisaging possible exit strategies, but warned that any exit needed to be done intelligently so as to not have the Russians or the Chinese "occupy the vacuum we'll have left" behind (Vincent 2020). Both are already the case, with the Russian mercenaries active on a military level and the Chinese providing financial support notably of 45,5 million US dollars "to the security and counterterrorism operations of the G5 Sahel Joint Force (IEP 2022, 51).

After already having handed over the bases in the north to the FAMa at the end of 2021, and the ones in Gossi and Ménaka in April and June 2022, the last French soldiers from the Gao base left Mali on 15 August. But the evacuation is not yet complete. As of July, 2500 out of the 5700 containers of material of *Barkhane* still needed to be brought out of Mali, while the majority of the remaining 3300 containers are in different neighbouring countries. Risky material has been flown out of Mali with the help of Germany, the US and private companies, but most containers are transported by land (Le Cam 2022; Vincent 2022b).

This poses a high security risk, as convois of about 70 vehicles with two containers each pass scarcely secured streets during five to ten days. Before the completed troop withdrawal, important material convois were escorted by members of *Barkhane*, the others by the armies of the countries they passed. Several convois have been hindered by protests, and the start of the rainy season supposes yet another risk for the transport. By September, Macron hopes, the reorganisation should be complete. Observers expect that the evacuation of material could last until January 2023, notably due to the difficulties listed above and fuel shortage linked to the war in Ukraine. Future centre of troop deployment, with about 1000 soldiers, is Niger, which already before hosted most of the air bases and drones and has been a partner during the last few years (Vincent 2022b). On a future air base in its capital Niamey, construction works on a French future air base started around December 2021 (Ministère des Armées 2022), long before the announcement of troop withdrawal from Mali.

In March 2022, observers got a first taste of the consequences of troop withdrawal from Mali. During various days, presumably the Malian and Russian military committed the massacre of Moura, the worst known crime of the whole conflict according to Human Rights Watch. On 27 March, the forces arrived in helicopters in the town in the Mopti region, where they tortured and executed hundreds of people. The MINUSMA, only 50 kilometres away, stayed inactive, incapable of stopping the massacre. A sign of the impotence of international

forces (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022; Delorme 2022). When the perpetrators of Moura had finished, they buried their victims in a mass grave under a thin layer of sand. Later, the military junta published videos of the "discovery" of the bodies and claimed that the French military was behind the crimes. The French authorities countered by spreading drone videos which presumably show how Russian and Malian military members bury the dead (Delorme 2022). The French foreign broadcast media Radio France Internationale (RFI) and France 24 were suspended after having presented this material and previously having reported on the abuse committed by the Malian national army (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022).

The massacre of Moura is the nightmare come true for the European Training Mission to Mali (EUTM). Originally under a mandate until May 2024, it had been suspended in February because of the presence of the Wagner group. European authorities feared there was a "risk that the EU trains soldiers that may later operate under the command of the Russian military" (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022). In effect, Russian instructors and paramilitary forces have already made use of their collaboration with the FAMa to strike a more violent and ruthless path in the fight against terrorism (Delorme 2022).

Another consequence of the end of *Barkhane* and *Takuba*, both announced the same day, is an increased security and operational problem for the remaining Western military missions in Mali. All present military interventions had been dependent on each other,[7] with the French forces notably providing protection and security to the other, often non-executive missions (Bensimon, Ricard and Vincent 2022). In reaction to Macron's February statement, German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock declared that the protection of EUTM could most probably not be assured (Gehrunger 2022). In April, the participating states decided to continue the mission, but limited it to human rights training, with the option of a quick exit in case the security situation gets worse (Guterres 2022, 8/20). It did get worse, as did the diplomatic quarrels. By August, the German government announced the suspension of its military involvement for EUTM and MINUSMA. The continuation of these two missions seems increasingly complex, maybe even infeasible (ZDFheute 2022).

For international observers, the risk of a "French Afghanistan" (Abba 2022) is realistic. The vast uncontrolled areas left behind will "present further challenges for counter-terrorism efforts" (IEP 2022, 26), "although the impact [of the security vacuum] will likely be felt differently depending on the areas concerned" (Guterres 2022, 9/20). Landmines regularly cause civilian and military victims. In May, Mali left the G5 Sahel, further isolating itself on the political and military level (Delorme 2022). The more complex long-term consequences of the failed French involvement and the actions of the Malian military junta are not yet predictable.

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[7] Already the risk of having the USA pull out of the Sahel region during the last few years worried Western forces, given the logistic and intelligence support they provided (Marshall 2021, 250, 254).

Part II - Theoretical basis for the campaign

4. The French parliament's role in military decision making

A number of researchers (see, for example, Peters 2018) insist that parliaments should play an important role in decision making about military interventions, including in the early evaluation of critical situations, political objectives and the preparation of the mission. This is especially demanded in case of cooperation between different countries. In France, "robust military interventions are a natural part of security politics" (Deitelhoff, Dembinski, Peters 2018), but the role of Parliament in this process is nearly nonexistent.

4.1 How decisions about military interventions are taken in France

The French Republic is organised as a rather centralised presidential system. The President is the head of state and directly elected by the population for a period of five years. He or she can only be reelected once (Constitution of the French Republic, Art. 6, 7). After his election, the President chooses a Prime Minister, who leads the action of the Government, is responsible for National Defence and the execution of laws (Constitution of the French Republic, Art. 8, 21). In order to pass laws, the President needs the approval of Parliament, which is composed of the National Assembly, the democratically elected legislative body, and the Senate, which represents the departments and is elected indirectly according to proportional representation. The Parliament mainly exercises a function of control and can overthrow the president by means of a vote of no confidence, although it is to be mentioned that the President also has the right to dissolve the National Assembly (Constitution of the French Republic, Art. 12, 21, 24; Le Monde 2022).

In line with this system, military decision making in France generally lies in the hands of one person: "The President of the Republic is the head of the armed forces. He presides over the higher councils and committees of the National Defence"[8] (Constitution de la République Française 2015, Article 15). From the compulsiveness of military service over the nation's role in NATO to foreign interventions, the President has the right to decide freely about his nation's military implications (Kempf 2017, 60-61). A recurring argument for this is that this assures the President's ability to act quickly in situations of threat (Gautier and Reiner 2016). Since the inauguration of the current constitution, nearly every French President has made use of this right, starting with Charles de Gaulle during the Algerian independence war from 1954 to 1962 (Guisnel 2022; Lewandowski 2022).

However, a broad constitutional reform was introduced in 2008 to reinforce the control function of Parliament, including a part which allowed the deputies to exercise a minimum of

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[8] Own translation from French original: "Le Président de la République est le chef des armées. Il préside les conseils et comités supérieurs de la Défense nationale."

control over the President's military strategy. After all, control over the Government is the main function of Parliament (Constitution of the French Republic, Art. 24). Article 35 of the Constitution now defines a need for parliamentary authorisation for war declarations. It further states that the Government is obliged to inform Parliament about its decision to start a military intervention at the latest three days after its start, including the objectives behind the operation. Yet, this session is purely informative: "This information can give way to a debate which is not followed by any vote"[9] (Constitution of the French Republic, Art. 35).

The first and only time the French Parliament has any say about the intervention is when the latter is supposed to exceed a duration of four months. In this case, the future of the troop deployment depends on the authorisation of the Parliament (Constitution of the French Republic, Art. 35). Given that no law defines the need for further parliamentary approval of the intervention after this initial authorisation, this one opportunity is crucial for Parliament (Kempf 2017, 60-61).

In addition to this, the President needs to cooperate with the Prime Minister, who is responsible for the Secretary of National Defence, the organism which provides the technical infrastructures for the intervention (Constitution of the French Republic, Art. 21; Kempf 2017, 61). When the President belongs to a different political party and ideology than the majority in the National Assembly, he usually chooses a Prime Minister from this party so as to not risk a dissolution of the Government by the National Assembly. Depending on the parties in power, this can mean an impasse, among others, for military decisions (Le Monde 2022).

In general, the President disposes of a personal staff of about 950 employees (Kempf 2017, 66). While this number includes employees for diverse functions, the importance of the military branch is reflected in these structures:

> *The most important employees are the political and military officials from the highest state corps. This group comprises about 50 people. They are among the most influential civil servants in France: they work in the General Secretariat of the President's Office, in the President's personal cabinet and in his personal military general staff (Kempf 2017, 66).[10]*

Hence, some of the President's most influential advisors are members of the military. This is especially significant when it comes to decisions about military interventions or any other kind of military action outside of the habitual field of action, as military structures play a main role in the feasibility of a potential troop deployment. This includes the available military

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[9] Own translation from French original: "Cette information peut donner lieu à un débat qui n'est suivi d'aucun vote."

[10] Own translation from German original: "Die wichtigsten Mitarbeiter sind die politischen und militärischen Beamten aus den höchsten Staatskorps. Diese Gruppe umfasst etwa 50 Personen. Sie gehören zu den einflussreichsten Staatsdienern Frankreichs: Sie wirken im Generalsekretariat des Präsidialamtes, im persönlichen Kabinett des Staatspräsidenten und in seinem persönlichen militärischen Generalstab."

means and their adaptability to the terrain, which can complicate the realisation of the intervention and the achievement of its objectives (Prieur 2021, 190). The President therefore depends to an important extent on military expertise for his decision.

Inside the military, decision making is based on a fixed structure. Similar to ministry departments, it follows a *functional* organisation model. Military functions are called *silos* and all include their own complexities and ressources, which are often only known in their total to the functional chef of each silo. Thus, the evaluation of available means and expertise for military action requires a rather complex, but organised process (Prieur 2021, 191-192).

When a military decision needs to be taken, a military general regroups between six and 60 general staff officers in a military operational centre (Centre opérationnel, CO). A CO can be of permanent or temporary nature and is composed of thematic cells, for example the *cell of means and resources*, or the *cell of anticipation of future manoeuvres*. Each cell has an assigned chef with his own team of counsellors and experts. The principal task of a CO is to answer four groups of questions needed for decision making (Prieur 2021, 191):

1. What is the situation about? What exactly is the nature and the severity of it?
2. Which kind of action and/or solution is possible?
3. Which means are available for this potential action? How and with whom can the action take place?
4. And afterwards: Which effects might the action have? What are the consequences?[11]

The CO and its respective cells work in three phases. First, they do an analysis, in which they gather all the elements needed to understand the origin of the crisis and deduct possible consequences, difficulties and constraints. During this phase, a first list of potential actions with their general framework, favourable and unfavourable factors is established. Secondly, possible solutions with their advantages, disadvantages and risks are reviewed. Lastly, the decision on the actions is taken in a plenary reunion and passed on to the general, who can freely add criteria to the actions. During their execution, the actors on the field usually have a certain margin (Prieur 2021, 192). While this is the general organisation model of the French military, applied to any situation of crisis, it contains the main factors and questions to be considered before the start of any troop deployment in a foreign country, including an analysis of possible consequences and an evaluation of how the situation might evolve with or without the intervention.

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[11] Open summary of the questions mentioned by Prieur (2021, 191).

Joël Prieur, former Commander of the Paris Fire Brigade (2007-2010) and Secretary General of the National Council for Civil Protection, criticises the absence of this kind of organised strategic thinking among French ministers:

> *I have taken part in crisis meetings in ministerial or interministerial formation, and I have always been struck by the lack of interest in the question of 'how?'. The answer to this question, which is essential in the military method, is too often to pass on to the silos the responsibility for implementation without always questioning the feasibility of the decisions taken at the meeting. In France, the will of the executive is communicated to the competent administrations, where 'everyone knows what to do', and from where the solution on the ground will spring (Prieur 2021, 193).[12]*

To sum it up, military decision making in France lies mainly in the hands of the President, who depends notably on the Prime Minister and military structures to execute an intervention. The Parliament only plays a role once in the process, if the Government aims to prolong the deployment after the initial four months. Compared to one of France's main partners in international affairs, including military strategy, this leaves room for improvement: In Germany, the Parliament plays the main role in military decision making and usually has to be consulted once a year for the prolongation of an intervention, which is not the country's principal go-to method in situations of conflict. At the same time, Germany depends rather strongly on France. Due to the low influence of the French Parliament on the Hexagon's military decisions, this might have a negative impact on the trust in and support for partner missions among the German public (Gehrunger 2022).

4.2 The role of commissions in the French Parliament

The French Parliament can form different types of commissions in order to fulfil its control function of the Government. The right to form research commissions is specified in the Constitution (Art. 51-2). The role of these research commissions, which can be created within each Assembly, is to conduct analyses, gather information and make recommendations. However, their work is limited to a maximum duration of six months, and opposition parties are allowed to form only one research commission per year (Assemblée Nationale 2022).

Different from these research commissions, Parliament disposes of eight permanent commissions, which examine and prepare legislative articles for debate in the parliamentary sessions. Each member of Parliament is obliged to participate in one of these commissions.

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[12] Own translation from French original: "J'ai participé à des réunions de crise en formation ministérielle ou interministérielle, et j'ai à chaque fois été frappé par le peu d'intérêt accordé à la question du 'comment ?'. La réponse à cette question, pourtant essentielle dans la méthode militaire, consiste trop souvent à renvoyer aux silos la responsabilité de la mise en oeuvre sans toujours s'interroger sur la faisabilité des décisions prises en réunion. La volonté de l'exécutif est, en France, communiquée aux administrations compétentes, où 'chacun sait ce qu'il doit faire', et d'où jaillira la solution sur le terrain."

The work of a commission consists of organising hearings of experts, ministers and external actors, publishing informational reports and forming so-called informational missions, which are similar to the concept of research commissions (Assemblée Nationale 2022).

Each permanent commission has its own field of expertise. For the present paper, two of them are of interest: Firstly, the Commission on Foreign Affairs, which focuses on international non-military topics, cooperation and development, currently composed of 72 members (42 men, 30 women) and presided by Jean-Luis Bourlanges (Mouvement Démocrate). This commission notably works on the prevention of escalations of conflict and on good relations to other countries. Secondly, there is the Commission on National Defence and the Armed Forces, which is responsible for military topics and escalated conflicts as well as for everything concerning the French military. It is currently composed of 69 members (44 men, 25 women) and presided by Thomas Gassiloud (Rénaissance). Previously, the head of this commission was Françoise Dumas, a member of the presidential party (Assemblée Nationale 2022). There is no information on a potential focus group about exit strategies.

4.3 Ethics of an intervention - taking the responsibility for its end

Generally speaking, ethics assess actions of individual human beings in regard to their objectives, arguments and consequences. The aim is to evaluate whether those actions are "adequate" (Moliner 2018, 6), and provide orientation for future actions. Naturally, there can be no such thing as a perfect action or an exact guide. Thus, this ethical evaluation always weighs up the action against its alternatives (Moliner 2018, 11).

While the field of military ethics is not new, there is no generally accepted definition of it, nor specifications about the thematics it covers. This gives way to a broad interpretation and various adaptations of the term in conferences and literature (Cook and Syse 2010, 119). Meanwhile, ethics of intervention are an even more peripheric concept which is yet to be discussed on a bigger and more complete scale.

In an essay for the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE), the retired Air Force Major General Juan Antonio Moliner attempts to define military ethics. According to Moliner (2018, 13), the concept first came up at the end of the Cold War and with the growing tendency of implication in military interventions for peacekeeping and humanitarian objectives, which were different to the previous concept of war. The importance of military ethics stems from the nature of the profession. As the military is one of the few fields of work which include the authorised use of weapons, ethical and legal frameworks are needed to ensure responsible and regulated action of military personnel (AEME 2021).

Nowadays, military ethics have turned into an increasingly flexible term, spanning from theoretical clarifications of military terms to religious considerations. The way Cook and Syse (2010) see it, military ethics are mostly needed to serve those working in the field, as "its core

function is to assist those professions to think through the moral challenges and dilemmas inherent in their professional activity" (119). With the rise of new technologies in warfare and changing forms of armed conflict, which raise new questions about legal and ethical implications, military ethics have been especially set in value (Moliner 2018, 6-11).

However, ethics should not be confused with rights and laws: The *military code of values and principles[13]*, for example, which guides soldiers in their actions and behaviour according to military ethics, does not equal any set of rights. At the same time, Moliner considers that notably the International Humanitarian Rights, which are supposed to limit human suffering caused by war, should be considered as "moral[14] rules of war"[15] (Moliner 2018, 7) in military ethics. As Cook and Syse (2010) argue, however, ethics should be used for a critical assessment of laws. In quickly changing circumstances, notably the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) "necessarily lags behind and requires reinterpretation so as to remain relevant and useful in guiding that changing activity" (120-121).

In Europe, various centres and organisations reflect on military ethics. In 2011, the International Society for Military Ethics in Europe (Euro-ISME)[16], the European chapter of a 2005 non-profit organisation in the United States, was registered in France to conduct research and provide guidance on behavioural norms in European defence. Various academic journals, for example the E-journal "Ethics and Armed Forces"[17], aim to reinforce critical reflections on current ethical issues among the military. Even educational resources are available. The United Nations Peace Operations Training Institute offers various training resources, a number of which is accessible to the interested public. While this material is not limited to military ethics, it includes a course about this topic which delves into cultural awareness, child protection and human rights in peace operations.[18] Finally, the King's College in London has set up a Centre for Military Ethics[19], which focuses on providing training material and a selection of interesting websites and resources about military ethics.

The latter stands out from all of the organisations mentioned above, as its learning resources include a topic which is rarely considered in military ethics. Under the title "Jus post bellum: Ending War and Ending Wars Well"[20], the centre offers a module which addresses the questions of how wars end and which responsibilities this implies for the winning force towards the affected population. However, the course focuses mainly on the traditional type of war

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[13] Own translation from Spanish original: "código militar de valores y principios".

[14] The moral is an individual's set of values which evolves with time and society (Moliner 2018, 6-7).

[15] Own translation from Spanish original: "reglas morales de la guerra".

[16] More information on the organisation's website: https://www.euroisme.eu/index.php/en/.

[17] More information: http://www.ethikundmilitaer.de/en/das-e-journal/ueber-das-e-journal/.

[18] The free guide is available on the course website: https://www.peaceopstraining.org/courses/ethics-in-peace-operations-english-2019/.

[19] More information and access to the courses on the centre's website: https://militaryethics.uk/en/.

[20] Access to the course: https://militaryethics.uk/de/course/jus-post-bellum.

between two or more sovereign states. Although Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has clearly demonstrated that this type of war still exists after all, most armed conflicts of our times have surpassed this approach. The *modern war* is not declared as such, has multiple actors, victims and means of combat, including so-called terrorism, technology and geopolitical power games. External actors intervene and the exact territory of war is difficult to determine (París 2009, 129; Pozo 2010, 178-190). In line with Vincent Martínez Guzman (2001), Alejandro Pozo (2010, 150-167) argues that the main cause of civilian suffering is structural violence, which causes more victims than war itself.

Accordingly, the military approach has shifted towards intervention politics. A military intervention is the deployment of troops on foreign territory. While this normally includes the use of force in order to achieve military, political and economic objectives, it can also succeed in the form of a United Nations so-called peacekeeping operation. The international military and police personnel of those operations are only allowed to use weapon force in order to protect themselves or the civil population. The aim is to stabilise the nation of deployment and ensure the respect of human rights (Martínez Guzmán 2001, 238-239). Whatever the objective of an intervention, its ethics are a very specific subcategory of military ethics, as every intervention includes the decision to "go in", as well as risks for the deployed personnel on the ground, dependencies on possible partner forces (Guterres 2022, 9/20) and the national government, and long-term responsibilities during and after troop withdrawal.

Most authors on ethics of intervention lay their main focus on the legitimacy of the decision to start a military intervention, as the case for Alejandro Pozo (2010, 299-303) and Juan Moliner (2018, 9-13). In his article about the ethics of the French intervention in Mali, Gerard Powers (2014), director of Catholic Peacebuilding Studies in the United States, falls into the same pattern when questioning the legitimacy of the French intervention in Mali. With the help of four approaches to intervention ethics, Powers discusses the justifications behind the decision to start the military intervention in 2013.

The importance of this focus on the decision to deploy troops is connected to international law, as illegitimate interventions can and need to be brought to court. As Powers specifies, according to international law, an intervention can only be legitimate on invitation by a legitimate national government in the case of internal unrest (Powers 2014, 120). A transitional government like the Malian one which extended an official invitation to France in December 2012 is considered legitimate if it is recognized by international bodies like the African Union and the United Nations, which was the case for Mali. Hence, in international law, *Operation Serval* can be considered to be a rather legitimate intervention because it followed the invitation by a "legitimate government against disparate threats posed by Muslim extremists and Tuareg separatists" (Powers 2014, 119).

Intervention ethics, however, go further. Following the possible paths of reasoning used by responsible politicians, they take a look at typical arguments for military action on foreign territory. Powers (2014, 119-120) sums up the four main approaches of intervention ethics, all focused on the legitimacy of starting a military operation:

1. *Moral sceptics.* An intervention must be in the deploying nation's own interest. In the case of Mali, this includes the protection of "some 6,000 French nationals as well as French interests, including access to uranium in neighbouring Niger" (119), or the justification of the intervention as an "act of collective self-defense or collective security in a regional and global war on terror" (119) like in Afghanistan.

2. *Ethics of sovereignty.* In line with international law, the concept of sovereignty ought to protect weak states from foreign interventions. Although this does not completely exclude the possibility of intervention, any intention of military deployment must be preceded by a clear governmental invitation. Given the history of coup d'etats in Mali, considering the nation a failed state would be a way to circumvent this regulation. The colonial history also leaves some uncertainties regarding the (Tuareg's) right to secession, as the current borders were imposed on the ethnic groups of the region (122-123).

3. *Ethics of peace and security.* Protecting the international order is of principal importance and mainly the responsibility of the United Nations. Following this approach, "intervention may also be a duty" (121). For the French intervention in Mali, Powers argues that it might have been "an obligation to address the unintended consequences of the NATO intervention in Libya" (121) in 2011.

4. *Ethics of human rights and the common good.* This cosmopolitan approach places the protection of human rights over the rights of the sovereign state. Consequently, the intervention must put all its efforts into the protection of communities affected by conflict and instabilities. When this justification is used, the troop deployment is usually referred to as a "humanitarian intervention" (119) to protect civilians against extremists.

All these approaches, Powers admits, can "overshadow the deeper roots of the conflicts and the need to address legitimate, long-standing grievances" and tend to "privilege military over political solutions" (Powers 2014, 122).

Additionally, these approaches of intervention ethics are limited to the initial decision to start an intervention and leave out of sight the preceding escalation of the conflict as well as the responsibilities and consequences during and after troop deployment. Military interventions can also be seen as a sign of previous unwillingness to prevent conflicts from

escalating into violence. The UNESCO Chair for Peace at the Universitat Jaume I considers that an escalated conflict is the result of ignored warning signs like poverty, food insecurity, repeated ethnic tensions and privation of basic necessities. Causes which, in turn, are increased by armed conflict (Paris Albert 2009, 126). Following this argumentation, every military intervention is obsolete in the case of previous non-military interventions.

If a military intervention takes place, the dependencies it creates entail a number of responsibilities during and after troop deployment. The ethics of human rights and common good approach, for example, translates to a clear responsibility to actively work on the resilience of the communities to take matters into their own hands and transform the cause of the threat in the long term. This is part of the responsibility to protect, which applies if an intervention is in place: "If France had a right to intervene in Mali, it had a duty to do so in a way that subordinated its own soldiers' security and France's own interests to the security and needs of the Mali people" (Powers 2014, 124).

The ethics of sovereignty approach, if taken further, should imply a responsibility for existing interventions to build up or reinforce necessary state structures before ending the intervention. As the military controls or constructs certain structures during the intervention, a weakened state is likely to be unable to fill the void once the troop withdrawal is complete.

At the same time, military interventions, by nature, entail violence. Especially civilian deaths, which responsible governments like to refer to as "collateral damage", provoke more violence. In Mali, this takes place in the form of civilians deciding to join or support armed groups for revenge, out of grievance or even for defence (IEP 2022, 17). There is a high risk that this turns into a vicious cycle. The spiral of violence increases the vulnerabilities of local communities and, along with this, the responsibility to protect. The longer an intervention lasts, the stronger the dependence on the foreign forces, and the harder it is to end the military engagement. Thus, a withdrawal must be well prepared. Powers recognizes the importance of discussing the "ethic of exit for interveners and norms for post-conflict reconciliation" in "Mali-type interventions" (Powers 2014, 124), but does not delve into the topic.

Already in 2002, researcher Brian Orend criticised the absence of regulations and a debate about the ending phase of armed conflict and its ethics, crucial for the prevention of a relapse into the pattern of violence. Having said this, the end of a military intervention does not equal the end of the armed conflict. Similar to Afghanistan in 2021, the end of the military operation in Mali succeeds in the context of expanding violence and armed group activity. Depending on the applied exit strategy, the end of a military intervention in this context can have dire long-term consequences. Thus, the end of a military intervention is, by far, not the end of all responsibilities. On the contrary, ethics of intervention should clearly include moral obligations for intervening nations to rigorously prepare the troop withdrawal and take non-military measures to stabilise the concerned nation, its structures and communities.

5. Exit strategies

Military interventions are expensive. They cost a lot of money, material, diplomatic and mediatic effort and, most importantly, human lives. When a military intervention has achieved its political and strategic objectives or turned out to be a failure, the intervening nation's government "holds a vital interest in bringing that operation to an end as quickly as possible" (Bame 2001, 48), usually while maintaining some sort of presence for geopolitical reasons.

However, leaving is not easy. Ending an intervention is a complex task, which includes plenty of risks and challenges. Military bases need to be evacuated and freed of sensibel material, technology and intelligence, before they are handed over to the national army. Local staff need to be instructed and possibly offered protection, if the security situation in the country of deployment is not stable. International NGOs and possible partner forces on the ground which previously depended on protection by the intervention troops need an alternative source of security. Soldiers and material need to be brought out of the country, which can be a logistic and security challenge. All of this happens in changing circumstances on the ground, which are rarely ideal. A badly executed exit can turn the mission into a resounding failure. Well-planned military exit strategies are key to preventing this.

5.1 Definition and when, how and by whom they are decided on

The United States military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 has turned into a globally known negative example of an exit from a military intervention. Decision makers failed to take the warning signs of the quick territory gains of the Taliban seriously. When the latter finally took over the Afghan capital Kabul on 15 August 2021, Western military forces started a hasty and majorly chaotic evacuation of their personnel and local employees in danger of persecution by the Taliban. Up to date, many of the asylum seeking local staff are still in the country and in danger for what the Taliban consider cooperation with the enemy (Tagesschau 2022). Technology and intelligence left behind by US soldiers, including a database of all local collaborators, pose an additional risk (Andrzejewski 2021; Bajak 2021).

All of this marked the end of what is referred to as "America's longest war" (Foreign Affairs 2021), an intervention which lasted a total of 20 years, and cost the United States about one trillion dollars and the lives of more than 2000 of its soldiers. The Afghan population suffered more losses, covered by the term *collateral damage* (Foreign Affairs 2021). In combination with the failed exit and its consequences[21] for the population, this leaves room to question the intervention as a whole. The way researcher Thorsten Gromes (2021) sees it, no exit can save a failed mission, but a bad and hasty exit can reverse previous achievements and success. This can not only make the initial intervention obsolete, but go so far as to make

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[21] For possible consequences of failed exit strategies, see chapter 5.2.

it seem more harmful than it might have done good. The US-American researcher and ex-soldier in Afghanistan (2007-2009) Adam Wunische (2019) brings it to the point: "The best way to ensure a speedy exit from a war is to have never intervened in the first place. The second-best option is to have an exit strategy."

It is in fact harder to leave a war than to get in one. Given that the presence of foreign military in any territory weakened by armed conflict creates dependencies and structures which the affected states struggle to fill, ideal conditions for an exit do not exist: "Persistent insecurity and inadequate nation-building make it seem as though the potential risks of leaving are too great to abandon" (Kampf 2019).

How can an exit strategy help? In a nutshell, exit strategies are the planning of military "disengagement, transition, and ultimate withdrawal from a location" (Kampf 2019). The main aim of this is to prevent a post-intervention relapse of the conflict into the original or new forms of violence and to preserve military, diplomatic and strategic achievements. While exit strategies include exit tactics like the logistics behind the withdrawal of personnel and equipment, this is only a small part of the strategy. In theory, they are supposed to set clear political and strategic objectives and strategies for the mission to prevent them from spiralling into endless wars (Gromes 2021; Wunische 2019).

The parts of exit strategies that are usually made public tend to be mainly concentrated on costs and timelines. These are limited exit strategies which focus on *end dates*, meaning fixed deadlines which are supposed to facilitate the planning of the mission and ensure the timely achievement of the objectives. Complete exit strategies are more oriented towards *end states*, meaning political objectives and benchmarks for necessary achievements and conditions for change (Gromes 2021). The best moment to start working on exit strategies is before the start of the intervention. In the best case scenario, this gives an impulse to evaluate beforehand how realistic and useful a military solution is in order to achieve the objectives. As Wunische (2019) puts it:

> *Developing an exit strategy before the war begins allows us to make a more informed decision as to the value and worthiness of actually engaging in the war in the first place. It also allows us to reasonably assess if the war can achieve its aims at all. If you're unable to develop an acceptable exit strategy before chaos, you will most likely not find an acceptable exit strategy during chaos, and chaos doesn't often resolve itself.*

In the last 70 years, reflections about possible exit strategies have rarely preceded military interventions (Wunische 2019). Critics like David Kampf (2019), senior fellow for strategic studies in the United States, argue that planning for the exit before the final phase of an intervention is unrealistic because of the "uncertainty and intractable nature of war". Others counter that this complexity and unforeseeability do not impede a "more informed planning for

exit" (Caplan 2012, 111). Kampf's argumentation leaves out of sight that strategies are adaptable with the advancing and changing situation on the ground. Instead of providing exact static planning which needs to be executed in detail, exit strategies need to be updated continuously with the evolving circumstances. This "forces planners to prioritize interests, anticipate counter-strategies, and make tough choices" (Wunische 2019) from the very beginning. Together with the political objectives, the exit strategy has an influence on the remaining parts of the mission, as each phase of the intervention is closely interrelated. Despite the characteristic complexity of armed conflict which impedes realistic planning, strategy is vital for the legitimacy of the intervention: "Without strategy guiding our action in war, it is nothing more than violence for its own sake" (Wunische 2019).

For the political opposition and activists in the nation which sends its troops, exit strategies are important in order to judge the costs and benefits of the planned intervention and the legitimacy of its political objectives (Gromes 2021; Wunische 2019). Especially when a nation considers to participate in another nation's intervention, this serves as a form of reassurance: "The call for an elaborated exit strategy is driven by the concern of being dragged into interventions that take a long time, cost a lot of money and yet fail to achieve their goals"[22] (Gromes 2021).

In the past, political and military leaders have misused exit strategies as "a political tool for selling a war in advance" (Kampf 2019). By presenting a deliberately pimped strategy, interventions were sold as quick and easy operations with easily achievable objectives. This provided a free ticket for the execution of military deployments even when non-military alternatives might have been available (Bame 2001, 2).

Therefore, exit strategies are sometimes misunderstood as the belief in and pushing for quick, simple and decisive operations and immediate withdrawal afterwards. In the same argumentation, they suppose a distraction from the initial phases of combat, or the risk that opponents in the country of intervention might just wait out the fixed end date to regain control (Gromes 2021; Kampf 2019). These interpretations fail to consider the more complex characteristics of exit strategies. Moreover, the publicly articulated strategy is different to internal military strategy which aims to "insure a war is fought justly and decisively with as minimal destruction as possible" (Wunische 2019). This includes long-term measures for the conservation of a mission's achievements and diplomatic or developmental efforts for post-intervention stability. It should also prevent the intervention from turning into a constant on which all national or regional structures depend. "Endless conflicts", Wunische (2019) believes, "are enabled by the fact that the right conditions for withdrawal are never apparent".

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[22] Own translation from German original: "Den Ruf nach einer ausgearbeiteten Exit-Strategie treibt die Sorge an, man lasse sich in Interventionen hineinziehen, die lange dauern, hohe Kosten verursachen und doch die gesteckten Ziele verfehlen."

5.2 Consequences of a failed or missing exit strategy

The consequences of failed or completely absent exit strategies are diverse and differ from case to case. Although it might seem obvious, the first consequence of this is a badly executed exit, often following a prolonged stay. Staying longer than absolutely necessary increases the financial and human costs of the intervention. According to Wunische (2019), the same goes for levels of violence:

> *If we know nothing else about war and conflict (especially in the modern era), it's that the longer an occupying country leaves its forces the more violence it incites and the more difficult an exit will become. History has not been favorable to occupations and counterinsurgencies since around the 1880s.*

Seemingly endless military interventions risk causing a loss of perspective, which further complicates the withdrawal (Kampf 2019; Wunische 2019). Apart from the costs and effort a long military intervention supposes for the deploying nation, this is also highly problematic to the affected region or nation. Every foreign troop deployment changes structures and creates dependencies on the ground which did not exist prior to this new military presence. In many cases, the intervening military provides logistical and security support to non-governmental, medical or humanitarian organisations and international media, provides working opportunities for locals on and around their bases and documents violations of fundamental rights (Cohen 2012; Peters 2018). None of these activities and structures are irreplaceable, but finding and implementing reliable non-military alternatives takes time.

If the withdrawal is too hasty and unprepared, various scenarios are possible. Firstly, the sudden void caused by this might be filled by other actors with harmful intentions. In Afghanistan, this was the case with the Taliban. In Mali, the Russian mercenaries of the Wagner group seem to be on the best way to do the same (Vincent 2022a). Depending on what the intervening forces leave behind, these actors might use the ex-intervening force's installations, weapons, technology and intelligence at the expense of civil society or other involved actors, as is the case in Afghanistan (Andrzejewski 2021; Bajak 2021). In Mali, the close cooperation of the Wagner group with the national army, previously trained by the Western forces, additionally allows the mercenaries an insight into their Western opponents' tactics and combat strategies (Brillaud, Eliassen and Miñano 2022).

Secondly, many military interventions nowadays are executed in cooperation with partner forces or alongside other military interventions. Mali is a good example for this, as the French *Opération Barkhane* worked in close cooperation with the European *Task Force Takuba*, the European Training Mission (EUTM) and the United Nations peacekeeping operation MINUSMA, and profited from shared intelligence of the United States (Marshall 2021, 250, 254). This cooperation naturally leads to dependencies between the different

interventions, as it includes shared tasks and activities. If one or various partner forces pull out, the remaining interventions need to be reorganised to ensure their ability to keep operating under the changed circumstances (Guterres 2022, 9/20). In Mali, the end of *Opération Barkhane* and *Takuba* set off a chain reaction. It led to a slightly delayed suspension of the German participation in the EUTM and the MINUSMA. This, in turn, is estimated to complicate the continuation of these two missions, already in a complex situation due to the retreat of the French, the presence of the Wagner group and diplomatic tensions with the Malian transitional government (ZDFheute 2022).

Thirdly, a chaotic withdrawal may result in the collapse of certain security structures, citizens left behind and a sense of abandonment among the local population (Borger 2021; Von Bebenburg 2022). This contains the risk that the concerned country might "further fracture into civil war" (Borger 2021). In consequence, previous achievements of the foreign intervention might be completely reversed. While the affected country would suffer the grave consequences of civil war, this should also not be in the interest of the intervening nation, as the latter would be affected by "reputational damage" (Borger 2021).

In order to prevent this and other consequences of badly executed troop withdrawal, the option of keeping some military presence on the ground tends to be discussed. This stems from the belief that exit is not always the best strategy and might actually help to prevent a short-term fall-back into the original armed conflict situation (Gromes 2021). However, this is counterproductive for any attempt to overcome the discussed dependencies. There are more suitable tools for this task, namely diplomatic, economic or development ones (Von Bebenburg 2022; Wunische 2019).

Part III - The campaign

6. Organising the campaign

In this third part, I will specify the planned public awareness campaign, which forms the main part of this project thesis. The campaign is based on the theoretical content of the second part of this paper.

6.1 The objective of the campaign

When the exit from a military intervention like the US-led one in Afghanistan fails, public attention shifts to focus mainly on the consequences of the failure for soldiers, local employees and cooperators, and especially for civilians. Activists, journalists, the political opposition, non-governmental organisations and others observe closely which military action or inaction has what kind of impact in the receiving country and voice critique and protest.

Even if the end of *Opération Barkhane* does not turn out to be a complete failure, it is most likely that French society will pay close attention to the aftermath. The public campaign proposed in the present paper aims to use this focus and the news and audio-visual material published in the process to create awareness for the importance of exit strategies.

The objective of the campaign is, in the long run, to commit the National Assembly to introduce a new designated research group under the wing of the Commission on National Defence and the Armed Forces. Composed of experts of military strategies, members of non-governmental organisations and politicians with a background in international affairs and military matters, the task of this commission should be to discuss possible scenarios under which current military interventions might end. It should then elaborate strategies adapted to the changing context of the mission and the security situation on the ground. Especially for the French Parliament's one-time opportunity to vote about the continuation of a military intervention after the initial four months, the work of the research group is thought to help evaluate how realistic the mission is, if the political objectives are achievable and whether the long-term situation allows for lasting positive changes in the country of intervention.

By favouring this critical reflection, the public campaign aims to prevent future failures of military withdrawals, including all the consequences they suppose for the country of intervention, civil society, human rights and, in the broader sense, for France: *Opération Barkhane* has had a strong negative impact on the public opinion in Mali about France, French companies and symbols, and the French in general. While both countries used to have a relatively strong connection following the Malian independence from the colonial power France, the security situation outside of Bamako is by now too dangerous for French nationals to freely move around. A collaboration with a French university for the development of the campaign also provides up to ten master's students the opportunity to gain practical experience in the field of activism for peace and learn about consequences of military action.

6.2 Planned activities and target audience

In order to achieve the objectives stated above, the campaign will be composed of various activities. First of all, the planification requires a definition of the target audience. Although the ideal case would be to reach all parts of society and thereby achieve the maximum of pressure on politicians, this is not realistic under the given circumstances, described in more detail in chapter 6.4. The main target audience is therefore selected according to the expected level of interest and receptiveness for the topic.

The objective of the campaign requires the following characteristics:
- *Political system in France*: basic political knowledge required to understand the existing military decision making process, as well as the political institutions and posts involved.
- *Nature of military interventions and their ethics*: understand the dangers and responsibilities behind a military intervention, dispose of the ability to question established structures.
- *Interest in foreign countries*: as the example used for the campaign is the intervention in the Sahel, a certain interest in countries and cultures outside of France should be given.
- *Interest in the news*: the problematics in the case of Mali are more likely to be understood and thought about if the person has followed to a certain amount the news and has already heard about the intervention and its challenges.
- *Ability to take action*: the target audience should fulfil the legal requirements and the technological capacities to get active in France, for example in online petitions or on social media.

Combining these factors, the main target audience is aged between 18 and 65 years, of French nationality or with a permanent French residence, politically interested and disposes of a minimum level of general education. It includes all genders.

Based on this main target audience, the campaign will be based on three main areas of action. The first two are aimed at achieving a maximum of awareness for the addressed topic of the importance of exit strategies. The third aims to use the outcome of the first two in order to make people pass to action and achieve the creation of a permanent commission.

1. Production of audiovisual content and short informational material (eye-catching pictures and graphics with short written information) for the diffusion on social media. For this, social media channels will be created, where users can find more information and the link to a website (also to be set up) and the

petition (see below). A popular hashtag will be created for the campaign and used in every social media post for more visibility.

2. Non-governmental organisations with similar interests and local, regional and national media outlets (including TV, radio, print and online) will be contacted for possible cooperation. Partner NGOs can use their platforms and influence to diffuse the material produced in point 1, and might provide financial, personnel or technical aid to the campaign. Media outlets might be open to publishing guest articles. They might also be interested in interviews about the situation in Mali and the consequences of the French troop withdrawal. Especially in the beginning of the campaign, smaller media outlets are more likely to be interested in both options.

3. As soon as the campaign has gained some public attention, start a petition for the implementation of a permanent commission as described before. In France, petitions can be uploaded and signed directly on a sub-website of the National Assembly[23]. If a petition manages to collect 100.000 signatures, it is published on the Assembly's main website. However, as specified in the general conditions of the website, only French nationals or people who regularly live in France are allowed to upload and sign a petition. Another option is the online platform for petitions in European member states *Open Petition[24]*. The advantage of this initiative is that it provides help and clear instructions to initiators of petitions. Unlike the first option, *Open Petition* is open to everyone who respects democratic values and acts in public interest.

All three pillars of action for the campaign are closely connected, as the audiovisual and information material is to be used mainly on social media but can be useful for the other two types of activity. Social media and the cooperation with NGOs and media outlets are also important for the success of the petition. Most important for the success of the campaign is a high level of visibility.

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[23] More information and already published petitions on https://petitions.assemblee-nationale.fr/.
[24] More information and already published petitions on https://www.openpetition.eu/ratgeber.

6.3 Preparation of the campaign

For a public awareness campaign which depends on its visibility and credibility, the most important part of the process surely is the preparation of the campaign. Used information has to be correct and comprehensive to a broad public, the public appearance must be easy to find and media outlets and organisations need to be contacted to support the campaign by spreading the word.

6.3.1 Finding support for the campaign

Especially due to the limitations in financiation[25] and personnel[26], the success of the campaign depends on external support. In order to stem the workload of the planned activities in the foreseen timeframe[27], a cooperation with the Master's program "Géostratégie, défense et sécurité internationale"[28] of the French University Aix-en-Provence will take place. First and second year's master students will be offered the opportunity to join an intensive optional seminar in which they will learn to plan and lead a public awareness campaign about a military topic. This gives the campaign an additional educational value, as the process of its planning and execution will provide students the opportunity to gain personal experience in a method of activism for peace. The guest seminar will be open to up to ten students interested in the topic. For organisational reasons, it will take place as an online seminar. Upon successful completion, participating students will receive a total of five credits (ECTS) for the seminar, which corresponds to a workload of 125 to 150 hours.

Students who join the seminar will be invited to join a communication platform for easier and quick interaction. This platform should include different channels for the various fields of action, so that every student can freely choose in which activities he or she wants to participate, according to their interests and expertise. Open tasks for students include:

- Research of information and audiovisual material;
- Fact-checking of information and authenticity of the material;
- Production and editing of audiovisual material;
- Contacting potential partner organisations;
- Providing media contacts;
- Spreading the word in public spaces, like events, seminars or busy streets;
- Evolving their own ideas for activities.

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[25] See chapter 6.2.3.
[26] The campaign is organised by the author of this paper and a small group of university students..
[27] See chapter 6.2.2.
[28] In English: "Geostrategy, defence and international security". More information about the degree: https://www.sciencespo-aix.fr/contenu/geostrategie-defense-et-securite-internationale/ [23.06.2022].

Given the need for different channels and chat groups for the organisation, the communication platform *Slack* will be used. This platform also allows to hold video calls with the team, which will be needed on a regular basis for live class sessions.

In addition to the participation of students, part of the campaign also depends on the support by non governmental organisations with similar interests. These organisations or associations should be based in France, given the objectives of the campaign. An interest might exist if the organisations:

- Defend international human rights and international solidarity;
- Are opposed to military interventions;
- Cooperate with Sahelian countries;
- Defend non-violent approaches;
- Criticise the low level of influence of the National Assembly in the French political system.

This is the case for *Initiatives pour un autre monde* (IPAM), a Paris-based network of associations for international solidarity, which offers support to various campaigns, organises debates and cooperates, among others, with African-based NGOs and initiatives.[29] In addition, the European NGO *The International Society for Military Ethics in Europe* (EuroISME) will be requested to collaborate, as it promotes research and discussions about military ethics and responsibilities with a focus on intervening nations.[30] Requested forms of support by these two organisations include:

- Publication of information, articles and audiovisual material of the campaign on the respective websites, social media appearances and in newsletters of the organisations for greater visibility;
- Provide financial support;
- Provide technical support for the campaign, provision of expertise on how to lead a successful campaign;
- Provide audiovisual material for the campaign;
- Edit and revise material for the campaign, using the organisation's available technology and expertise;
- Produce and print out informational flyers;
- Provide media contacts;
- Set up and support the petition.

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[29] More information about IPAM and its activities on its website: http://www.reseau-ipam.org/.
[30] More information about the EuroISME and its activities on its website: https://www.euroisme.eu/.

Furthermore, the campaign's visibility also relies on cooperation with media outlets. This includes TV, radio, print and online journalism on a local, regional and national level. Out of my proper experience, smaller media outlets are more likely to be interested and have space for external content.

For local media, the focus will lie on outlets in the university's region, as this is likely to give the students an opportunity to visit the local studios and newsrooms for an insight on journalistic work. The outlets to be contacted are the following, although student suggestions for further media contacts will be included in the campaign:

	Print	Television	Radio
Local	La Provence (Marseille)	vià Occitanie (local emissions in Montpellier, Perpignan, Toulouse, etc.)	Radio Campus France (network of local independent student radio programs)
Regional	EBRA group: Le Progrès (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes), Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace (Grand Est), Le Dauphiné libéré (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur)	BDM TV (private station in Île de France)	Sud Radio (Information radio in the South of France)
National	Le Point (weekly), Le Monde (centre-left daily)	ARTE (French-German), France 2 (public general television station)	Radio France, France Inter (young public)

Intended types of cooperation with media outlets include but are not limited to:

- Publish guest articles, videos and features about the end of "Operation Barkhane", the current situation in Mali, exit strategies and their impact, the military decision making progress in France, and the campaign;
- Lead and publish interviews with members of the campaign;
- Use of researched information for the media's content.

Finally, all kinds of public can easily participate passively. This includes sharing social media posts, spreading the word, and openly showing support for the campaign.

6.3.2 Schedule

The public campaign is intended to be launched within a month after the French troop withdrawal from Mali is completed. By then, the social media channels and the websites have to be prepared, including the posting of the first audiovisual material, to ensure visibility. Given that it is subject to a university seminar, the schedule follows the university seminar calendar, which starts on 12 September. The university master's responsables[31] need to be contacted by the start of the semester holidays in France to planify the seminar and propose it to the students together with the remaining class options. For the campaign activities schedules below, students will be encouraged to participate in all activities. However, each student will be asked to choose two main fields of responsibility. In case of unequal distribution of students among the fields of activity, the decision will be made by drawing lots. A high level of interaction on the student platform will be incited.

The schedule for the university seminar is as followed:

Category	Task	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Organisation	Set up communication platform	■									
	Divide tasks among students	■									
Background information and news	Research	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Factchecking	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Preparation of arguments	■	■								
	Formulation of info material	■	■								
	Updating info material			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Audiovisual material	Preparation of scripts			■	■	■					
	Recording of voiceovers			■	■	■					
	Collection of basis material			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
	Editing/production					■	■	■	■	■	■
Website	Informatic set up	■	■								
	Design	■	■	■							
	Upload of information		■	■	■	■					
	Open access to general public					■					
	Update information and material					■	■	■	■	■	■
Social media accounts	Set up of accounts			■	■						
	Regular postings					■	■	■	■	■	■
	Interaction with the public					■	■	■	■	■	■
NGOs/media contacts	Inform and request support			■	■	■					
	Provide material for publication			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Stay in contact, e.g. for feedback					■	■	■	■	■	■
Petition	Preparation of the petition				■	■	■				
	Launch of the petition						■	■			
Evaluation	Consult personal contacts	■	■	■	■	■					
	First evaluation (see chapter 6.4)					■	■				
	Second evaluation										■

Week 1 to 2: Preparing the arguments.

The seminar will start with organisational matters such as the explanation of the campaign to the students and the discussion of its relevance in the group. Tasks will be divided among the students and the communication platform will be set up and organised.

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[31] Currently, these are Nicolas Badalassi and Walter Bruyere-Ostells (co-responsable). Mail contacts are available on the master's website.

For the first two weeks of working on the campaign, the focus is on research and preparation of the arguments for the campaign. For the campaign to work, the information spread on social media, the website and shared with NGOs and media outlets needs to be firmly researched and carefully formulated. The previous two sections of the present paper serve as an informational base for the campaign. For the audiovisual material, the explanatory parts of the website and the written information for partner NGOs, this research needs to be formulated in a language adapted to the main target audience. Because of the rather big age span of this group, short and long versions of explanatory text should be prepared. Research also includes open source audiovisual material and pictures, which needs to be checked carefully for its authenticity (see chapter 6.2.3).

A first version of the website will be set up, including the informational material. This will be constantly updated in the process of the following few weeks and not yet made public.

During this period of the preparation for the campaign, students are invited to consult their personal contacts to collect different opinions and levels of interest on the matter. They will also be invited to provide feedback to the idea and material for the campaign.

Week 3 to 4: Setting the base for the campaign.

Using the prepared information and arguments from the previous two weeks, in this phase, scripts for audiovisual material will be prepared and the production and editing of the material will start. This includes the first eye-catching videos and pictures, which will be supported by informative text to contextualise the material and prevent misunderstandings. This material will be constantly updated and new material will be produced, always depending on the most recent material available.

Once again, students and their personal contacts will be asked for feedback and opinions about the produced material.

Social media accounts will be set up with (profile) pictures, a short description of the campaign and its objectives and the link to the website. All social media accounts will use the same or similar account names for easy recognition. A catchy hashtag will be invented and used for the first published content, informing about the upcoming start of the campaign.

Organisations will be contacted to inform about the campaign and ask for support and partnership for the execution of the campaign.

The website will be updated to include links to all social media accounts and partner or supporting organisations. A section of the website will give specific indications about possible ways for the general public to get active and participate in the campaign. At the end of week four, the website has to include all the information about the campaign in a transparent and comprehensive way, including a clear explanation of the arguments, objectives and organisation of the campaign.

Week 5 to 10: Launching the public campaign.

The website access will be opened to the general public. The website content will be subject to constant updates of information, partner NGOs and features on media outlets.

Active use of social media channels. Regular postings, quick reactions to comments and interaction with other relevant account's postings.

Media outlets will be contacted to provide information, guest articles and interviews, starting with smaller and regional outlets.

New and updated audiovisual material will be produced and published. Fundamental for this is the ongoing research about the situation in the Sahel and consequences of the withdrawal as well as about the authenticity of the material.

Partner organisations will be kept up to date with the progress of the campaign and the situation in Mali, as well as provided with the produced material.

Week 6: First evaluation and possible start of the petition.

The first results of the campaign will be evaluated (see chapter 6.3). If necessary, the campaign strategy will be adapted to the situation.

If the results are generally promising, the petition will be launched officially. Media outlets and NGOs will be informed about this progress.

Week 10: Second evaluation of the campaign.

After the start of the petition, the campaign will last for at least four weeks to gain as many signatures as possible. By the end of this period, the results will be evaluated and a decision about the future of the campaign will be taken in class. This will notably depend on the level of financial support for the campaign and the interest of the students.

6.3.3 Costs of the campaign

The background of the campaign, the matter of a higher level of parliamentary participation and the education in political activism are of personal moral value to me. Thus, I plan to organise this campaign and the university seminar as a volunteer. I am aware that a matter which is important to me might not be of the same value to others, and a campaign which includes a petition requires popular interest in order to succeed. If this interest exists, which I believe to be true, more people will be interested in actively supporting the campaign.

Students will earn university credits as an additional value to the gained experience in activism for peace. As the campaign is not, for the moment, subject to funding, the campaign will work as much as possible with open source material and freeware. Due to my professional background as a freelance journalist, most of the professional soft- and hardware needed is already available to me. Students will work with freeware and paid software available to university members. Given that university studies nowadays require students to use their own technology, the ownership of necessary technology for the online seminar and the campaign is assumed. Otherwise, students will be able to work in their university's computer rooms.

As the university seminar will take place online, there will be no office, transport or hotel costs. Instead, communication will take place on the platform Slack. For the functions needed (diverse channels, team video calls, connection with partner organisations via the platform, etc.), the "Pro-Tarif" is necessary, available for 6,25 Euros per month.

Additionally, contacting organisations and media outlets requires a telephone flatrate, available for 9,99 Euros per month at my provider. A stable internet connection is also necessary for the campaign, available for 29,99 Euros per month at my provider.

The calculated budget for the campaign, set for a period of 10 weeks[32], is therefore of 138,69 Euros, not including potential financial support by partner organisations:

Budget for the public awareness campaign					
Costs	Unit	# of units	Unit value (in EUR)	Total cost (in EUR)	
1. Human Resources					
Salaries		0	0	0	Campaign based on a university seminar, participants will earn ECTS
Subtotal Human Resources				0	
2. Office costs					
Office rent	Per unit	0	0	0	Work from homeoffice
Computer equipment	Per unit	0	0	0	Computer equipment is already available
Editing software	Per unit	2	0	0	Use of freeware (DaVinci Resolve)
Internet	Per month	3	29,99	89,97	Internet flatrate for online research and communication
Telephone calls	Per month	3	9,99	29,97	Handy flatrate for contact with media and NGOs
Communication platform (Slack)	Per month	3	6,25	18,75	Use of Slack, Tarif Pro
Subtotal Office costs				138,69	
3. Other costs					
Petition	Per unit	1	0	0	Free of charge (Open Petition and National Assembly)
Audiovisual material	Per unit	100	0	0	Open source and partner organisations' material
Subtotal Other costs				0	
Total eligible costs of the campaign				138,69	

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[32] The French university semester generally includes a 12 week period of classes. As the seminar has a higher workload during the first few weeks for the preparation of the campaign and will not be evaluated in exams, it will end two weeks earlier than other seminars as a compensation for the students.

6.4 Evaluation

As mentioned in the schedule, two evaluation periods are foreseen for the campaign. The first one will take place two weeks after the public launch of the campaign and, in the case of a positive result, give way to the start of the petition. The second one will take place four weeks after the start of the petition, which is the presumed end of the campaign. A third evaluation may be effectuated after another two weeks.

In order to evaluate the success of the campaign, including the petition, the following factors and possible outcomes will be considered:

- The National Assembly agrees to form a commission as demanded in the campaign;
- A public debate about the importance of exit strategies starts in France. This includes media content about the matter, postings on social media (easy to evaluate by the use of the campaign's hashtag) and events which address the consequences of failed exit strategies;
- Politicians or other influential personalities make public statements about the topic, including especially ex-presidents, current ministers of the government or (French) members of the European parliament;
- The number of signatures for the petition;
- Students will be asked to evaluate the class, the campaign and its success;
- The pronounced interest of organisations and media outlets to collaborate;
- The campaign is also to be considered as a success if a debate about the topic starts in a different context, be it on a regional French parliament's level or a regional or national level in a different country such as Germany, given that the importance of the topic is not limited to the national borders of France and military cooperation tends to exist between different European nations.

In order to find out about the accomplishment of these factors, internet research (in the students' languages) about public statements and events, social media appearances, and the signatures for the campaign will be made.

The main tool for the internet research about the diffusion of the debate will be Google Trends[33]. This tool shows the number of search requests for an introduced term in a chosen country and its regions. It shows the evolution of the number of search requests in the chosen timeframe in the form of a graph and allows users to filter the results according to different categories. The students will participate in this research and share their own perceptions as a closing part of the university seminar.

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[33] The tool is available via this link: https://trends.google.com/trends/?geo=FR.

6.5 Limitations and risks of the campaign

The campaign proposed in this paper is subject to a number of risks and limitations which, as mentioned before, might have an influence on the success of the activities.

First and foremost, this campaign, including all its activities, has been planned and organised by one person. This implies that there might be factors which have not been considered, for example legislative or administrative frameworks, concerning the French National assembly's functioning. Even if the campaign is successful, the French legislation might complicate the implementation of a permanent commission for exit strategies.

The matter at the core of the campaign might not find the expected interest in French society, which would lead to a failure of the whole campaign. This would include the missing interest of students, NGOs and media outlets and a low number of signatures for the petition. Additionally, the use of *Barkhane* as an example supposes a risk, as the consequences of troop withdrawal and the interests for this in French society are not yet clear.

There might also be some activities which are not realistic to realise unless the participating students mobilise a greater amount of people, but which would have an important impact on the campaign's success. An example are public appearances.

Given the dependency on the support by organisations, there might be a necessity for an adaptation of some activities and arguments to the needs and interests of the partner organisations. Unless these organisations take the matters into their own hands or provide financial support, no funding for paid publicity towards a greater public is available.

While the production of audiovisual elements is thought to make use of open source raw material, there might not be enough material of the situation in Mali available, and organisations might not want to provide the material they dispose of. In this case, it might be necessary to buy some material for the campaign to work.

Another risk related to the material is the existence of propaganda material and possible complications in finding proof of authenticity. In Mali, the use of propaganda is a proven technique of the military Junta and the Russian mercenaries. Both actors have a proven interest in a bad image for the French and the French military intervention. As stated in chapter 3, the experience from the "massacre of Moura" in March 2022 has shown the attempt of accusing French soldiers of grave abuse against civilians, presumably committed by mercenaries of the Russian Wagner group in cooperation with the Malian military.

Lastly, the campaign is limited to France and the example of *Barkhane*, due to the factors mentioned above. However, the matter of missing exit strategies should be a main concern for all states which lead or participate in military interventions. As explained in chapter 5.1, a clear exit strategy could be a helpful reassurance for cooperating countries.

7. Conclusion

In the context of popular demonstrations against the French military in Mali, consistent diplomatic quarrels and the arrival of Russian mercenaries in the West African country, the decision to *pull out* was only a matter of time. The end of *Opération Barkhane* came earlier than originally planned and later than some military and political responsables had hoped for. The previous existence of exit strategies is highly questionable. Lasting consequences might long exceed the withdrawal of deployed troops and not be visible straight away. The French military-first approach has proven to be insufficient for the complex situation in Mali.

Usually, the withdrawal from military interventions attracts great media and public attention. The developed campaign aims to use this momentum to provoke a shift in French public opinion and politics. As France tends to approach international crisis situations with military measures, its politicians and society need to be aware of the short and long term consequences these can have. Awareness about this issue is the first step for change.

The campaign's focus on exit strategies is thought to provide constructive criticism. It is rather unlikely that the French government will step back from robust interventions, which is why the campaign does not attempt to achieve a change of this general strategy. However, the existence of exit strategies and a broad understanding for what is at stake for the affected population and remaining military and humanitarian forces would be an important achievement. For countries in which France might intervene in the future, this is crucial.

As an ideal outcome of the campaign, the National Assembly would introduce a new focus group to the Permanent Commission on National Defence and the Armed Forces, tasked with the analysis of the situation on the ground and the elaboration of possible exit strategies. These should set clear indications on political objectives of the interventions and which conditions should serve as cornerstones for their end.

What does a permanent commission change? The French constitution does not allow the parliament to prevent a non-realistic or harmful intervention before it starts. The only opportunity for French members of parliament to exert some influence is after the initial four months of intervention. A permanent focus group on exit strategies keeps members of parliament up to date about the evolving situation and makes sure the topic will be addressed more regularly during legislative sessions. This invites politicians to question governmental decisions and military action, thus exercising more control. Details of military activities are usually kept hidden from the public for tactical reasons, although they are financed by public money and effected in the name of the whole country. The parliamentary control function as a pillar of democracy is key to ensure the respect of human rights and for taking on the responsibilities for governmental and military actions. Currently, the French parliament's control function is rather limited, which the campaign will address as a problem.

The campaign's success relies on its visibility and credibility, notably in the face of the use of propaganda in Mali. To prevent mistakes, intense research is key for the campaign.

By preparing and executing this campaign, participating university students will gain experience in peace activism and intervention politics. For their personal and professional development, the students will be invited to implement their own ideas, provide ongoing feedback and take on responsibilities for activities of the campaign. They will also have the opportunity to set up a network with different media outlets and NGOs for future research and activism. In the ideal case, participating students will further delve into the campaign's topics after the university semester, for example the development of ethics of intervention.

This is another important focus of the campaign and connected to the consequences of military engagement. Ethics of intervention tend to focus mainly on the legitimacy of starting a troop deployment in a sovereign state. Long-term responsibilities have not been debated on adequately. Hence, ethics of intervention need to be revised to include moral obligations of intervening nations to meticulously prepare troop withdrawals. Given the dependencies which military interventions create, part of these obligations should be non-military measures to stabilise state institutions, communities and social structures.

In line with the UNESCO Chair for Peace at the Universitat Jaume I, the escalation of the situation in Mali might have been preventable: Clear warning signs like poverty, food insecurity and signs of marginalisation were visible a long time ago. In turn, climate change and the outbreak of the armed conflict have led to a deterioration of these factors. But the existence of warning signs does not imply the availability of acceptable solution strategies.

Taking the ideas of the campaign presented in this thesis further, follow-up campaigns could raise a debate about the link between preventive measures, their acceptance among the authorities and population of sovereign states and colonial history. This includes notably the questions of who should intervene when and in which way to realistically prevent conflicts from escalating without undermining state sovereignty and national pride; how the strategies can be explained to the nations of intervention and how their legitimacy can be evaluated. It should also not be forgotten that non-military measures also fall under the concept of an intervention. Thus, similar to military interventions, preventive measures can create dependencies and need to be ended carefully so as to not cause a relapse.

In Mali, NGOs, the European Training Mission and the UN's blue helmets will stay after the end of *Barkhane* and *Takuba*. However, in the context of a security vacuum and growing hostilities, these interventions might be forced to come to an early end as well. The advancing isolation of Mali is and will be at the expense of civil society. Direct and structural violence remain an existential problem in the country. For the following years, a deterioration of the situation in the Sahel and adjoining regions is expected. The awareness campaign presented in this thesis aspires to prevent similar future failures of military withdrawals.

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