



France's participation in the development of foreign land forces since decolonization

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Recent changes in the arrangements for pre-positioned forces, mainly in Africa, and the changing threat, call for a review of the development and appropriateness - or otherwise - of French participation in the development of land forces on that continent. Despite a reduction in size and increased competition, both international and private, France remains structurally a privileged partner for this type of action thanks to its recognised legitimacy and constant adaptation of its posture to sub-continental issues.

1960: The Central African Republic gains independence under the leadership of Father Barthélémy Boganda. More than half a century later, after numerous coups d'état and despite an almost permanent French military presence, the local armed forces are unable, in 2013, to stop the clashes between Seleka and anti-balakas. On the other hand, the lasting stability of a state like Senegal, based on a relatively democratic model, seems on the whole to be a success, particularly because it is supported by a real, credible and effective national army.

The decolonization period was marked by widespread access to institutional independence. One of the conditions for the transition from "de jure" to "de facto" independence was the establishment of a national army, which was an illustration and embodiment of the State and its regalian prerogatives. France's participation in this process of setting up the armed forces, essentially land forces, was permanent, always sensitive, but with uneven results. It is therefore necessary to question the nature and the results of France's action within its former colonies, in this participation in the creation of land-based defence tools or commonly known as operational military assistance. France's role, essentially devoted to the implementation of a structural and/or short-term cooperation action, has extremely diverse aspects (equipment or training for example) which will be included in the analysis.

Our work will focus on the African continent, a historical zone of French efforts since

decolonization, and will exclude specific actions such as the LTOs in Afghanistan, to name but a few.

France's participation in the development of foreign land forces has been a mixed success, which could be more comprehensive, subject to a comprehensive and appropriate strategy. Demonstrating this means putting the successes and failures into a historical perspective, identifying their internal and external causes before proposing a few avenues for relaunching efficient training of the land forces of the "lost continent".

Five decades after the proclamation of their independence, the progress made by the armed forces supported by France appears to be a success of limited scope in view of the efforts made.

The initial impression inspired by the armed forces supported by France is sometimes bad because it focuses on a number of failures, as is the pervasive instability affecting a large part of the former French colonies. This situation of failure is regularly exploited (at the political level more than at the military level, moreover) in order to support a negative discourse on France's foreign policy in Africa or "Françafrique". The many successive coups d'état, as experienced in West Africa, such as those fomented by the Général Guéi in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire in the late 1990s and early 2000s, illustrate this idea.

In addition, French aid may also have been diverted from its original destination and used to serve interests that run counter to the projects in favour of local forces.

The Foccart years, the recurrent confusion between general and particular interests, may have been a deliberate bias. More fortuitous but no less interesting is the case of Ange Félix Patassé . The latter took advantage of French aid not to increase the general operational capacity of his forces but to increase the volume of his presidential guard and thus to establish his power on a force devoted to his person more than to his nation.

Finally, a certain lack of realism reinforces the idea that failures could supplant successes. While the purpose of a long-term presence was to anticipate, limit or even avoid conflicts, this was not on the whole the case and the aid provided by France has not been withdrawn or reviewed. The case of Chad is enlightening in this respect since, despite strong support for the establishment of its land forces, this country has seen regular "emergency" interventions through various external operations. Also at the highest level, the response to these failures has been mainly political and, since the La Baule speech (1990), some States have been able to choose to dispense with French aid, which is more effective than the French "conditions based" pragmatism.

This observation could be alarmist, but it cannot hide the success stories, both because political stability is a reality in some regions and because the land forces are demonstrating a certain effectiveness.

The establishment of regional cooperation centres (POCs) seems to have many factors for success. Knowledge and exchanges between different regional land forces actors increases synergies and actively contributes to regional stability. Senegal and Gabon are thus indicative of France's successful participation in the development of land forces.

Moreover, the military tool remains a constant in the affirmation of sovereign power. Any participation by France in the creation of this tool therefore implies de facto the assurance

of the existence of at least an embryonic state, at least from the Western point of view. The permanent will of the Heads of State to set up elite units thus remains an attribute of power and France remains a referent in terms of offers for the creation and training of this type of unit.

France has also proved its federating power and places its action on land forces in a more global context, the beginnings of which are certainly only visible, but are nonetheless encouraging signs for the future. This is the case for the creation of the African peace and security architecture and the troops dedicated to deployment under the aegis of the African Union.

Criticism of French action often suffers from a lack of perspective in space, but above all from an excessively narrow view of time. Thus, the study period cannot neglect the freezing phase due to the Cold War: Third World movements, led by Modibo Keita in 1960, or the choice of Congo to join the communist camp rather than remain in the French "bosom" have harmed French action in the long term. Moreover, the setting up of land forces with a minimum of effectiveness is necessarily a long-term process and French action has not been monolithic, but has constantly evolved by combining structural and cyclical actions. It also relies on indirect support mechanisms. This long-term work is also favoured by a feeling, admittedly paradoxical, of attraction-repulsion, but which still leaves a predominant place for French action today.

Beyond the historical perspective, this mixed success has its source both in a fluctuating French policy of cooperation and in a certain lack of receptiveness on the ground and increasingly marked international competition, encroaching on the French preserve.

Military cooperation in Africa has followed a twofold trend over the past fifty years, which could be expressed as follows: reduction of the mechanism and means, and change in nature. On the first point, the number of personnel devoted to cooperation has been steadily declining since independence, as has the budget allocated to this mission.

The second point concerns organisational changes and placement at the political level which are leading cooperation to lose visibility. Beyond the volume, a qualitative study of cooperation shows the gradual transition from a policy of substitution, consuming resources and boasting of assistance, to a policy promoting partnership and the appropriation of their training by Africans, or "empowerment". These various factors may have contributed to a loss of credit by the former colonizing country, but cannot omit causes endogenous to the recipient countries.

As mentioned above, African armies sometimes demonstrate a structural inability to implement France's contributions. The reasons for this are as numerous as the examples, but the primary cause remains the almost systematic ethnicization/tribalization of armies. This was the case in the Central African Republic during the Patassé era (1993-2002). More broadly, we are witnessing a form of crisis of "republican" vocation of the armies receiving French aid: the latent militarism of certain countries thus often constitutes a major obstacle to the establishment of frank cooperation. In the end, these armies are also generally of a relatively low level, and some African States have difficulty in anticipating and clearly expressing their needs, as was the case with the BATAMISOM armed by Djibouti.

Beyond this purely military aspect, a "cultural incompatibility" with the principle of conditionality mentioned above may have been a triggering factor: not only because it opened up a decade of chaos (1990s), but also because, with many States having no interest in meeting democratic requirements, it widened the scope for competition and the rise of new actors.

A nebula of state or private actors is now operating in Africa without any real coordination, but encroaching on traditionally French "market shares". This recourse to third parties is accentuated by increasingly strong geostrategic competition. Thus, beyond the Chinese competition often mentioned in economic matters, so-called "advanced" countries on the continent have played their part.

This was the case with Algeria, Sudan and South Africa, many of whose natives were and still are the backbone of the presidential guards of the most vulnerable countries. Non-African actors are also multiplying, such as the Netherlands, Israel and the American superpower (AFRICOM), and know how to respond to demand by adapting to new threats (fight against terrorism and trafficking). More recently, the Americans have participated in the formation of rapid intervention battalions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon, as part of the fight against Boko Haram. This arrangement could be further expanded with the establishment of a West African support point in Dakar.

It therefore appears that France, beyond the internal reorganization of its cooperation, has mainly had to deal with the rigidity of African structures (traditional and State structures) as well as increased international competition. Within an Africa that is overstretched by an international offer lacking in coordination, France nevertheless has favourable prospects to exploit.

Despite the questioning of its actions, France remains the only long-term player and still achieves success at lower cost, which is already the case with some programmes that include competition. A global strategy must, however, validate this new role of centralization/coordination of actions.

France still has many successes in terms of cooperation. First of all in terms of costs: cooperation in the Sahelian strip thus represents 70 people at a cost of 20 million euros. It would be interesting to compare the cost-effectiveness ratio with that of Operation Barkhane.

In this same region, France's action is being renewed with the setting up of the ACTS project, which represents a new way of conceiving cooperation. The principle of this pilot project is to link security and development (in a global approach), to start from the needs on the ground and finally to propose to other countries to join the programme. Finally, the National Schools with a Regional Focus (ENVR) is an excellent success story. They are in fact adapted to local needs with a schooling based on the reality of the African field.

The current model, based on the proven concept of RECAMP, is, however, struggling to address the full breadth of a threat that has become more violent, hybrid and transnational. The French contribution has become inadequate both quantitatively (reduced means) and qualitatively (training needs evolving towards hitherto unexploited

areas).

In this context, private military companies - based on the ACOTA model - are becoming a solution to which France does not refrain from resorting, at least for certain areas that are expensive or not feasible (3D, health, heavy logistics). Thus, the ESSDs, long devoted to the protection of international companies, regularly find themselves at the forefront in the training of foreign armies wishing to break free from Western powers. If France considers that training should remain for the most part a sovereign function, a "burden sharing" is at least conceivable, provided it is under control.

Faced with this profusion of actors, whether state or non-state, France can hope to play a coordination/centralization role, made possible by its credibility, its system and its legitimacy. This is possible because of its credibility, its mechanism and its legitimacy. However, this is subject to one condition: this cooperation must overcome the distortion felt - including from the point of view of Africans - between its structural part (DCSD) and its operational part (MINDEF). The Quai d'Orsay thus does not seem to offer a clear strategic orientation, whereas the CEMA clearly makes Africa a strategic issue via a precise and regularly updated directive.

As the purpose of training land forces remains their operational commitment, there is therefore a need for continuity between structural and operational cooperation. However, neither the strategies, nor the projects, nor the budgetary organisation give any indication of such a comprehensive action. It therefore seems urgent to bring the projects of each party together while at the same time relying on and giving greater responsibility to the operational and regional levels. It is now dialogue with the decision-making and design levels that seems to be the priority, for example, the contribution to the architecture of peace and security in Africa.

On the strength of many successes in the past, France has seen its primacy in the training of African land forces called into question by constrained allocated means, a fluctuating threat and increased competition, whether state or private. However, it remains the only global player whose pre-positioned arrangements and long-term presence guarantee it credibility and legitimacy in this action, which must be renewed, while remaining in the spirit of the tried and tested RECOMP concept.

A fertile breeding ground and source of emulation for Africa and the countries that support it could be the fight against terrorism, which would make it possible to move from a wait-and-see situation to the resumption of the initiative.

- Saint-cyrien of the promotion "General Béthouart", the MOROT Battalion Chief chose to serve in the Navy troops. He spent his first part of his career in the 1st RIMA as a platoon leader, then as a unit commander, during which time he was projected four times. He also served in the Martinique Adapted Military Service Regiment from 2007 to 2009. Assigned to the EMSOME between 2012 and 2015, he served as DOM-COM cell chief and Antilles instructor. He has been a trainee at the CSIA since 7 March 2016.

- Saint-cyrien of the promotion "General Béthouart", the PUPPO Battalion Chief chooses to serve within the navy troops. He spent his first part of his career in the 21st RIMA as a section chief, then unit commander, a period during which he was projected four times. He also served in the Pacific-Polynesian Marine Infantry Regiment from 2006 to 2008. Assigned to EMSOME between 2012 and 2015, he serves as Head of the Central Africa and Pacific Ocean Cell. He is, since 7 March 2016, a trainee at the CSIA.

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