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People and security officials walk and look as smoke rises from a tourist bus in south Sinai, February 16, 2014

EGYPTIAN MILITARY OFFENSIVE IN THE SINAI FOLLOWS TOURIST MASSACRE

Andrew McGregor

Egyptian security forces have responded to the latest terrorist blow to Egypt’s vital tourism industry with a series of raids that have killed dozens of militants and resulted in the detention of many others.

On February 16, a bomb on a tourist bus carrying South Koreans making the trip from St. Catherine’s monastery to the resort town of Taba killed three tourists and their Egyptian driver, while a further 13 tourists were wounded (al-Jazeera, February 16). The attack was claimed by militant group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem), who claimed the strike was “part of our economic war against this regime of traitors” (AFP, February 19). Tourism accounts for over 11 percent of Egyptian GDP and is an important source of foreign currency. The Sinai was the last part of the politically volatile nation to maintain a healthy tourist trade, but this has now been put in jeopardy. The bombing was denounced by the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Gama’a al-Islamiya, a militant Islamist group responsible for the murder of 58 tourists and four Egyptians in Luxor in 1997 (Ahram Online, February 17).

Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) is the Egyptian branch of a Gaza-based Islamist organization. Since its first appearance in the Sinai in the days after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, the group has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks on oil pipelines, a strike on Israeli troops in 2012, the attempted assassination of Egypt’s interior minister in 2013 and the successful assassination of an important National Security Agency investigator the same year (see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 28, 2013).

The tourist bus bombing led to a number of operations as part of the ongoing Egyptian military response to radicalism in the Sinai Peninsula:

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- During the night of February 19, Egyptian Army helicopter gunships used missiles to attack houses suspected to harbor militants in the Shaykh Zuwayad area, killing at least ten people (AP, February 20).
- On February 28, the Egyptian Second Field Army (responsible for the Sinai) reported killing six militants (including an alleged member of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis) and the arrest of 14 others (Egypt State Information Service, February 28).
- On March 1, the armed forces reported ten extremists killed and ten others wounded in the Northern Sinai communities of al-Arish, Shaykh Zuwaya and Rafah (*Aswat Masriya* [Cairo], March 1).

The military also continues to demolish tunnels to Gaza in the border town of Rafah.

Militants in the Sinai also continue to attack another sector of the Egyptian economy – gas exports to Jordan. The gas pipeline running through northern Sinai was blown up south of al-Arish for the fourth time this year on February 25 (al-Arabiya, February 26). Most of the bombings of the pipeline (which brought an end to gas exports to Israel in 2012) have been claimed by Ansar al-Maqdis.

AL-QAEDA RESPONDS TO SECTARIAN CLASHES IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Andrew McGregor

In a statement entitled “Central African Tragedy... Between Crusader Deceit and Muslim Betrayal,” al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has taken note of the ongoing reprisals against Muslims in the Central African Republic (CAR) being carried out by Christian “anti-balaka” militias, referring to the attacks as “a new episode in the series of spiteful crusades against Islam and its people.” [1] Over 15,000 Muslim civilians live in improvised camps where they are surrounded by armed militias intent on killing them for their alleged support of the largely Muslim Séléka rebel movement that briefly seized power last year (Reuters, February 25).

AQIM describes the international peacekeeping forces being sent to the CAR as arriving “only to increase the suffering of Muslims.” France comes in for special attention as “a malevolent colonial crusader... [that] continues to play the role of guardian of the African continent” while fueling conflict and looting wealth “in order to preserve their interests and satisfy their arrogant whims.” AQIM concludes by warning France: “Your crimes will not go unpunished and

the war between us and you continues.”

The Islamist movement also condemns the “shameful silence” of the Islamic community, “a nation of one billion.” Noting that some conflicts involving Muslims gain the attention of the Muslim world while others do not, AQIM asks: “Why differentiate between a persecutor and a persecutor and a tragedy and a tragedy?”

The African Union peacekeeping mission in the CAR, the Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine (MISCA), has some 6,000 troops from Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). There are an additional 600 police officers from the same countries engaged in training local police forces. Part of MISCA’s difficulty in restoring order to the CAR lies in the fact that the mission is trusted by neither the ex-Séléka rebels nor the anti-balaka militias. It has already become clear that the combined forces of the 2,000-man French deployment (locally referred to as “Sangaris” after the name of the French operation in the CAR) and MISCA are far from sufficient to restore order and security in a large nation with little infrastructure or road systems.

MISCA raided the Boy Rab quarter of Bangui, a base for anti-balaka militias, on February 15, detaining a number of important militia leaders, including Lieutenant Konaté and Lieutenant Ganagi Hervé. Another important anti-balaka leader, Patrice Edouard Ngaissona, managed to evade the operation, though arms and ammunition were recovered from his home (RFI, February 15). The detainees attempted to escape Bangui prison on February 23, but were foiled by alert Rwandan MISCA guards (AFP, February 24).

The anti-balaka militias are reported to be divided over the CAR’s future political direction. One faction continues to call for the return of deposed president François Bozizé, while a more moderate faction is seeking to lower the intensity of the conflict and to cooperate with the new government of interim-president Catherine Samba-Panza (RFI, February 16). The anti-balaka rebels depend heavily on charms and amulets designed to ward off bullets and other threats.

Many residents of the CAR view the Chadians as biased towards the republic’s Muslims, who are often referred to by the Christian population as “Chadians” regardless of their origins. The arrival in Bangui of the projected EU force of 1,000 troops with heavy equipment is still believed to be a month away. The formation of a planned UN force of 10,000 peacekeepers (which would probably absorb most of MISCA) is opposed by Chad and is likely still six months away from materializing (VOA, March 3).

Chad traditionally regards the CAR region as its traditional

backyard, dating back to the days when the Sultanate of Wadai (in present-day eastern Chad) used the region as a source of wealth in the form of slaves, ivory and other goods. In more recent years, Chadians have figured in the CAR as traders, mercenaries and even presidential bodyguards. N'Djamena's influence on CAR politics is considerable and growing, considering Chad's expanding and oil-financed military might. Most of Chad's oil production is in the south of the country, just north of the unstable CAR.

Both the EU and the UN are calling on Turkey to contribute to the EU deployment, with the UN secretary-general even making a personal call to Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan for assistance. The likelihood of such a commitment is, however, still uncertain, as Ankara is consumed externally with the Syrian crisis and internally by a corruption scandal and approaching elections (*Today's Zaman* [Istanbul], March 2). Turkey is, moreover, heavily involved in the reconstruction of Somalia and may be wary of adding a military role in an unfamiliar area.

French forces currently deployed to the CAR include Alpine troops of the 27th Mountain Infantry Brigade, some of whom are specialists in urban warfare, and troops of the 8th Régiment de Parachutistes d'Infanterie de Marine (8e RPIMa), an airborne unit with experience in French Indo-China, Algeria, Chad and Afghanistan.

The French intervention in the CAR is not the first in that nation's post-independence period; in September 1979, units from the Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage (SDECE - France's external intelligence service until reorganization in 1982) and the 1st RPIMa seized Bangui's airport, allowing transports carrying 300 troops to land with the purpose of replacing "Emperor" Jean-Bédél Bokassa with a new president, David Dacko, who helpfully arrived with the French troops.

Notes

1. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, "Central African Tragedy... Between Crusader Deceit and Muslim Betrayal," February 26, 2014, <https://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=47761>.

Yemen's Southern Insurgency is Undermining the Political Transition

Ludovico Carlino

Yemen's political transition reached a new turning point on February 10, when President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi formally approved the transformation of the country into a six region federal union (*Yemen Times*, February 10). The move was partially built on the recommendations promoted by the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), the year-long forum in which Yemeni political parties and factions were tasked with drawing a new political and administrative system for the country as the center-piece of the Yemen transitional mechanism. The new legislation is intended to divide Yemen into regions that reflect longstanding historical identities as well as to address the enduring grievances that still endanger its cohesion, especially the southern provinces' request for greater autonomy, while preserving the country's unity at the same time. The six regions solution, which was preferred to the other option on the table consisting of one northern region and one southern region, has nonetheless been highly contentious. The Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP - deeply rooted in the South), the Yemen Islamic Clerics Commission, the Salafist al-Rashad Party and the Houthi movement rejected the decision, although the YSP ended up signing the final document (*Yemen Times*, February 13; al-Tagheer [Aden], February 11). The strongest opposition to the federal system, however, came from the hard-line factions of the fractious Southern Movement (al-Harakat al-Janubiyya, also known as Hiraq), which have opposed the political roadmap from its early stages, remaining inflexible in their call for a complete secession from the North (*National Yemen*, February 16; Aden Now, February 17).

Hiraq is an amorphous umbrella group that includes several southern factions that generally agree on the need for greater autonomy for the South but differ on the shape of it and on the process to achieve it (see *Terrorism Monitor*, February 7, 2013). While the bulk of the Southern Movement remains committed to peaceful tactics and regular demonstrations in opposition to the central government, marginal segments of the movement started to adopt a more confrontational stance against the state two years ago, calling openly for secession. In 2011 and 2012, a number of low-profile incidents targeting security checkpoints and government buildings in Abyan and Aden were attributed to gunmen loosely affiliated with Hiraq, although too often these episodes become indistinguishable from the attacks carried out by jihadist militants active in the area. From early 2013,

however, a different trend began to materialize. Not only did a growing number of militant factions start to emerge and claim responsibility for their attacks, but this militant segment has also shown a strong intent to challenge the state's authority in the South by mounting attacks and using tactics previously unseen in the past.

This low-intensity conflict currently has its main flashpoints in al-Daleh, Lahij, Abyan and Aden – the provinces that will constitute one of the two southern regions of the new administrative division – and Shabwa. The militant push gained traction last December, when a tank of the Army's 33rd Brigade shelled a funeral tent in al-Daleh, killing 15 civilians (Yemen Today, December 27, 2013).

The funeral procession was mourning a HIRAK activist killed when secessionists attempted to storm a governorate building to hoist the flag of the former South Yemen republic (al-Masdar Online, December 23, 2013). Although the 33rd Brigade said later that the attack was a mistake and the government opened a formal inquiry on the incident, the episode played well in southern characterizations of the Army as a “northern occupation force” (SabaNews [Sana'a], December 27, 2013; *al-Sahwa* [Aden], January 3). Rallies in support of people in al-Daleh quickly spread across many southern cities, while the chances of a non-violent settlement collapsed when troops from the 33rd Brigade opened fire on demonstrators in al-Daleh on December 28, 2013 killing two (*al-Daleh News*, December 28, 2013). Tensions escalated in al-Daleh throughout January as a militant faction called the “Armed Resistance in al-Daleh” took control of several government offices, stormed the security compound in the city and on two occasions ambushed Army units, kidnapping seven soldiers (al-Motamar, January 12; Yemen Today, January 25; *Yemen Times*, February 20). The group also attacked the Jarbhan Army base in the Sanah district of al-Daleh with mortar fire and RPGs and tried to target (without success) a government compound in al-Daleh city with a car bomb (al-Motamar, January 29; 26September.net, February 2). After a deadly February 18 confrontation in al-Daleh between security forces and Southern militants left 13 people dead and 30 injured, gunmen with RPGs ambushed an army convoy in Mafraq, killing six soldiers and kidnapping 12 others (SabaNews, February 18; Aden TV, February 19). Responsibility for the attack was claimed a few days later by a group called the “Southern National Resistance,” which threatened further attacks and called on the government to withdraw the 33rd Brigade from the province (Aden News Agency, February 20; AdenAlghad.net, February 21).

Besides the ongoing violence in al-Daleh, which over the past two months has claimed dozens of lives on both sides

of the fighting, clashes and attacks against security forces are also occurring on a weekly basis also in Shabwa, Aden, Abyan and Lahij. The seizure near al-Hawta (capital of Lahij governorate) of a large quantity of IEDs, detonators and landmines that, according to the army, belonged to Southern militants, represented a further indicator of the seriousness of the situation (Barakish.net, February 17). Attacks have not been limited to military targets; the “Southern Resistance in Shabwa” claimed responsibility for an assault on a security unit guarding a gas pipeline in Shabwa (Aden TV, February 21). However, the growth of armed separatist movements in many places in Southern Yemen calling themselves the “Southern Resistance,” represent the strongest display of this trend. Various accounts tie these movements to Ali Salem al-Beidh, the former general secretary of the Yemen Socialist Party and the strongest voice calling for secession within the Southern Movement (Akhbaralyom.net, January 24, Aden News Agency, February 2; *Aden al-Ghad*, February 4). His recent call for an armed struggle against the central government found the support of several of HIRAK's armed wings, most notably the Brigades of the Popular Resistance for the Liberation and the Independence of the South in al-Dalhe, Abyan, Aden and Shabwa (Akhbaralyom.net, January 24). Also close to al-Beidh is the National Front for the Liberation and Independence of the South, a new entity led by Shaykh Ahmad Bamualim recently established in Lahij with the aim of coordinating the different southern factions (Aden Live TV, February 17).

While the gradual radicalization of segments of the Southern Movement might be partially a consequence of the questionable conduct of some Army Brigades in the South (especially in al-Daleh), the risk of an open southern insurgency against the central government is no longer a remote prospect. As the government will likely remain resolute in rejecting any HIRAK request different from the six regions solution, tensions have the potential to worsen and even jeopardize the Yemeni political transition. The interplay in southern Yemen between demands for autonomy by local tribes and the security challenges posed by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula already constitutes an explosive mixture.

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The Battle for al-Quneitra, the “Gateway to Damascus”

Nicholas A. Heras

Syria’s southwestern al-Quneitra governorate, bordering the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights and the UN administered demilitarized zone, is an active area of conflict between the armed opposition and forces loyal to the Assad regime. In addition to the geo-political significance of al-Quneitra, the governorate is important to the Assad government because it is geographically situated 70 kilometers from Damascus, linking both the Syrian military and the armed opposition to the highly-contested battle fronts in Damascus’ eastern and southern suburbs and in the southern Dera’a governorate, a region of strong armed opposition along the Syrian-Jordanian border. The Syrian armed opposition estimates that it controls 80 percent of al-Quneitra governorate, particularly the southern districts of the province bordering northern Dera’a governorate (*al-Safir* [Beirut], February 26).

Al-Quneitra was an area of major fighting in May 2013, when the short-lived Free Syrian Army (FSA) seizure of the Quneitra crossing on the Syrian-Israeli border led to the deployment of Syrian armor to retake the border post and dislodge opposition fighters from the area (*Times of Israel* [Jerusalem], June 6, 2013). It is reported that the Syrian military’s deployment in the demilitarized zone led to a series of strongly-worded and threatening communiqués from the Israeli government concerning the intentions of the Syrian military in the area (*Haaretz* [Tel Aviv], August 6, 2013).

Two recent initiatives of the FSA Supreme Military Council (FSA-SMC) and allied armed opposition groups have placed increased attention on al-Quneitra. The first of these events was the February 16 announcement that the FSA-SMC has replaced its former leader, Brigadier General Salim Idris, with Brigadier General Abdel Illah al-Bashir, a defected Syrian army officer from al-Quneitra who is the commander of the FSA-SMC’s al-Quneitra front and a member of the important southern Syrian al-Nu’ami tribe (Reuters, February 16). Members of the tribe in al-Quneitra are reported to be among the strongest supporters of General al-Bashir (*al-Akhabar* [Beirut], February 17).

It is reported that this change of leadership within the FSA-SMC was prompted by the organization’s desire to re-emphasize the FSA’s strength in Syria’s southern governorates (Reuters, February 16). A senior FSA commander, Brigadier General Abdullah al-Qarazi, referred to the strategy behind his organization’s renewed focus on southern Syria by stating:

“Dera’a province is the gateway to Damascus. The battle for Damascus starts from here” (AFP, February 18). Related to the FSA’s renewed focus on southern Syria is the February 14 announcement of the creation of the Southern Front by a coalition of 49 armed opposition groups, the majority of which are active in Dera’a, al-Quneitra, al-Suweida and Reef Damascus governorates. The constituent armed groups of Jabhat al-Janoubiya, most of which are affiliated or allied with the FSA, claim to number 30,000 fighters. The movement currently maintains a loosely organized command structure that provides freedom for its constituent armed groups’ leaders to act independently:

We are the voice of moderation and [a] strong shield for the Syrian people... to liberate Syria from the dictatorship of Assad and from extremism... to defend the right of the Syrian people to choose a representative government... we work toward the formation of a government that truly represents the people, that respects minorities and that ensures and respects the rights and beliefs of all Syrians, without ethnic or religious discrimination. [1]

Several Islamist armed opposition groups that are not formally associated with FSA or its partner, the opposition civilian political organization the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), have been as active as the FSA in the fighting for control of al-Quneitra governorate. Of these groups, one of the most prominent is Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya (Islamic Movement of the Free Ones of the Levant), part of the Jabhat al-Islamiya (JI - Islamic Front; for more information on Harakat Ahrar al-Sham and the JI, see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 4, 2013; MLM Briefs, November, 2013). The militant Salafist group has launched a series of campaigns in southern al-Quneitra governorate and the Izra district of northwestern Dera’a governorate, particularly in and around the villages of al-Hijah, Ain al-Tineh and Sweisa, located near the heavily-contested Dera’a towns of Jasim and Nawa. Campaigns launched by Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya in this region of Syria include November 2013’s *Ma’rakat Fajr Tawhid* (Dawn of Holy Unity Battle) and the ongoing *Ma’rakat Fajr al-Rabiah* (Dawn of Spring Battle), which the group has promoted heavily via social media outlets. [2] Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya’s offensive in southeastern al-Quneitra has succeeded in seizing Syrian military equipment, including small arms, ammunition and military vehicles. [3]

Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya’s militant Salafist ally and al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (JN-Victory Front) has also been actively involved in the fighting in southern al-Quneitra and northwestern Dera’a, particularly in and around Jasim and Nawa, where it has focused on taking

control of the local Jasim-Nawa highway to relieve the Syrian military siege of the town. [4] The Assad government has highlighted JN's involvement in the fighting in this region, asserting that fighters from JN attacked and killed eight civilians in the pro-Assad village of al-Duweiya al-Saghra in al-Quneitra (SANA [Damascus], February 13).

The ongoing offensives launched by Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya and JN in this region are being conducted simultaneously with another armed opposition campaign named *Ma'rakat Fajr Tawhid 2* (Dawn of Holy Unity Battle 2), which is being waged by a coalition of Islamist armed opposition groups led by the suburban Damascus and al-Quneitra-based organization Alwiya al-Furqan (The Criterion Brigades; for more information on Alwiya al-Furqan see MLM Briefs, March 2013).

Fajr Tawhid 2 is the continuation of a November 2013 armed opposition campaign named *Ma'rakat al-Safat* (Battle of the Ranks) and led by Alwiya al-Furqan that is attempting to cut off the north-south Damascus-Quneitra highway by attacking Syrian military outposts and checkpoints along the road (Sham Times [Damascus], November 13, 2013; al-Dorar al-Shamiyya [Damascus], February 9). [5]

The fighting for al-Quneitra, particularly in the southern districts of the governorate, is a strategic battle that both the al-Assad government and the Syrian armed opposition are likely to continue to wage into the foreseeable future.

Al-Quneitra's strategic position between the armed opposition controlled southern and central districts of Dera'a governorate and the battlefields of suburban Damascus make it a necessary region for both the government and the Syrian opposition to control. Although there is renewed FSA attention to the southern front, including al-Quneitra, the active presence of potentially competing, non-FSA Islamist and militant Salafist-led campaigns in the fighting for the governorate is likely to complicate rebel efforts to coordinate a cohesive response to renewed Syrian military attacks and pressure in al-Quneitra and northern Dera'a governorates.

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Notes

1. "49 Factions Declare the 'Southern Front' in 5 Governorates," Zaman al-Wasl [Damascus], February 13, 2014, <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/46545.html>.
2. "Harakat Ahrar al-Sham-Starting the Dawn of Holy Unity Battle," Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya website,

November 27, 2013, <http://ahraralsham.net/?p=3953>; "Harakat Ahrar al-Sham-Issuing the Dawn of Spring Battle-Liberate al-Quneitra Countryside," Islam Sham YouTube page, February 19, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdVpiHdScsw>.

3. "Harakat Ahrar al-Sham- Liberates the Mechanized Company in the Sweisa District in the al-Quneitra Countryside," Ahrar News YouTube page, January 31, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueZTUxDZjDQ>.

4. "Beginning Battles in the Countryside of al-Quneitra to Open the Road to the Besieged City of Nawa," Jabhat al-Nusra's declaration posted on Moslim.org forum, February 26, 2014, <http://www.moslim.org/vb/showthread.php?528657-%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-%E2%80%93-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%83-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%86%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9>.

5. See the Alwiya al-Furqan YouTube page for frequently updated video footage of the Fajr Tawhid 2 Battle: http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdiidS1jUkQBqPFvwUPvUhFA/videos?sort=dd&view=0&shelf_id=1.

Counterterrorism or Neo-Colonialism? The French Army in Africa

John Daly

France has sent troops in the past year to two former African colonies, Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR). In Mali, the concern was an Islamist terrorist assault on the government, while in the Central African Republic there were fears that religious clashes between the country's Muslim and Christian populations could descend into genocide. France will maintain a presence in both nations for the foreseeable future, but French interventions in Africa date back over five decades. The major difference between then and now is that France is now working in cooperation with African Union troops and has received U.S. air support in Mali's Operation Serval.

The Past as Prologue

At its height, France's African empire included most of the Sahara and Sahel region, large parts of West Africa (including several important ports), the Island of Madagascar and the strategic port of Djibouti at the southern entrance to the Red Sea.

The conclusion of World War II was the beginning of the end for most European colonial empires, as the conflict lethally weakened both the governments' political fortitude and their military capacities to withstand rising post-war Third World nationalist independence movements, many supported by the Communist bloc as "wars of liberation."

The watershed year for African independence was 1960, when 17 sub-Saharan nations, including 14 former French colonies, gained independence. However, Algeria, with its status as a department of France, had to endure a brutal guerrilla war against its French occupiers before finally gaining independence in July 1962. The last French colony in Africa, Djibouti, only gained independence in June 1977.

France – Still Influential in African Ex-Colonies

Despite the independence of its former African colonies, France still wields a high degree of influence in sub-Saharan Africa. Economic considerations remain a major driver of French foreign policy in Africa. Over the past decade, France's share of African trade plummeted from 10 to 4.7 percent, while China's African market share soared to over 16 percent in 2011. [1] Reviving France's African trade is a key foreign policy element of the French government.

During African crises, France remains a prime source of diplomatic, financial and military support for African francophone nations. From 1960 to 2005, France launched 46 military operations in its former African colonies. [2] French military interventionism in its former African colonies has been a relatively consistent policy for 54 years and is supported by an extensive network of bilateral Franco-African defense and military assistance treaties. French military protection was extended to the francophone former Belgian colonies of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Rwanda and Burundi in the mid-1970s. While many of the operations were portrayed as missions to protect French citizens or support legitimate governments against rebellions, Paris often sent military assistance contingent on a "legitimate" African leader's willingness to support French interests.

The 1994 Genocide in Rwanda – A Turning Point

In 1993, Rwandan rebels rose against the government and France sent 600 troops in Operation *Noroît* to protect foreigners, though these troops were withdrawn by the end of the year. On April 8, 1994, in view of the deteriorating situation, France launched Operation *Amaryllis* in order to protect the evacuation of 1,500 residents, primarily Westerners. France's subsequent Operation *Turquoise* saved an estimated 10,000 to 17,000 lives, but it also helped Rwandans suspected of genocide flee the country, resulting in harsh media criticism and parliamentary inquiries, especially as France did not use its U.N. Security Council position to stop the killings while it was still possible. [3] The French embassy in London stated that "France acted not only in order to prevent the tragedy, but also to mobilize the international community to come to the aid of the genocide victims." [4] The allegations of inaction contributing to the Rwandan slaughter increased French determination not to allow similar events in former French and Belgian colonies in the future.

French Peacekeeping Operations

Roughly 12,000 French troops are currently engaged in 15 United Nations peacekeeping operations around the world, sanctioned by the Security Council. [5] According to the French Ministry of Defense, nearly half of these are deployed in Africa in both military and advisory capacities, increasingly on short-term emergency deployments in order to stabilize regions under France's traditional influence. [6]

France's African Military Presence Becomes Permanent

There are three main French military bases in Africa. Djibouti is the largest, with smaller forces at Dakar in Senegal and Libreville in Gabon. Their purpose is to promote regional security, though the base in Djibouti on the Red Sea allows France to exercise a measure of military influence in the Middle East as well. According to the French Ministry of Defense, the missions of the "prepositioned forces" are assisting armed forces of the African Union (AU); fulfilling the commitments of France to host countries, European and UN frameworks, including peacekeeping; crisis prevention, support of free trade and the protection and possible evacuation of French nationals. [7]

France is in Djibouti under a 1977 bilateral defense protocol covering "Les forces françaises stationnées à Djibouti" (FFDj). The French Ministry of Defense numbers FFDj forces at about 1,900 soldiers, including 1,400 permanently based prepositioned troops, with the FFDj "numerically the

most important French contingent in Africa.” [8]

The “*Éléments français au Sénégal*” (EFS) deploys about 450 soldiers, mostly in Dakar; in 2014, the EFS is slated to run at least 120 training exercises and train about 5,000 African military personnel from neighboring Sahel countries, including Niger, Mali and Mauritania, along with providing assistance to French troops in Mali. [9]

France has deployed armed forces in Gabon since independence under defense agreements signed in August 1960. “*Les forces françaises au Gabon*” (FFG) currently number about 900 soldiers, including 450 permanently based in Gabon, one of three French reservoirs of prepositioned forces in Africa, with the FFG on alert to support operations in Western and Central Africa. [10]

The ongoing Operation *Épervier* (“Sparrowhawk”) deployment of French troops in Chad began in February 1986 at the request of the Hissène Habré government to contain a Libyan invasion that was threatening the Chadian capital of N’jamena. The 950 French troops still stationed there contribute to both Chad’s stability and that of the surrounding region. [11]

Force Licorne, the deployment of 450 French troops in Côte d’Ivoire, dates back to September 2002, when they were dispatched to protect French nationals after an attempted coup. [12]

Mali 2013 – Operation Serval (“Wildcat”)

In 2013, France undertook two interventions, one in Mali and another in the CAR. On January 11 2013, Malian authorities requested French assistance in halting armed terrorist groups believed to be advancing towards the capital Bamako. Utilizing its prepositioned forces, France launched a major air and land intervention a few hours later in support of the Malian armed forces. West African and Chadian troops backed by a pro-Bamako Tuareg militia joined them in the second half of January. Eight NATO air forces plus Sweden and the UAE provided non-combat assistance with air transport, aerial refueling and reconnaissance. Within six weeks, French-led forces recaptured all of the towns in northern Mali that had been seized by the Islamists in 2012. [13] French forces now work alongside the United Nations’ peacekeeping Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali, (MINUSMA), established by UN Security Council Resolution 2100 to stabilize Mali after the 2012 Tuareg rebellion and Islamist occupation.

About 2,500 French soldiers with armor and attack helicopters are currently serving in Operation Serval in Mali alongside four battalions of AU troops, though further reductions of the size of the French force are underway. [14]

Central African Republic - Operation Sangaris

France has deployed forces to the CAR seven times in just over 30 years, including on three occasions in 1996.

In March 2013, Séléka rebel leader Michel Djotodia seized power, unseating elected president François Bozize and became the second Muslim leader of the predominantly Christian oil-rich country (former CAR president Jean-Bédél Bokassa briefly converted to Islam for three months in 1976 at the urging of Libyan leader Mu’ammar Qaddafi). Some Muslim guerrillas ignored Djotodia’s order to disband and went on a rampage, prompting Christians to form anti-*balaka* (“anti-machete”) vigilante groups in response.

Accordingly, on December 5, 2013, French President François Hollande announced his decision to reinforce French troops in the CAR to prevent a humanitarian disaster, telling reporters: “The Security Council has adopted a resolution, unanimously, which mandates an African force to provide security, to restore stability in the CAR and to protect the population. France will support this operation... Already, 600 French soldiers are on the spot. This number will double in the next few days, if not hours.” [15]

But France is now moving beyond unilateral intervention. On December 6-7, 2013, France hosted the Elysée Summit for Peace and Security in Africa, with 53 African delegations and France participating, along with UN, AU, EU, IMF, World Bank and African Development Bank representatives. Participants reiterated their commitment to collective security in Africa and to encouraging peace and promoting human rights. Vice Admiral Marin Gillier, director of the Security and Defense Cooperation Directorate of the Ministère des affaires étrangères (MAE) stated in the wake of the summit’s Final Declaration that Directorate priorities are set according to three criteria set by the Elysée, the MAE and the Ministries of Defense and the Interior. The first priority is geographical, centering on the Sahara-Sahel region. The second is to oppose cross-border trafficking in drugs, human beings and armaments. The third and final priority is to preserve the influence of France. Far from constricting French behavior, the Final Declaration is being interpreted in Paris as a mandate to expand French African operations, including deploying a maritime safety system in the Gulf of Guinea. [16]

On January 10, Djotodia resigned under intense international pressure after failing to end the violence. He was succeeded by former Bangui mayor Catherine Samba Panza as interim president. Panza immediately urged Christian and Muslim militias to cease fighting.

Conclusion

For decades, France viewed much of post-colonial Africa as *pré carré*, an exclusive sphere of influence. The results of its military footprint in Africa have been mixed. A year after Operation Serval began, Mali's government has reasserted itself through nationwide polls that saw former premier Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta elected president and parliament reopened. Challenges for Mali remain a peaceful settlement with its Tuareg separatists, quashing the remnants of its Islamist insurgency and improving the dire state of the economy.

The picture is cloudier in the CAR. The bloodshed continues, albeit at a reduced rate, and the interim political structure is at best fragile. A number of analysts have described the CAR as a failed state in permanent crisis. Furthermore, the country is surrounded by other poverty wracked, unstable states, including Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, South Sudan and Cameroon.

On February 25, the National Assembly approved extending France's 2,000-strong CAR deployment beyond April by a vote of 428 for and 14 against. The same day, French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault warned his compatriots: "Our action in the CAR is not finished but our efforts have begun to bear fruit," adding that "difficulties are considerable." [17]

France is now encountering increased economic competition for African resource riches from new players in Africa, including China, India, Canada, the United States, Israel, Iran, Brazil, the Gulf States, Turkey, South Africa and Malaysia. Such competition will only intensify in the short and long term. Paris, in the meantime, is prepared to protect its economic assets, ordering Special Forces troops to protect its uranium facilities in Niger.

Multilateral deployments seem to be the way of the future, with France coordinating its activities with such allies as the EU and the United States. For the moment, however, France's prepositioned troops are likely to be the advance units for the foreseeable future of any peacekeeping forces sent into France's former African colonies.

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Notes

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