



Review and outlook for Operation Barkhane

Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces - Thursday 18 June 2020

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Published on 22/06/2020

Engagement opérationnel

France intervened at the request of Malian President Diacounda Traoré in Mali in January 2013 to stop terrorist groups and prevent them from taking the capital, Bamako. Operation Serval, which was a success, ended in July 2014 to give way to an operation on a completely different scale: Barkhane. We needed a regional approach to prevent the formation of terrorist sanctuaries. It was also a gesture of solidarity with friendly countries.

Together with our Sahelian partners, we reaffirm our commitment to continue the fight against terrorism together and to further mobilize the international community. The Pau Summit was a founding moment in our commitment to the Sahel. The four objectives of our action were clearly formalised: combating the terrorist threat in the region; training and equipping national armies; promoting the return of State services; and supporting the development of the countries concerned.

Our enemy is well identified: terrorist groups affiliated with Daesh and al-Qaeda operating in the Sahel. The Pau summit made it possible to clarify the objectives of our presence on the ground, to remobilize our Sahelian partners and to internationalize our action. The coordination and cooperation of the international community have become the cornerstone of our commitment. The impetus given in Pau has taken shape with the Coalition for the Sahel, which the G5 Sahel countries and the European Union officially launched on 28 March. It is a streamlining tool to better coordinate and focus our efforts to help stabilize the region.

The G5 Sahel countries have redoubled their commitment in recent months. The two ministerial meetings we held on 12 June with Jean-Yves Le Drian confirmed that we are moving in the right direction.

The Europeans are also continuing to mobilise. We have had several pieces of good news. The British have renewed the commitment of their Chinook helicopters to Operation Barkhane. The mandate of the European Union training mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) has been strengthened. Germany and Spain have announced a significant increase

in their contribution.

The efforts undertaken by the armed forces of the G5 Sahel countries, the Barkhane force and Minusma, and the decisive action of other international partners have made it possible to deprive the armed terrorist groups of a solid territorial foothold.

We have decided to concentrate our efforts in the area of the three borders between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, which the Islamic State in the Great Sahara (EIGS) is trying to control. Coordination and information-sharing between the various forces has improved significantly, with the creation of the joint command mechanism. As we communicate better, we act better together on the ground.

Operation Sama, which was conducted by the joint force, is achieving tangible successes. Combined with Operations Monclar and Malvern, led by Barkhane, and the Nigerien armed forces, it has reduced the logistical and combat capabilities of the EIGS katibas in the tri-border region. The computers seized made it possible to collect information and ultimately put hundreds of terrorists out of action. Collectively, we have gained the upper hand over the enemy. We have significantly impeded them, thanks to our almost permanent presence on the ground and the responsiveness and mobility of our forces. We could not have done so without the exceptional commitment of our soldiers and partners, who risk their lives every day to defend us. Once again, I want to salute the memory of those who have fallen. We do not forget them.

The areas of Labbezanga and Tiloa were taken over from the terrorists. The State is gradually making a comeback. But action by the terrorists could undermine security efforts, which are bearing fruit. Still, we have weak signals that the mobilization is working. In Kidal, a battalion of the reconstituted Malian army is finalizing its build-up. It bears witness to the gradual return of the Malian state to this historically unstable area. It was one of Mali's commitments in Pau. It has been kept.

At the same time, our forces are keeping up the pressure on terrorists, in particular with actions on the ground. We effectively neutralized the head of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdal, through a bold intervention that could never have happened without the intelligence provided to us by the United States. We are on the right track, but it is still too early to claim victory. Local forces are making progress, but they remain fragile and subject to significant setbacks. In many places, however, the population is beginning to regain confidence, and it is becoming easier for them to provide us with intelligence.

Nevertheless, the EIGS, which has not disappeared from the Tri-border region, can still deal violent blows. The Rassemblement pour la victoire de l'islam et des musulmans (RIVM) is growing stronger, Boko Haram is still active in Niger and Chad, inter-community conflicts are on the rise, the threat is re-emerging in southern Libya and the health crisis will affect all local and international actors.

That said, every step towards a little more stability is good to take. The state of mind and the quality of cooperation with which we are moving forward are already a victory. But until the partners of the Sahelian countries take over and armed groups can recruit from among the local population, terrorism will not have been defeated.

The Takuba task force was officially launched on 27 March. Several detachments of soldiers from special forces of European countries will be placed under the command of Barkhane. Their mission will be to supplement the tactical training of the local armed forces and to accompany them in combat. From July, the deployment of the mission will begin with Estonian and French soldiers, and will gradually increase in strength until the

beginning of 2021. In addition to the partners already involved in Takuba, the broad political support for this initiative illustrates the collective spirit that drives us.

Despite Covid-19, we are on track to meet the objectives set at the Pau Summit. But let's remain cautious. Now is not the time to weaken. Let us bear in mind that the action of our armies is aimed at enabling the forces of the G5 countries to take responsibility for the protection of their populations and to promote the return of the State. Our role is to facilitate this appropriation by continuing to weaken the terrorists and by strengthening our efforts to accompany the G5 Sahel forces. I see three major lines of military action emerging for the coming year: the continued internationalisation of the military commitment, with in particular the rise in power of Takuba, which will be a sort of operational laboratory for the G5 Sahel forces; the continued rise in power of the joint G5 Sahel force, thanks to the further strengthening of the G5 Sahel joint force through greater coordination and operational cooperation; the development of our structural cooperation with the local armed forces to make their resilience a reality. These objectives are within our grasp. But they depend on one absolute condition: strict compliance with international humanitarian law. There are black sheep everywhere.

I have reminded all my Sahelian counterparts that France will not tolerate exposing the lives of its soldiers, its image and its credibility. That message is perfectly understood. The Malian Minister of Defence condemned the atrocities without the slightest ambiguity. He is committed to ensuring that investigations are carried out quickly and that the guilty parties are punished with the utmost firmness.

We also agreed that the missions of EUTM Mali, some of which had been suspended because of the health crisis, should resume as soon as possible. They include a training component on international humanitarian law.

These subjects will be at the heart of the Nouakchott summit, which will be held in a fortnight's time and which should set the course for the end of 2020.

Significant progress has been made, particularly in the tri-border area, where the EIGS is now significantly hampered. It no longer has the means to carry out serious attacks, which does not mean that it is completely neutralised. Our Malian and Nigerien partners are making progress. We must welcome the fact that the commander of the G5 Sahel joint force is so active, so resolutely committed and that he is achieving very good military and diplomatic results. Difficulties had arisen after the attack on the G5 Sahel Joint Force CP in Sévaré and General Namata, through his tenacity, obtained a CP at Bamako, a place that is obviously essential for the proper functioning of the force, beyond the coordination mechanism set up in Niamey for the Tri-border area. The security situation is improving even if it is not stabilized and remains deeply fragile.

I have stressed the commitment of the countries of the region. There is less talk of other partners. Our exchanges with Algeria are dense, in particular on the assessment of the security situation and the implementation of the peace and reconciliation agreement signed in Algiers in 2015. Algeria is, by construction, an important player in the Malian peace process and has a vocation to become even more so.

You have expressed doubts about Chad's commitment. I think that you are concerned about the slowness with which the Chadian battalion is deploying on the Central Spindle. Because of its geographical position, Chad is naturally destined to intervene on the eastern flank of the G5 Sahel, but in Pau, the Chadian President had undertaken to deploy a battalion on the central flank to support the efforts made in the three-border zone. That deployment was delayed because that battalion, although trained and equipped by

French forces, was committed in the Lake Chad area to participate in Operation Colère de Bohoma against Boko Haram. Jean-Yves Le Drian and I reiterated the need for the rapid deployment of the battalion as planned in the Tri-border area, even though the Chadian minister did not fail to recall the state of the threat in the Lake Chad area and the real concern that Boko Haram continues to cause. Practical issues should in no way impede this rapid redeployment, and I reiterated France's readiness to facilitate its transfer to the Central Zone. I do not despair that this battalion will be deployed where it is intended.

I do not insist on the absolutely decisive nature of American support for Barkhane. The recent events of 3 June and the neutralisation of Droukdal have shown this once again. I reported to you on my exchanges with my colleague Esper in Washington in January. They continue. We have gained time since it is June and these means are still available and have not been counted.

Nevertheless, the United States changes budget years in October. It is a deadline. We are continuing the dialogue and hope that the crucial drone observation capabilities will not be called into question. Unfortunately, I have no further information to provide you with today. President Trump's guidelines are still valid, which is why we must continue the dialogue.

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Release date	12/02/2021

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