Master Thesis

Opération Serval and the Sahel discourse in French quality newspapers (2003-2013): exploring indirect forms of news media influence on the decision-making of international intervention missions

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the influence of news media on the decision-making of international interventions. While academic literature on media-policy interactions is abundant, it stands out most scholars have studied news media's influence over intervention decision-making in a positivist framework. Here, they generally attempt to prove whether news media can 'pressure' governments into launching a humanitarian intervention – a mechanism usually called the 'trigger effect'. Besides such studies having yielded many ambiguous results, I argue that this focus on direct, trigger effects has led to a neglect of more 'indirect' forms of news media influence, such as how news media reports impact decision-makers' perspectives of threats and interests, or their assumptions about the conflict where intervention is considered.

Aiming to provide a more coherent definition of such indirect media effects, I find through a discourse analysis of Operation Serval and French news media reporting on the Sahel between 2003 and 2013 that news media influence intervention decision-making in three main ways. First, news media create or contribute to a societal context that is receptive towards specific forms of intervention justification, hereby facilitating the decision to intervene. Second, by popularizing and therefore legitimizing specific representations of a conflict through reporting, news media impact decision-makers' perspectives of effective intervention strategies, as well as their ability to rally support for such policies among other stakeholders. Third, due to news media's tendency to report on extreme ideological violence and events involving citizens from their country, news media tend to delegitimize armed non-state actors in their reporting, reducing decision-makers' ability to include such actors in the peace process. Following from these observations, I conclude that the primary mechanism underlying news media's influence over decision-making is news media's ability to generate broader legitimacy for the representations articulated and perceived by decision-makers. As a result, news media's influence should be understood as their ability to 'enable', rather than directly 'cause' or 'trigger' decisions.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Ever since the introduction of 24-hour cable news channels in the early 1990s, scholars have shown a renewed interest for the question of how news media reporting influences foreign policymaking. Although this question had been studied long before, the late 1980s witnessed major technological advancements in telecommunication that fundamentally changed the dynamic of international news coverage. Conflict zones once deemed far away could suddenly be covered in real time on television, bringing the devastation of civil wars and humanitarian crises into the living rooms of Western families. For this reason, many in the 1990s spoke of a 'globalization' of news media, arguing that this development would profoundly affect public perceptions of the world and, ultimately, foreign policymaking.[1]

The globalization of news media ran parallel with the end of the Cold War and gained further momentum amid an era of geopolitical unipolarity and increased participation of Western countries in international intervention missions. As a result, an extensive body of research emerged in the 1990s on how media coverage affected the decision-making of such interventions. By the mid-1990s, for example, the theory that news media played a central role in shaping foreign policy had gained widespread popularity under the label of the 'CNN effect' and was frequently drawn on to explain 'irrational' or 'emotion-driven' engagements of Western forces in non-strategic conflicts.[2] While later studies have largely debunked or nuanced this effect, it did not prevent from the academic debate on media-policy interactions from being dominated by questions of directionality: was it indeed media that influenced decision-making through public pressure, or rather governments that manipulated public opinion through media outlets – often labeled as 'propaganda theory'? Others, in turn, argued that such influence worked 'bi-directionally' or that news agencies simply 'indexed' their stories to official policy statements, hereby reflecting the contours of elite debate rather than public opinion.[3]

Whereas this body of research has provided interesting insights into the relationship between foreign policymaking, public opinion, and news media coverage, it stands out that most scholars have studied the question of media-policy interactions in a strongly positivist framework. In their accounts, the main research question generally constitutes whether news media coverage has the ability to move governments into deciding to intervene or not – often labeled the 'trigger effect' – and is answered by large-N models that quantify different forms of coverage and government action. Unfortunately, such approaches have yielded many ambiguous results, and scientific consensus currently does not go further than news media coverage having little to no direct effect in triggering international intervention responses.[4] In sum, most researchers nowadays acknowledge the existence of a link between news media

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[1] See e.g. Kennan 1993; Gowing 1994; Miller 2007.
[2] Idem.
[3] See Robinson 2002; Miller 2007; Bennett 1990.
[4] See e.g. Robinson 2008; Miller 2007; Soderlund et al. 2008.

reporting and international intervention decision-making. But besides a general denouncement of a direct, trigger effect, it remains largely unclear and debated how these two interact.

Following from this lack of consensus on the effects of news media on intervention decision-making, the main goal of this thesis is to contribute to a better understanding of the complex interaction between news media and foreign policymaking. I do this by taking a different approach to the concept of news media influence: rather than studying whether news media coverage can pressure governments into launching an intervention, I attempt to go beyond the 'trigger effect' by studying how news media discourse influences the way decision-makers conceive intervention policies. In other words, I attempt in this thesis to study the 'indirect' rather than 'direct' media effects on intervention decision-making, by focusing on news media's influence on decision-makers' assumptions, perceptions, and ideas underlying decisions about international intervention. After all, news media influence entails more than a binary notion of government action versus no government action following media coverage.

A focus on the indirect effects of news media on foreign policymaking is relevant for two main reasons. First, it is broadly acknowledged that news media reporting plays a central role in shaping public discourse by pushing certain issues to the forefront of public debate and by representing them in a particular way – mechanisms generally referred to as *agenda-setting* and *framing theory*. In specific relation to conflict news coverage, a well-established body of research under the label of 'peace journalism' has, for example, shown how news media outlets tend to be biased towards the violent and sensational aspects of war. By consequence, news coverage of conflicts may carry negative effects for the peace process or even sustain violence by creating incentives for conflict parties to continue fighting.[5] Second, academic research within the field of conflict studies has shown how the institutionalization of specific conflict and conflict resolution discourses within policymaking circles have been able to orient international intervention activities into specific, often ineffective directions.[6] Frequently, such policy discourses were even capable of withstanding criticism by regional experts, enabling ineffective peacebuilding strategies to persist despite negative results.[7]

Following these observations, it seems likely that news media affect intervention decision-making in more ways than pressuring governments into launching an international intervention. Decision-making entails a complex and multidimensional process of defining problems and formulating solutions that is shaped by numerous ideational, material, and contextual factors. As such, I argue that limiting this process to a causal model with several variables – as is common within positivist approaches – risks oversimplification and should be avoided. Rather, the question of news media influence on international intervention decision-making should be expanded towards how news media reporting affects decision-makers' fundamental assumptions about the conflict they consider intervening

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[5] For an extensive discussion of Peace Journalism research, see Galtung 1986 or Lynch 2008.
[6] See e.g. Campbell 1992; Autesserre 2009, 2011, 2012; Hansen 2006; Malejacq & Sandor 2020; Woodward 2017.
[7] See e.g. Woodward 2017; Autesserre 2011.

in, their preference for certain peacebuilding strategies over others, and the way they justify decisions and policies towards constituencies. To my knowledge, none have specifically looked into such indirect effects on intervention decision-making yet. This points to a gap in our understanding of the role of news media in foreign policymaking and calls for further investigation into this matter.

Aiming to fill this knowledge gap, the main contribution of this thesis holds that news media can indirectly influence intervention decision-making in three main ways: 1) by creating a '*receptive societal context*' for specific forms of intervention justification, thereby facilitating the decision to launch an international intervention 2) by popularizing particular understandings of the conflict where intervention is considered, consequently influencing decision-makers' perspective of effective intervention strategies and their ability to rally support for such strategies; and 3) by reducing the perceived legitimacy of non-state actors, consequently reducing decision-makers' ability to include non-state actors into peace negotiations – in particular so-called 'jihadist groups'.

In sum, I argue in this thesis that news media contribute to societal conditions that enable the development of certain intervention policies, while disabling the development of others. For this reason, the relationship between media and policy should not be understood as direct and causal – i.e. that a specific conflict representation in news media automatically leads to a specific intervention policy – but rather as contextual and constitutive. This means that news media are capable of shaping public discourse in such a way that certain representations articulated by decision-makers become broadly considered legitimate and accurate, consequently enabling the decisions deriving from them. As such, I find that news media reporting might have a bigger impact on foreign policymaking than initially thought. This influence, however, is different and more indirect than assumed before.

In a theoretical sense, the conclusions of this thesis build on two main parts. The first part is heavily inspired by the International Relations (IR) school of post-structuralism – in particular its conception of the interaction between public and policy discourses. This school of thought considers foreign policy a 'discursive practice', meaning that foreign policy is a socially constructed phenomena, dependent on representations of strategic interests, threats, security problems, and conflicts. Moreover, as policies have to be justified towards constituencies, decision-makers are considered to draw upon the representations that already circulate within society in order to formulate meaningful policies about the issues they wish to address.[8] For this reason, post-structuralists argue that decision-makers are situated within a larger 'public sphere' and inevitably build their policies on the discourses articulated by a larger number of individuals, institutions, and media outlets – a domain conceptualized as 'public discourse'.[9]

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[8] Hansen 2006, 7-8.
[9] Idem.

Public discourse thus does not cause action directly, but rather functions as the 'enabler': it "establishes the conditions of possibility for objects or events to exist."[10]

The second part of the theoretical framework stems from literature on peacekeeping and, more specifically, the theory of different 'logics of action'. Building on this theory, I theorize that international intervention decision-making is essentially shaped around three parameters: a *logic of interest* (i.e. motivations to intervene in the first place); a *logic of effectiveness* (i.e. perceptions of how the objective of peace can be achieved most effectively); and a *logic of appropriateness* (i.e. global norms determining the range of acceptable and non-acceptable strategies and practices). This framework enables me to break down the complex rationale behind decision-making into three parameters determining the purpose, strategy, and range of acceptable practices for a given intervention mission. As a result, I am able to identify and define more coherent ways in which news media indirectly affects international intervention decision-making.

1.1 Case study: the France's military intervention 'Opération Serval' in the Sahel

In this thesis, I examine the issue of news media influence on intervention decision-making within a single case, that is, the French intervention mission 'Serval'. In January 2013, the French government launched this military intervention into Mali to stop the advance of Islamic militants towards the capital of Bamako and prevent the Malian government from losing territorial sovereignty. As the French forces had ousted militants by February 2013, the Serval military campaign was broadly considered a success and received appraisal for its efficient handling of the situation.[11] Nonetheless, due to ongoing instability in the region, the mission was replaced in July 2014 by a longer-term presence of French forces called 'Barkhane', which was part of a broader international effort to restore stability and security in the entire Sahel. At the high point of foreign presence, the region hosted not only French forces, but also the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), two EU-funded capacity building and training missions, as well as regional coalitions such as the G5 Sahel Joint Forces, the Takuba Task Force, and troops deployed by the African Union.

While this large-scale international presence has certainly affected conflict dynamics, most experts nowadays agree that none of these initiatives have been able to stop the deterioration of the region's security situation.[12] Due to this lack of results, political opposition towards international presence has grown in both Sahelian and Western countries, and was recently sealed by the complete withdrawal of French forces from Mali.

Moreover, an increasing number of regional experts and conflict scholars has voiced criticism on the employed peacebuilding strategy in the Sahel, often citing the heavily militarized character of the

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[10] Finnemore 1996, 15.
[11] See e.g. Bergamischi 2013; d'Evry 2015; Vincent 2022.
[12] See e.g. Vincent 2022; Guichoua 2020; Kornio 2019; Schmauder 2020.

international response to the crisis. According to this critique, peacebuilding efforts in the Sahel have not been successful, because the international response has been geared towards hard security issues, (i.e. counterterrorism and peacekeeping,) and improving state stability (e.g. via capacity building and military training missions).[13] Many researchers have argued that such approaches are unlikely to stop violence, because they barely address the underlying causes and drivers of conflict in the region, which tend to be more political, political-ecological, and socio-economic in nature.[14]

In academic literature, it is often suggested that the persistent focus on security issues within Sahel intervention decision-making stems from a years-long 'securitization' of the Sahara-Sahel region.[15] According to such literature, security thinking after 9/11 was dominated by the discourse of 'state failure', causing outstretched territories with limited statehood, such as the Sahel, to be perceived as a national security threat. In essence, this threat perception was driven by the recurring representation of the Sahel as an 'ungoverned space', ultimately causing fundamental problems in the region such as governance grievances, political marginalization, systemic poverty, and intercommunal conflicts over natural resources to be viewed through a security and state failure lens by Western policymakers.[16] For example, rather than viewing the 2012 uprising in northern Mali by ethnic Tuaregs as a result of their decades-long marginalization in national decision-making, many Western policymakers interpreted unrest in the country as the next episode in the 'global jihad' that could gain momentum due to the incapability of Sahelian state to control borders and exercise state sovereignty over their territory.[17]

In a similar vein, other scholars have shown how the continuous representation of violence in Mali as a 'jihadist conflict' has brought about a pervasive, simple narrative containing that local jihadist groups in the Sahel are linked to worldwide terror networks, such as the Islamic State or Al-Qaeda, and attempt to establish a new Islamic caliphate in Africa.[18] Within such narratives, parallels between the Sahel and other conflict zones are often made. The region's frequent comparison with Afghanistan has, for example, resulted in the widespread amalgam 'Sahelistan'.[19] All in all, most scholars agree that such discourses contain overly simplified representations of reality and, by consequence, have contributed to a 'distorted understanding' of Sahelian conflict dynamics among Western policymakers.[20] As a result, discourse is often considered an important driver of the ineffective security and statebuilding-focused approach to peacebuilding in the Sahel.

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[13] E.g. Charbonneau & Fears 2014; Guichoaoua 2020; Schmauder, Soto-Mayor & Goxho 2020; Kornio 2019.
[14] Bergamischi 2013; Schmauder et al. 2020; Charbonneau & Sears 2014; Charbonneau 2017, 2018; Osland & Erstand 2020; Benjaminsen & Boubacar 2019; Kornio 2018.
[15] Baldaro 2021; Idahosa, Degterev & Ikhidero 2021.
[16] Bachmann 2008; Harmon 2014; Baldaro 2018; Frowd & Sandor 2018.
[17] Schmauder, Soto-Mayor & Goxho 2020; Frowd & Sandor 2018.
[18] Dowd & Raleigh 2013; Pérouse de Montclos 2015.
[19] Rekawek 2014; Malejacq & Sandor 2020.
[20] Guichaoua 2020; Malejacq & Sandor 2020.

While the discourses underlying peacebuilding in the Sahel have received quite a bit of attention in existing literature, it remains less clear how such discourses could become dominant in the first place and withstand repeated criticism from regional experts. Regarding this question, literature on intervention efforts in the Sahel often suggests that news media has played an important role in the construction, diffusion, and reproduction of the security discourse that underlies the militarized response to the Sahel crisis. [21] Implicitly, scholars here posit that news media coverage on the Sahel conflict has contributed to an intervention strategy geared towards security and statebuilding. Such claims, however, are based on very little or anecdotal evidence as, to my knowledge, no systematic efforts have yet been undertaken to research how news media has covered this conflict and how this coverage has affected policymaking.

To sum up, academic literature often implies that news media has to a large extent contributed to the militarized character of the international response to the Sahel crisis, while little to no research has been conducted on how news media have covered this conflict. Given news media's proven ability to shape public discourse, it is relevant for both practical and scientific reasons to take a closer look at the interaction between news media coverage and intervention decision-making in the case of the Sahel. Moreover, in a broader sense, providing insight into this interaction adds to a better understanding of how news media affects foreign policymaking – in particular more indirect forms of influence. For such reasons, I chose the Sahel as the main case study of this research project.

Finally, the choice for specifically the Serval case is mostly motivated by methodological reasons. As many of the intervention missions in the Sahel consist of international coalitions (e.g. the United Nations or European Union), studying the question of news media influence on decision-making would require an analysis of news media discourse and decision-making across multiple countries. Without even speaking of the representativeness of such an analysis (e.g. how to pick news media outlets or determine whether each news source or country should count equally in the decision-making process), this extensive, multi-national approach would simply fall beyond the scope of a master thesis research project. For such reasons, a bilateral intervention mission such as Serval or Barkhane were considered more feasible. Ultimately, the Serval case was deemed most appropriate as the Barkhane mission was a sequential mission and, consequently, did not include the decision-making process about launching an intervention, which is a key issue in existing literature on media-policy interactions.

1.2 Methodological approach: a qualitative discourse analysis

One of the key epistemological challenges for studying media influence has been the impossibility to directly observe and measure it. Traditionally, this problem has been tackled by either employing interview-based methodologies, or by using large-N quantitative approaches that link the actions of decision-makers to the content of news media items. However, as discussed, these approaches have

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[21] Keenan 2005; Bachmann 2008; Malejacq & Sandor 2020.

primarily focused on the question whether news media coverage can move governments into undertaking an international intervention, yielding ambiguous results.

In this thesis, I adopt a different methodological approach: rather than focusing on the decision by governments to intervene or not, I closely analyze the ideas and representations that decision-makers articulate through policy texts other official communication – a domain I define as the '*intervention policy discourse*'. As briefly explained, post-structuralists situate policymakers in a wider public sphere and argue that government officials are to some extent forced to draw on representations articulated within this sphere to formulate legitimate policies. In turn, news media are considered to be one of the most important shapers of public discourse and therefore represent a vital link in the process of inscribing meaning and legitimacy to the utterances of policymakers. Hence, in order to understand the influence of news media on the way decision-makers conceive intervention strategies, one should carefully analyze how the three shaping parameters of intervention policies are represented in communication of Serval's policy discourse and compare these with their representation in news media reports – conceptualized as '*news media discourse*'.

As such, the main methodology of this thesis comes down to a qualitative discourse analysis of Serval's policy discourse and the French news media discourse in 10 preceding years. The main goal here is to identify patterns of reproduction and contestation between the two. By doing so, I first attempt to unravel the 'systems of thought' underlying international intervention policies and, subsequently, to examine whether these ideas, assumptions, and perceptions have been supported or contested by news media discourse in preceding years. If news media were to have a large amount of influence on decision-makers, one should find more patterns of reproduction between the news media and policy discourse, whereas patterns of contestation would point to less influence. By linking such patterns to the three shaping parameters of intervention decision-making, this provides insight into the role of news media in the development and legitimization of ideas, representations, and assumptions that underly decisions about international intervention. As a result, this methodology enables us to go beyond the search for immediate causes and identify more coherent forms of indirect media influence on foreign policy.

In terms of data collection, this thesis contains two main datasets: one for the analysis of the policy discourse, and one for the news media discourse analysis. Among other material, the policy discourse dataset includes over 90 texts of official government communication, such as presidential speeches, senate reports, policy documents, responses to parliamentary questions, and transcribed interviews with French government officials. The second dataset consists of 290 news articles from four different French newspapers (*Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Les Echos*, and *La Croix*) about the Sahel between 2003, generally considered the year that the securitization of the Sahara-Sahel region started, and 2013,

which saw the launch of the French intervention.[22] In Chapter 4, I provide a more extensive discussion of the employed methodology, research design, and data collection.

1.3 Thesis structure

Including the introduction, this thesis consists of eight chapters. In Chapter 2, I start off by looking into existing scholarship on the interaction between news media and foreign policymaking. The goal of this section is to assess the current state of research and identify gaps in our understanding of media-policy relations. Having mapped the shortcomings of existing literature, I proceed in Chapter 3 by developing a theoretical framework that enables a better study and definition of indirect news media effects on international intervention decision-making. This framework is subsequently operationalized in Chapter 4, where I discuss my choices for a qualitative discourse analysis and other decisions regarding research methodology and case selection. For clarity reasons, I decided to split the empirical analysis of this thesis into three parts: in Chapter 5, I examine the policy discourse of Operation Serval, after which I shift attention to the Sahel news media discourse in French newspapers (2003-2013) in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, I attempt to tie the results of both analyses together by identifying three indirect forms of news media influence on intervention decision-making. As such, this chapter contains the main scientific contribution of this thesis. Finally, in Chapter 8, I conclude by reflecting on shortcomings of this research project and situating my findings in broader debates on media-policy interactions.

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[22] For more discussion of the start of the Sahel's securitization in 2003, see Bachmann 2008; Baldaro 2018.

Chapter 2 - Status Quaestionis: Existing scholarship on news media and foreign policy interactions

In the introduction, I explained how the primary motivation for this thesis stems from the observation that scholarship on interactions between news media and intervention decision-making has been dominated by positivist studies examining whether news media coverage can 'trigger' the decision to launch a humanitarian intervention. Due to this focus on direct, trigger effects, the academic debate on media-policy connections is currently quite narrow and largely excludes more indirect forms of news media influence over decision-making.

To get a sense of the current state of research on this matter and further clarify its shortcomings, this chapter contains a brief discussion of existing literature on interactions between news media and foreign policymaking. I identify three waves of academic research: a pioneering phase in the 1960s and 1970s driven by public opinion research; a second wave of renewed interest that emerged in the 1990s theorizing media-state relations; and a third wave of theoretical refinement and focus on underlying mechanisms starting in the early 2000s. In the final section, I present an overview of the different theories and draw several conclusions from the existing scholarship.

2.1 Pioneering phase and public opinion research (1960s – 1970s)

Within the debate on media-policy interactions, Bernard Cohen's *The Press and Foreign Policy*, from 1963, is usually considered the pioneering academic study. In this work, Cohen closely analyzes the process of production, distribution, and consumption of foreign affairs news by interviewing over 150 policymakers and foreign affairs journalists. His main argument is that a handful of columnists and reporters belonging to 'prestige newspapers' influence the making of American foreign policy, because they are able to "set the stage" on which policymakers must perform.[1] The press thus "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about."[2]

In essence, Cohen theorizes that a rather small group of journalists gets to determine what becomes the foreign affairs news and therefore decide for policymakers and the public what the most relevant foreign policy issues are. However, due to journalists' conventional bias towards sensational, dramatic, and controversial news items, Cohen argues that the coverage of foreign affairs is overwhelmingly "spasmodic, piecemeal, impressionistic, and oversimplified, sometimes inaccurate or garbled, and generally failing to deal with policy issues until they have become matters of public record."[3] He concludes that foreign policy is too complex of an issue for mass audiences and suggests

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[1] Cohen 1963, 32.
[2] Ibidem, 290.
[3] Cohen 1963, 234.

that foreign affairs news should be retained to a separate, specialized section in newspapers as is common with financial news.

In many ways, Cohen's research laid the groundwork for what is now known as *agenda setting theory*. This theory was coined in 1972 by the political communication scholars Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, and refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that news media place on issues in their coverage and the importance attributed to these same issues by mass audiences.[4] In their landmark study that first identified this mechanism, McCombs and Shaw asked undecided voters for the 1968 US presidential election to describe the issues they deemed most important and compared these results to the salience of political issues in media reporting during the campaign. Through quantitative analysis, they found strong correlation between the two, and hundreds of replicating research projects have since confirmed their results.[5] In sum, their research showed that media could push certain issues to the forefront of public debate and thus had the ability to 'set' the public agenda. Moreover, as politicians were generally considered to follow public opinion, it became broadly assumed that media also influenced the matters politicians deemed important.[6] This body of research, however, almost exclusively focused on the perceptions of mass audiences, so little theories were developed to specify the assumed connection between policymaking and media coverage.

While agenda setting initially pointed to mass media's ability to influence the public's attributed importance of political issues, the theory was later expanded towards *second-level agenda setting*, meaning the ability of media to influence the public's substantive opinion. In other words, media could not only tell the public 'what to think about' but also 'how to think about' issues, by representing them in a certain way. It was in this context that sociologist Erving Goffman coined the theory of *framing* in 1974 to explain how individuals cannot fully understand the ever-complex world and therefore apply "mental frameworks" to classify information and make sense of it.[7] Goffman's framing theory sparked a major field of research across different academic disciplines on how individuals, such as journalists and politicians, use frames to reduce the complexity of issues and make them accessible to lay audiences. Whether done deliberately or not, framing was found to have significant effects on the audience's perception of issues and is still considered an important factor in the ways that news media shape public opinion.[8]

2.2 Renewed interest and theorizing media-policy relations (1990s – 2000s)

Following the proliferation of new telecommunication technologies and the establishment of 24-hour televised news stations, academic interest for the effects of mass media regained momentum in the

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[4] McComb & Shaw 1972, 176-187.
[5] McComb 2005, 1.
[6] Miller 2007, 37-38.
[7] Goffman 1974, 24.
[8] See e.g. Lang & Lang 1981; Scheufele & Tewksbury 2006.

1990s, leading to many new publications and theories. In this phase, the most important development was a shift away from public opinion research and towards theorizing the interaction between media and decision-making. This shift was driven by the concomitance of new technology enabling real-time television coverage of conflict zones and the increased participation of western forces in international intervention missions after the end of the Cold War.[9] Especially the Gulf War in 1990-1991 and the US-led intervention in Somalia in 1992 sparked major discussions among academics and foreign policy experts about what they saw as an "unwarranted intrusion of media actors into the policymaking process."[10] Televised news media were considered to reduce the scope for calm deliberation over policies, as decision-makers were increasingly forced to respond to issues that played into the emotions of the public, such as humanitarian crises. Critics therefore warned this trend would strongly diminish the strategic quality of decision-making and, consequently, threaten effective forms of foreign policy.[11]

By the mid-1990s, it had had become more or less conventional wisdom that media played a central role in driving foreign policy. The theory that televised news media was able to trigger humanitarian intervention response became quickly popularized as the *CNN effect*.[12] Emblematic of this sentiment is the famous 1993 op-ed by prominent American diplomat George Kennan in which he bluntly accused television for the 'unjustified' US intervention in Somalia:

> There can be no question that the reason for this acceptance lies primarily with the exposure of the Somalia situation by the American media, above all, television. The reaction would have been unthinkable without this exposure. The reaction was an emotional one, occasioned by the sight of the suffering of the starving people in question (…). If American policy from here on out, particularly policy involving the uses of our armed forces abroad, is to be controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry, then there is no place – not only for myself, but for what have traditionally been regarded as the responsible deliberative organs of our government, in both executive and legislative branches.[13]

In this era, many shared Kennan's observation, arguing that the revolution in telecommunication had forever changed the dynamic between media and politics.[14] Others, in particular humanitarians, argued we should simply accept this new reality and welcomed it as an expansion of political activism.[15] Due to this wealth of attention, few initially questioned the claim that news media played a pivotal role in causing recent humanitarian interventions, enabling the CNN effect to be broadly considered a 'fact' in policymaking and journalistic circles throughout the 1990s.[16]

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[9] Miller 2007, 2-3.
[10] Robinson 1999, 302.
[11] See e.g. Kennan 1993.
[12] Miller 2007, 3.
[13] Kennan 1993.
[14] Robinson 2002, 46-72.
[15] Ibidem, 10.
[16] Robinson 1999, 303.

Yet in the late 1990s, the CNN effect started to draw increasing criticism, in particular after Steve Livingston and Todd Eachus published the first systematic tests of the theory. To examine whether pressure from media really led to the United States' decision to intervene in Somalia, Livingston and Eachus conducted an extensive content analysis of news accounts prior to the intervention, alongside interviews with officials and journalist connected to the events. Their findings were clear: "news coverage trends do not support the claim that news attention for Somalia led to the Bush administration's decision to intervene."[17] Rather, they concluded that "the decision to intervene was the result of diplomatic and bureaucratic operations, with news coverage coming in response to those decisions."[18] These findings were later supported by Piers Robinson who concluded that the CNN effect "fails to clarify whether the news media have (or have not) triggered recent humanitarian interventions."[19]

In turn, the debunking of a clear CNN effect by Livingston and Eachus emboldened an already-existing school of thought commonly referred to as *manufacturing consent theory*. This school of thought argues that media-government interactions work in the opposite direction of what the CNN effect suggests: rather than media outlets being able to influence policymaking through public opinion, manufacturing consent emphasizes "the ability of governments to influence the output of journalists and the tendency of journalists to perceive global events through the cultural and political prisms of their respective and social elites."[20] Although manufacturing consent is usually presented as a single theory, the school of thought stretches a broad range of arguments that vary in their degree of rigidity. In general, two dominant versions are distinguished: an *executive* and an *elite* version.

The *executive* version of the manufacturing consent paradigm emphasizes the tendency of news media reports to conform to the views of government officials. Robert Entman, for example, showed how American news media framed the shoot-down of a civilian plane by US forces as a 'technical failure', whilst the downing of a plane by USSR forces was framed as 'moral outrage'. According to Entman, overall media coverage of these events was consistent with the policy interests of the respective US administrations at that time. He therefore concludes that government shaped media coverage rather than the other way around.[21] More radical variants of this version even completely reject the ability of media to challenge executive policy lines. Adherers to this school of thought argue that mass media outlets tend to be owned by commercial enterprises and, by consequence, have a systematic bias towards political prejudices and economic desires of their advertisers. For this reason, scholars such as Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky rule out any possible form of media influence on policy – a controversial stance often referred to as the *propaganda model*.[22]

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[17] Livingston & Eachus 1995, 1.
[18] Idem.
[19] Robinson 1999, 301-302.
[20] Robinson 2002, 12.
[21] Entman 1991, 26-27.
[22] Herman & Chomsky 1998.

By contrast, the *elite* version of the manufacturing consent paradigm holds that news media coverage does not necessarily reflect the interests of the government, but that critical news coverage of executive policy is limited to specific conditions – in particular dissensus among political elites over policy issues. This viewpoint strongly builds on the *news indexing theory* as coined by Lance Bennett in 1990, containing that "mass media news is indexed implicitly to the dynamics of governmental debate."[23] Hence, when media coverage is critical of executive policy, this essentially reflects a "professional responsibility [for journalists] to highlight struggles within the centers of power."[24] In contrast to the executive version of manufacturing consent that precludes any form of critical coverage of executive policy, the elite version thus allows for the possibility of critical media coverage during periods of elite dissensus. As such, the elite version of manufacturing consent posits that media influence on executive policy is possible under the condition that a certain degree of dissensus over the policy issue already exists among policymakers.[25]

Finally, the manufacturing consent school of thought has drawn significant criticism for diminishing journalists to passive recipients and neutral replicators of official information – a critique often labeled '*essentialization*'.[26] Critics have argued that this assumption ignores the possibility of journalists taking sides (either intentionally or unintentionally) during elite debates over policy, or even take the side of non-elites. As a result, they tend to argue that journalists have substantial power in shaping the boundaries of policy debate. Others go even further by claiming that journalists play a central role in critically supervising decisions, making them a "fourth political institution".[27]

2.3 Theoretical refinement and identifying underlying mechanisms (2000s – Present)

While the debate on media-policy connections in the 1990s was dominated by questions of directionality (i.e. in which direction influence worked) and yielded little consensus, the 2000s were characterized by a further refinement of existing theories and a focus on the mechanisms underlying media-policy interactions. One of the most significant contributions from this era comes from Piers Robinson's book on the CNN effect. In this work, Robinson not only critically examines the evidence underlying the CNN effect, but also presents one of the most comprehensive 'policy-media interaction models' that helps to "identify instances when media coverage comes to play a significant role in persuading policymakers to pursue a particular policy."[28] Robinson identifies three key factors that determine media influence on international interventions: *policy certainty*, *media framing*, and *type of intervention*.

The first factor builds strongly on the elite version of manufacturing consent theory and relates to a situation where policymakers are divided about what to do (*elite dissensus*), or simply do not know

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[23] Bennett 1990, 108.
[24] Ibidem, 110.
[25] Robinson 2002.
[26] Wolfsfield 1997, 34.
[27] Cook 1997, 12.
[28] Robinson 2002, 37.

how to do react to a crisis yet (*policy uncertainty*). In essence, this factor points to a precondition for media influence: without policy uncertainty or elite dissensus, there is little potential for media to influence government decisions. The second factor draws on the theory of framing and relates to the way that media represents a crisis and the response of governments in their coverage. Robinson identifies two main media frames: on the one hand, news media can create an emotional distance from the plight of suffering people, with the likely impact of deterring politicians from intervening (*distance framing*). On the other hand, media can empathize strongly with the victims and frame their reports in such a way as to criticize existing government policies of non-intervention and call for them to 'do something' (*support framing*). The higher the degree of support framing in media coverage of a crisis, the higher the probability for media coverage to trigger a humanitarian response by the government. The third and final factor relates to the *type of intervention*. Robinson argues that media influence is much more likely in cases of low-risk, non-coercive responses to humanitarian crises, such as aid provision or agency relief, than in cases of coercive interventions that involve military forces. Within the domain of military interventions, Robinson finds that news media are more likely to trigger aerial bombings than the deployment of ground troops, as the latter carries way bigger political risks.

All in all, Robinson paints a quite sophisticated picture of the linkages between news media and international intervention decision-making. By identifying several pathways and conditions for media to influence foreign policymaking, he goes against the executive version of manufacturing consent theory that precludes the possibility of media influencing policy decisions. Meanwhile, he clearly rejects the existence of a direct CNN effect, stating that "no evidence was found that media coverage could cause policymakers to pursue the riskier option of deploying ground troops during humanitarian crises. The idea of the media driving this kind of intervention is a myth."[29]

A second key contribution from the third wave of research comes from Derek Miller who, in 2008, was the first to develop an explicit theory on media pressure. Drawing strongly on Robinson's findings, Miller argues that the majority of scholarship on media-policy interactions is built on the assumption that media is able to pressure decision makers, but fails to define how the underlying mechanism of pressure works and how it can be measured.[30] Miller fills this gap by theorizing that the foundation of media's power is their ability to harm the reputation of those they write about. He subsequently translates these findings into the *positioning hypothesis*, holding that "media pressure is the perlocutionary impact of the media's communicative acts that demonstrably defame the reputation of the executive, or the executive's policy."[31] In other words, media can publish things that "damage the reputation of the executive among the people it needs to get things done."[32] According to Miller, the

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[29] Robinson 2002, 128.
[30] Miller 2007.
[31] Miller 2007, 43.
[32] Idem.

main power of American presidents, for example, derives from their ability to persuade lawmakers in non-legal ways and maintain political coalitions around the policies they wish to advance. This persuasion is highly communicative and thus dependent on a president's reputation, making the maintenance of "reputational authority" a paramount concern for them.[33]

In order to measure media pressure, Miller analyzes questions from journalists during White House press conferences about the Gulf War, coding each one that provokes a 'repositioning response' – that is, an answer aimed at protecting or defending the administration's reputation. From these results, Miller composes a list of topics that the White House was being pressured on and subsequently looks for correlation between mention of these topics in media coverage and changes in US foreign policy regarding the Gulf War. He concludes that media pressure was an unlikely source of the launch of Operation Provide Comfort: although the US government was under heavy pressure at times, it for long maintained its policy of noninvolvement in the conflict. This only changed once European allies began to call for US support for the Kurds, rather than changes in news media coverage.[34]

Finally, one the most comprehensive positivist studies on linkages between news media and international intervention decision-making has been produced in 2008 by a group of researchers under the guidance of Walter Soderland. To determine whether the United Nations' adoption of the responsibility to protect in 2005 had changed the interaction between news media coverage and intervention decision-making, Soderland and his colleagues integrated a wealth of existing theories on this matter into a model with five dependent variables: (1) the severity of a humanitarian crisis; (2) the perceived risks associated with an intervention; (3) the national interests of the potentially intervening powers; (4) the volume of coverage; and (5) mass media framing (in particular, whether coverage mentions reasons for intervention). The group subsequently applied this model to 10 cases of humanitarian crisis in Africa, aiming to understand why intervention occurred in certain places and not in others, and whether news media coverage played a role in such decisions. Unfortunately, the study presents very mixed and contradictory results. In fact, the authors themselves even concede that "the findings concerning the influence of media on foreign policy decision-making remain inconclusive."[35]

2.4 Overview of theories and shortcomings of existing scholarship

After walking through the existing literature on connections between news media and foreign policymaking, two key conclusions are to be to be drawn. First, in spite of abundant scholarship and development of many theories (see Table 1), little to no scientific consensus has yet been reached about the ways that news media and foreign policymaking are interlinked. Most scholars nowadays seem to agree that news media coverage does not have the ability to directly cause humanitarian interventions (as suggested by the CNN effect). But beyond a general denouncing of such direct links, little agreement

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[33] Miller 2007, 43.
[34] Ibidem, 185.
[35] Soderland et al. 2008, 651.

exists about the directionality and degree of interactions between media and foreign policy decision-making.[36] General theories such as *agenda setting* and *news indexing* have received much empirical support, but these mechanisms either link media coverage to public opinion trends (and not decision-making), or do not tell us anything about the (im)possibility and degree of media influence on policymaking. Other theories that do specify such relationships, such as *manufacturing consent*, however, remain heavily contested due to their essentialization of journalists.

Until now, Robinson's media-policy model probably remains the most comprehensive theoretical framework about the mechanisms linking media and decision-making. It provides important conditions and factors that determine the ability of media coverage to influence such decisions. His model, however, has received little empirical testing and later research incorporating wider sets of variables and cases studies have partially challenged his findings.[37] Overall, it can at best be concluded that most scholars acknowledge the role of news media coverage in driving foreign policy, but remain divided over the degree it can influence decision-making, and under what conditions it expands or diminishes. As such, media-policy relations remain largely unclear with little understanding of the mechanisms linking them.

This lack of consensus leads us to the second and more fundamental shortcoming of existing scholarship: the conceptualization of news media influence. The majority of the researchers studying media-policy interactions have, either implicitly or explicitly, conceptualized media influence as *the ability of media coverage to move governments into making a certain decision or undertaking action* – in particular into launching a humanitarian intervention. As such, this literature tends to operationalize media influence on decision-making in a relatively binary way: testing weather a certain or form amount of coverage has led to government action or not. While more recent studies have specified the concept of government action by separating different forms of intervention responses (e.g. humanitarian aid, aerial bombings, military interventions) or theorizing underlying mechanisms (e.g. media pressure), it seems that this conceptualization of media influence has shaped the academic debate into one that is dominated by questions of causality. Robinson, for example, even literally speaks of the ability of news media to "trigger" an intervention response.[38] His usage of "trigger" is emblematic of this tendency: the primary concern is to prove whether a certain form and quantity of media coverage leads to a certain form of humanitarian intervention response. In essence, he questions whether media coverage and political decisions to intervene are causally linked.

This narrow conceptualization of media influence is understandable from both a scientific and methodological point of view. The CNN effect, for example, referred to a mechanism directly linking media coverage of a humanitarian crisis to the decision to launch an intervention, so it makes sense that

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[36] Piers Robinson also mentions this lack of consensus in Robinson 2008, 179.
[37] Soderland et al. 2008.
[38] Robinson 2002, 36.

researchers tested such claims and later developed related theories. Nonetheless, I argue that one should be wary of this conceptualization of media-policy connections, because it tends to reduce decision-making into a somewhat mechanical response to news media coverage. In reality, decision-making is a lot more sophisticated, entailing a complex process of identifying problems and formulating solutions, which, in turn, are shaped by numerous material, ideational, and contextual factors.

For this reason, I argue that the current literature on media-policy connections only accounts for a narrow set of immediate effects and largely disregards more indirect forms of influence on intervention decision-making. For example, not only can news media coverage push certain issue to the forefront of debate (i.e. influencing the perceived importance of issues), but they also have the ability to influence an individual's opinions and understandings of issues themselves through certain forms of representation. As such, it seems that a substantial part of potential media effects is not yet included in the existing academic literature.

Considering such points, I suggest defining news media's influence on international intervention decision-making in a different way. Rather than viewing media influence as news media's ability to affect the initial decision to intervene or not, one should expand it towards news media's ability to indirectly influence *how* is intervened, for example by studying their impact on decision-makers' perceptions of the region where intervention is considered, or on decision-makers' assumptions about conflict dynamics. In other words, influence does not only include direct, causal effects, but also more indirect, constitutive forms of impact. Therefore, it is key to shift focus from establishing causality and move towards the role of news media in the development and legitimization of fundamental perceptions, ideas, and assumptions that underly decisions concerning international intervention.

Finally, the shortcomings that I describe above fit into a broader criticism of positivist research approaches by post-modernism. Scholars adhering to this academic tradition tend to reject research projects attempting to establish correlation and causality, arguing that a human-made reality cannot be fully explained through recurring mechanisms, laws, and structures. Interestingly, even Robinson acknowledges the limitations of positivist research approaches, but claims that we have no alternative when answering the question of media influence:

> Analyzing the impact of media coverage upon policy decisions raises the controversial issue of causation. Post-modernism and social constructivism have taught us to be cautious of explaining the world through reference to dependent variables, independent variables, and causal links. Inevitably, however, if we are to discuss the impact of media coverage on policy, we become involved in making assessments as to whether a particular decision would have been made if media coverage had been different. To my mind, this type of question is a reasonable one to ask, although I acknowledge some would argue the question is either unanswerable or else ill conceived.[39]

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[39] Robinson 2002, 4.

While I just explained my disagreement with his vision that establishing causal links between decision-making and news media coverage is a prerequisite to speak of media impact, Robinson does raise the important issue of proving and measuring influence. Following from my criticism that the study of news media influence should be expanded towards more indirect forms of influence, the next step is developing a research methodology that enables an identification of such indirect media effects in an empirical setting. In the next chapter, I therefore build a framework which theorizes indirect news media effects on international intervention decision-making, which is a first key step in this process.

Table 1: Overview of theories linking news media and foreign policy in existing literature

School of thought / theory (year of first formulation)	Description	Key Authors
Agenda setting (1972)	Theory containing that news media coverage has the ability to influence the attributed important of issues by audiences. As such, it can push certain issues to the forefront of public debate; i.e. 'set the public agenda'.	Maxwell McCombs Donald Shaw Bernard Cohen
Framing *Second level agenda setting* *(1974)*	Theory containing that news media has the ability to not only influences the attributed importance of issues, but also public opinion about a specific issue by representing or framing issues in a certain way within their coverage. This may happen deliberately, but ultimately all media coverage applies framing in some way as reality is ever-complex.	Erving Goffman Robert Entman Dietram Scheufele
News indexing (1990)	General theory relating to the tendency of news agencies to 'index' their stories to statements by government officials. News coverage thus reflects the contours of elite debate rather than public opinion.	George Bennet
CNN effect (1993)	A popularized term for the presumed ability of news media to provoke major responses from domestic audiences and political elites to both global and national events – in particular humanitarian intervention missions.	George Kennan
Manufacturing consent - *elite version (1995)*	Theory about media-government interactions emphasizing the tendency of news media reports to conform the views of political elites. As a result, media coverage is more likely to follow actions and utterances of policy elites rather than the other way around, but media influence remains possible under certain conditions.	Piers Robinson Steven Livingston Todd Eachus
Manufacturing consent - *executive version* *Propaganda model* *(1998)*	Theory about media-government interactions emphasizing the tendency of news media reports to conform the views of government officials. As a result, media coverage is more likely to follow the actions and utterances of governments, rather than influencing its course.	Edward Herman Noam Chomsky
Media Pressure *Positioning hypothesis* *(2008)*	Theory specifying the mechanism of media effects on decision-making. It posits that the main way in which media can influence political elites is by publishing things that damage their reputation and the legitimacy of their policies. Fearing for their reputation, policymakers will feel 'pressured' and therefore change course.	Derek Miller

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework: Discourse, news media, and intervention decision-making

In the previous chapter, I showed how most scholars studying the interaction between news media and intervention decision-making have conceptualized media influence as an immediate cause for government action. As a result, this body of work has largely disregarded more indirect forms of news media influence on foreign policymaking. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a framework that theorizes such indirect effects of news media coverage on intervention decision-making by assessing how foreign policymaking is underpinned by discourse. I do this by drawing on theory from the post-structuralist school of International Relations (IR) and connect this to literature on peacekeeping mandates. In the final section of this chapter, these elements are integrated into a new theoretical framework that will serve as the backbone of the following analytical chapters.

3.1 Foreign policymaking as a *discursive practice*

In order to study how news media influence intervention decision-making, it is key to first gain a conceptual understanding of foreign policy. In a general sense, it can be argued that foreign policy involves (political) decisions about matters that transcend national borders or involve other sovereign states. Following from that, IR is often defined as the scientific study of interactions between sovereign states, hereby involving questions of why and how states make decisions about international interventions. Within the field of IR, however, different academic traditions exist about what constitutes foreign policy (i.e. ontology) and what factors shape and drive it (i.e. epistemology).

According to the *realist* tradition of IR-scholarship, the world system is made of states that compete with each other via power politics. In this context, power is primarily understood in material terms (e.g. military hardware and energy resources) and that material interests drive foreign policy.[1] Theoretically speaking, states are therefore considered to launch international interventions when there are material interests at stake; other forms of intervention would simply be irrational. *Liberalism*, by contrast, emphasizes the role of ideology, international organizations, and nongovernmental actors in shaping state preferences and policy choices. Here, foreign policy is no longer considered to be driven by material interests only, but by ideology and norms as well. Within this tradition, decisions about international interventions can be explained through, for example, the moral conviction of democratic state leaders to spread or uphold liberal values in places where such values are threatened.[2]

It is crucial to note that both the realist and liberal traditions assume that states and international organizations do exist in 'reality' and thus root their theories in a state-centered ontology. The *constructivist* and *post-structuralist* IR-traditions, however, strongly reject this ontological assumption. Instead, scholars belonging to these traditions argue that foreign policy is socially constructed through

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[1] Wohlforth 2008, 35-54.
[2] Doyle 2008, 54-78.

a shared system of representations, ideas, and assumptions regarding international affairs that, in turn, are produced and reproduced through communication between individuals. As such, this communication functions as a structuring 'system of thought' that underpins knowledge, provides meaning to social practices, and influences how individuals perceive the world around them.[3] In post-structuralism, the sum of these communications is conceptualized as *discourse,* and it is through discourse that individuals inscribe meaning to materiality. For this reason, foreign policymaking is considered to be more than a rational response of a state to material interests or pre-existing threats. Rather, these interests and threats are constructed within a particular foreign policy discourse that, in turn, makes a particular response possible, and appear as necessary and legitimate. For these reasons, post-structuralists argue that foreign policy is a *discursive practice*.[4]

Following the notion that discourse inscribes meaning to the material world, post-structuralism assumes that an individual's perception of the world (and thus their 'reality') only exists to the extent that can be communicated about it. Post-structuralism is, in other words, rooted in a *linguistic ontology.* It is through their articulation in language that 'things' – objects, subjects, states, living beings, and material reality – are given meaning; there simply is no meaning outside of language. Consequently, language is no longer a neutral transmitter of data, as assumed by positivist and empiricist science traditions, but functions as an intersubjective constructor and reproducer of reality.[5] For this reason, post-structuralists argue that language can exercise political power: through discourses, language 'shapes' what we perceive as reality and, consequently, what becomes accepted as knowledge.

Given its inevitable connection to human thinking and materiality, language becomes key to explain why and how actors develop ideas and perform actions: individuals have to understand what they are doing and why in order to act. For this reason, discourse is often viewed as the 'enabler' of action: it unconsciously "sets the parameters of what is sayable and thinkable in a given social order", consequently enabling certain actions while precluding others.[6] When applying this principle to policymaking, discourse determines how policymakers develop certain policies, as well as what policies appear as logical and legitimate at a given time. Therefore, discourse plays a central role in explaining why policymakers choose certain policy options over others, making it a relevant research object for the purposes of this study.

3.2 Theorizing news media's indirect influence on foreign policy

As my theoretical framework considers foreign policy to be dependent on representations, this raises the question of where representations come from in the first place. Moreover, it remains unclear how representations articulated by decision-making relate to other, competing representations that are

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[3] This definition of discourse as a system of thought builds on Foucault 1970.
[4] Hansen 2008, 101-102.
[5] Ibidem, 18.
[6] Panizza and Miorelli 2013, 305.

articulated within society. Governments in democratic states rarely formulate the only perspective on how to solve an issue, so how do policymakers generate legitimacy for their responses amid this cacophony of representations? Regarding this question, post-structuralists argue that policymakers inevitably "draw upon and are formed by the representations articulated by a larger number of individuals, institutions, and media outlets."[7] Decision-makers, for example, rarely have detailed knowledge about the issues they decide on and therefore rely on advisors, media coverage, and background literature to establish an understanding of policy issues.

This does not mean that decision-makers will blindly repeat whatever they hear and read. But as they have to present policies as legitimate to their constituencies, post-structuralists theorize that decision-makers must, to some extent, build upon the representations that already circulate in society to formulate meaningful and acceptable solutions to societal problems.[8] State leaders, for example, may traditionally dispose over a certain amount of credibility when articulating threats to national security, but whether these threats (and the policies addressing them) are accepted by their constituencies, depends on context. As Barry Buzan states: "presenting something as an existential threat does not by itself create securitization – this is a securitizing move, but the issue is securitized only if and when the audience accepts it as such."[9] For such reasons, post-structuralists argue that foreign policymakers are inevitably situated within a wider public and political sphere; it is ultimately the existing *public discourse* that "makes particular utterances, practices, and policies possible while precluding others."[10]

Meanwhile, the interaction between public discourse and policymaking is not unidirectional. When government officials draw upon a representation from public discourse in a policy text, a debate, a speech, or other official communication, they simultaneously inscribe a degree of legitimacy to this very representation. As such, government officials play an important role in the reinforcement and legitimization of (parts of) public discourse, consequently influencing what counts as a proper representation and what does not.[11] Eventually, this dynamic may lead to a vicious circle where specific representations of a policy-relevant issue become so institutionalized into actions, practices, and thinking that they are repeatedly reinforced without contestation. At this point, it is no longer viewed as a representation, but taken for granted as knowledge, making it difficult to think and respond differently.[12] A well-established body of research within security studies has, for example, shown how the institutionalization of '*failed state*' or '*global war on terror*' discourses in decision-making circles has allowed ineffective policies to persist for years despite much criticism from scholars.[13] This again

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[7] Hansen 2006, 7.
[8] Idem.
[9] Buzan et al. 1998, 25.
[10] Fierke 2007, 245.
[11] Hansen 2006, 23.
[12] Milleken 1999, 237.
[13] See e.g. Bilgin and Morton 2002; Jones 2008; Woodward 2017.

shows the power of discourses in shaping policies – in particular when they become institutionalized into daily routines and are considered common sense.

The dual direction interaction between discourse and policy holds a fundamental implication: a causal relation between the two is impossible.[14] A rigid definition of causality would suppose that the dependent variable (e.g. a representation of a threat) and the independent variable (foreign policy) can be observed independently. Within post-structuralism, however, this becomes problematic because it is through its articulation in foreign policy that the threat is constructed in the first place. One cannot simply assume that a certain representation of a threat leads to a particular form of policy, because this threat does not exist in a material sense. It becomes a threat *because* it is constructed as such within the foreign policy discourse that addresses it. Lene Hansen explains:

> Celeste Wallander's rationalist liberalist analysis argues that NATO's post-Cold War survival is due to its ability to address not only external threats but also a 'variety of security problems, including instability, uncertainty, and relations among allies' […]. Yet, her analysis leaves unexplored how 'threats' or 'instabilities' become constituted as such in the first place – they are presumed to exist materially and objectively independently of NATO's own construction thereof. Poststructuralist analysis, however, shows how these 'threats' and 'instabilities' are not simply 'there' but appear through NATO's own discursive articulation of the alliance's (transformed) post-Cold War rationale. For example, the decision to consider the situation in Kosovo an 'instability' which warranted NATO's intervention – and legitimated the alliance's existence – required a particular construction of the parties to the conflict and the adoption of a discourse of humanitarian intervention.[15]

The abovementioned interaction between policy and public discourse is relevant because it provides a way to theorize the indirect influence of news media over foreign policymaking. First, news media must be considered an integral part of public discourse: through news reports, media outlets articulate representations that inscribe meaning to the material world. Since most these news reports are widely retrievable and read by a larger number of individuals in society, they can be considered public and thus part of the public discourse.[16] In fact, as proven by agenda-setting and framing theory (see 2.4), news media play a central role in shaping the public debate both in terms of attributed importance to issues and public opinions about issues. For this reason, news media must be seen as one of the most important shapers of public discourse, meaning that the representations articulated through media reports are likely to be reproduced within society and, ultimately, become part of the public discourse.

As discussed, if policymakers want to formulate legitimate policies, they must draw, to some extent, upon the representations that already circulate in public discourse. Given the fact that news media are an important shaper of this public discourse, it becomes likely that the representations articulated by news media outlets are reproduced, to a degree, by policymakers in policy discourse. Obviously,

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[14] See e.g. Hansen 2006, 25-28.
[15] Hansen 2006, 25.
[16] See Van Dijk 1988 for a further elaboration of news media as public discourse.

policymakers can also draw on other representations in the public sphere or simply contest these representations, but somehow must generate legitimacy for their responses to policy problems. Meanwhile, when government officials articulate representations through official communication, they inevitably reproduce or contest already-existing representations and in turn influence the public discourse. For this reason, the relation between public and official policy discourse resembles a circular, rather than unidirectional motion (see Figure 1).

An important implication of this circular dynamic holds that the relationship between news media discourse and foreign policy cannot be defined in a direct causal way. Inevitably, a representation found in news media reports is part of specific discourse that itself is shaped by the utterances of government officials. It is thus impossible to posit that a particular representation by news media will automatically lead to a particular government response, because the two are *mutually constitutive* of each other. Whenever journalists, for example, label a specific action or utterance as a 'threat to natural security', they construct this threat into an existing object, enabling policymakers formulate responses to it. However, the fact that journalists recognize a particular act or utterance as a 'threat' in the first place, is because they invoke a discourse of national security, which is in, in turn, constituted by foreign policy. For this reason, measuring the effects of news media representations onto the representations in foreign policy documents is impossible, because the two main variables (e.g. threat representations by news media and foreign policy) simultaneously shape each other – a known analytical problem referred to as *endogeneity*.

Following from this impossibility of a direct causal relationship, the indirect influence of news media on foreign policymaking should be defined differently than X directly influencing Y. Rather, it refers to *the ability of news media to establish conditions in which certain foreign policies become thinkable, meaningful, and legitimate, while others not*. As such, I posit that news media discourse must be seen as the 'enabler', rather than direct cause of foreign policy decisions.

3.3 Breaking down the decision-making of international interventions
Having now defined foreign policymaking as a *discursive practice* and theorized how news media discourse relates to foreign policy, the third step of this thesis' theoretical framework is to clarify the concept of decision-making.

In peacekeeping literature, scholars have identified three factors that are central in the decision-making of international interventions: 1) a *logic of interests*; 2) a *logic of effectiveness*; and 3) *a logic of appropriateness.* These factors strongly reflect the oft-cited theory of different 'logics of action' as first presented by James March and Johan Olsen in 1989. According to them, the process by which political actors define goals and decide how to behave can follow two main pathways: *a logic of consequences*, whereby political actors act as rational utility maximizers who select strategies that are most likely to achieve a desired goal; and, by contrast, *a logic of appropriateness*, whereby political actors choose

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their strategies in accordance with prevailing norms of proper conduct within a given social context. March and Olsen, however, clearly state that these two logics are not mutually exclusive and that most political action "cannot be explained exclusively in terms of a logic of either consequences or appropriateness."[17] More recent studies on peacekeeping have, however, identified three rather than two logics, by further refining the logic of consequences into a *logic of interests* of a *logic of effectiveness*. Within this three-fold division, the former points to the pursuit of strategic interests by major parties that are involved in the intervention effort (i.e. underlying motivations to get involved), whereas the latter to methods deemed most effective for the establishment of peace by conflict experts. Following this framework, I also distinguish three different logics instead of only two.

Important to note is that these parameters are purely analytical categories which do not exist in an ontological sense. They are ideal-type constructions and empirically show overlap. Nonetheless, these parameters provide a way to break down the complex rationale underlying foreign policy decision-making, making them a suited analytical framework for the goals of this thesis.

3.3.1   Parameter 1 – Logic of interests

Traditionally, scholarship assumes that peacekeeping mission mandates are shaped by two factors: (a) the interests of major parties; and (b) the perceptions of how effective strategies will be in establishing peace (see 3.3.2).[18] The former stems from the observation that peacekeeping mission mandates are the result of negotiations among states, notably permanent members of the UN Security Council, the governments of troop contributing countries, and the governments of the states hosting the mission.[19] In essence, this logic builds upon the idea that peacekeeping missions are not solely driven by the stated objective of establishing peace, but also by the strategic interests of participating states. States simply need an incentive to launch or join such as external military intervention, causing mission mandates to partially reflect the vested interests of the states involved.

Yet as described above, a post-structuralist approach to foreign policy means that interests never are pre-existing. Rather, they are constructed within a foreign policy discourse that, in turn, is enabled and shaped by the representations of interests articulated within the broader public sphere. As such, I define the logic of vested interests as the way a state's vested interests (e.g. security threats, economic ties, and strategic energy resources) are represented by policymakers to justify and legitimize an international intervention. An example showing how the construction of security threats depends on public discourse can be found in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Prior to the attacks, justifying an invasion of Iraq in the name of national security would probably have been considered illegitimate and therefore unlikely to be accepted by the American public. After 9/11, however, the public discourse of

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[17] March & Olsen 1998, 952.
[18] Paris 2003, 441. Other examples include Boulden 2001; Hillen 2000; Jett 2000; Malone 1998; and Durch 1996.
[19] Paris 2003, 442.

national security had starkly shifted, enabling President Bush to legitimately articulate an 'existential terrorist threat', justifying the deployment of US troops in the country.

In essence, the logic of vested interests reflects the answer to the question of *why* should be intervened? For what reasons is an intervention necessary? What consequences would be faced if no intervention takes place? Studying this logic thus primarily serves to identify the underlying motivations of decision-makers to launch an intervention in the first place.

3.3.2 *Parameter 2 – Logic of effectiveness*

The second key factor generally mentioned in peacekeeping literature relates to the perception of how effectively certain strategies will accomplish the stated objective of peace. This factor stems from the observation that government officials are often assisted by peacebuilding and military experts who advise them on strategies that have worked well in previous missions.[20] In a more general sense, such groups of experts can be defined as *epistemic communities*, that is, "network[s] of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area."[21] Although experts within this network may have varying backgrounds, they are characterized by shared sets of norms, causal beliefs, perceptions of what makes valid knowledge, and political values. The label of 'epistemic' thus relates to their ability to identify resources and methods that enable policymakers to develop effective responses to complex problems.[22]

Following from this, the second central shaping parameter of intervention decision-making is a *logic of effectiveness*. This logic refers to the way decision-makers attempt to achieve the goals of an international intervention as efficiently as possible. In essence, this logic reflects the answer to the question of *how* decision-makers decide to intervene: how to design an intervention strategy that brings highest benefits and least possible costs? Since the stated objective of an international intervention generally entails the establishment of peace, this logic is highly dependent on the policymakers' assumptions about the root causes, main actors, geography, drivers, or sustaining factors of the conflict in question, as well as more general assumptions about conditions for peace or conflict resolution (e.g. the necessity of a ceasefire, power-sharing agreement, or democratic elections). After all, one has to understand a conflict in order to solve it.

As explained above, such assumptions and understandings do, however, not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, they are constructed through a particular discourse that makes policymakers interpret conflict-related events and actions in a certain way.[23] Much scholarship from conflict studies has, for example, shown how policymakers, journalists, and NGOs are often reliant on simple narratives to deal with the complexity of violent conflict, carrying significant consequences for what conflict resolution

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[20] Paris 2003, 441.
[21] Haas 1992, 3.
[22] Idem.
[23] See Malejacq 2010 for an extensive study on the ways that conflict theories influence peacebuilding strategies.

strategies are deemed effective.[24] For example, in the case of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Séverine Autesserre has shown how a dominant narrative about illegal minerals extraction being the root cause of sexual violence has oriented peacebuilding activities towards improving state authority, at the expense of local conflict resolution. Another example involves the civil war in the former Yugoslavia: as the initial dominant discourse of a 'Balkan war' portrayed the conflict as one caused by ethnic hatred, all ethnic groups were considered equally culpable for the violence. As a result, the Western intervention long focused on issues such as stabilization and the containment of fighting, ultimately leading to the peacekeeping debacle of Srebrenica. It was only after the dominant conflict discourse shifted from a 'Balkan War' to a 'Genocide' that Serbian troops were perceived as the aggressors and NATO engaged in more military force, such as aerial bombings.[25]

As these examples show, narratives and representations are powerful shapers of policy, especially when they become dominant. This means that they are reproduced to such an extent in decision-making circles and the public sphere that they become viewed as common sense and unquestioned 'facts'. Such dominant narratives and representations are found to even resist strong criticism, often leading to dramatically ineffective forms of intervention. For such reasons, studying conflict discourse is not a mere philosophical hobby, as critics of post-structuralism sometimes suggest. By contrast, conflict discourse plays a central role in explaining how decision-makers understand conflict dynamics and why they pursue certain intervention strategies, making it a relevant object to study.[26]

3.3.3 Parameter 3 – Logic of appropriateness

The third and final parameter of intervention decision-making does not relate to the internal dynamics of decision-maker circles, but instead to the international normative context in which intervention missions are designed and deployed. Generally, the logic of appropriates suggests that individuals do not only perform cost-benefit analyses to determine their actions, but follow social norms to decide what action is the most appropriate for them in a given situation.[27] In other words, this logic posits that individuals always strive to maintain a reputation (or identity) and therefore tend to follow the norms associated with this reputation, making certain actions more appropriate than others.

The logic of appropriateness has first been applied to international intervention decision-making by Roland Paris in 2003. Building on world polity theory, he showed how UN member states were disinclined to develop and implement peacebuilding strategies that deviated from the global norm of the Westphalian state as the most legitimate model of statehood. In fact, he found that the UN tended to reject strategies they viewed as normatively inappropriate, even when such strategies were potentially

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[24] See e.g. Autesserre 2009, 2011, 2012; Malejacq & Sandor 2020.
[25] Hansen 2006; Fierke 2015, 200-201.
[26] For a critique of post-structuralism and discourse analysis, see e.g. Price & Reus-Smit 1998, 279-282.
[27] Risse-Knappen 1996, 163.

more likely to accomplish the stated objective of peace. Similarly, Paris found that shifts in the global normative environment corresponded with shifts in dominant forms of peacekeeping strategies.[28] For this reason, Paris concluded that "the design and conduct of peacekeeping missions reflect not only the interests of key parties and the perceived lessons of previous operations, but also the prevailing norms of global culture, which legitimize certain kinds of peacekeeping policies and delegitimize others."[29]

The logic of appropriateness is considered to have two dimensions: an *ethical* dimension and a *cognitive* dimension.[30] As an ethical matter, the logic of appropriateness concerns action that is performed because it is perceived as virtuous, morally just, or conform to international law and ethical norms. In terms of international intervention action, this could for example relate to interventions justified through the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). In a non-conflict context, intervening in another country would likely be considered a violation of the international norm of sovereignty, making such a decision 'inappropriate'. This perception of appropriateness, however, may change in a context of war crimes, making the moral responsibility to protect human rights more important than the norm of respecting sovereignty.[31] As a result of this logic, decision-makers might decide to intervene, even though there are no vested interests connected to the conflict case in question.

The second *cognitive* dimension of the logic of appropriateness relates to the belief that individuals tend to act in accordance with a particular conception of their own identity – usually conceptualized as the *perceived Self*.[32] Within IR scholarship, identity is generally defined as the agent's understanding of itself, its place in the social world, and its relationships with others.[33] As such, it is argued by post-structuralist scholars that states are not only driven by self-interest or global cultural norms, but they also "strive to uphold particular visions of themselves" and employ foreign policies that are in line with this vision.[34] Following this connection between perceptions of identity and appropriate political action, the historical, cultural, political, and social context in which decision-making takes place also becomes important when explaining state behavior.

Following a post-structuralist approach, both norms and identities are socially constructed rather than pre-existing. Identity, for example, is often constructed by differentiating a 'perceived Self' from an opposing 'Other'. After all, the label of the 'underdeveloped world' is only meaningful when juxtaposed to the 'developed world', and the identification of a 'terrorist' only makes sense in contrast with a 'freedom fighter'.[35] In turn, such juxtapositions are merely linguistic representations that only become meaningful due to their constant reproduction in everyday communication. For this reason, post-

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[28] Paris 2003, 441.
[29] Ibidem, 443.
[30] March & Olsen 1998, 951; Weber, et al. 2004, 281.
[31] Newman 2016, 125-143.
[32] See e.g. Hansen 2006.
[33] Flockhart 2016, 84.
[34] Hansen 2008, 95.
[35] Hansen 2006, 19.

structuralists argue that identity is constituted through discourse. Norms do not emerge out of nowhere either, but are "institutionalized practices of a collectivity, based on mutual, and often tacit, understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good."[36] In other words, norms are constituted through interaction between individuals and reinforced by collective practices, making them dependent on context.

Finally, it is important to note that the distinction between the cognitive and ethical dimension of the logic of appropriateness is not absolute, as the self-perceived identity of a state also influences which norms are deemed important and which are not. States that, for example, identify as liberal democracies likely embrace norms such as respect for human rights, free and fair elections, and rule of law, whereas states that are non-democratic tend to place emphasis on the notion of sovereignty. Norms and identity are thus closely linked. For this reason, explaining state behavior through the logic of appropriateness inevitably requires an understanding of its perceived self-identity.

3.4 Conclusion of theoretical framework

To sum up, the theoretical foundation of this research project contains three main components (visualized in Figure 1):

1. *Foreign policymaking is a discursive practice*. It is through a particular foreign policy discourse that material structures, actions, actors, and utterances are constructed into interests, threats, states, enemies, conflicts, and security problems. Discourse must, in turn, be understood as a linked set of representations that is continuously produced and reproduced by communication between individuals, functioning as a 'system of thought'. As such, foreign policymaking is not a rational response to pre-given interests, but an ongoing practice that is dependent on representation.

2. *Public discourse functions as an 'enabler' of foreign policy.* Policymakers do not operate in a vacuum: the representations that are articulated in a policy text have to be perceived as legitimate and meaningful by constituencies in order to justify certain policies. Therefore, policymakers have to draw upon representations already articulated within the public sphere (i.e. in public and media discourse). This logic, however, is not unidirectional: whenever policymakers rearticulate particular representations from public discourse, they simultaneously reinforce this representation and shape public discourse as a consequence. Public discourse and foreign policy thus are 'mutually constitutive' of each other, making a direct, causal relationship impossible. Instead, public discourse – and thus news media discourse indirectly – 'enables' certain forms of foreign policy.

3. *International intervention policies are shaped around three parameters.* These parameters include a logic of interest (i.e. motivations to intervene in the first place), a logic of

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[36] March & Olsen 1998, 4.

effectiveness (i.e. perceptions of how the stated objective of peace can be achieved most effectively), and a logic of appropriateness (i.e. global norms determining the range of acceptable and non-acceptable strategies and practices).

Figure 1: Visualization of theoretical framework

Intervention Policy Discourse

Decision-making

Logic of interest
(Why intervene?)

Perceptions of threats

Perceptions of interests

Logic of effectiveness
(How to intervene?)

Assumptions about conflict dynamics

Assumptions about effective peacebuilding

Logic of apprioriateness
(What constraints to intervening?)

Ethical dimension (Norms)

Cognitive dimension (Identity)

Enables & Shapes

(Constitutive effect)

Reinforces & Shapes

(Reinforcing effect)

Public Discourse

News Media Discourse

Chapter 4 - Research Methodology & Data Collection

In the previous chapter, I have laid out the theoretical foundations that this thesis builds on. The objective of this chapter is to explain how this framework is operationalized, so it can be used for empirical analysis. For this reason, I discuss my choices regarding the overall research design, data collection, and methodological approach to analyzing the data.

4.1 The epistemological challenge of studying 'influence'

Within academic research on media-policy interactions, one of the major epistemological challenges has been the inability to directly observe influence. There is no straightforward way to study the thinking of decision-makers and measure the degree to which their decisions are driven or affected by particular forms or quantities of news media coverage. Therefore, research on news media's influence over decision-making has always relied on some degree of methodological creativity.[1]

As briefly discussed in Chapter 1, scholars have generally employed two epistemological models to tackle the issue of identifying media influence: *interview-based research* and *large-N quantitative studies*. This first approach involves simply asking government officials about how important news media reporting was in a specific case of foreign policy decision-making. As such, this methodology presumes that media influence can be directly observed by the decision-makers themselves, who can, in turn, inform the researcher.[2] The second refers to mostly quantitative research projects that systematically look for correlation between certain amounts or types of media reporting (e.g. through framing or content analysis) and certain forms of government action (e.g. the decision to launch a humanitarian intervention) across a high number of different cases. In essence, this approach means integrating decision-making theory into a testable model and filtering out the influence of media by testing different variables related to media coverage.

4.1.1 The incompatibility of interview- and correlation-based approaches

The two methodological approaches discussed above are less suited for the purpose of this study due to two reasons. First, interview-based research rests upon the assumption that policymakers are aware of how and when their decisions are influenced by news media. However, the goal of this thesis is to study more 'indirect' forms of influence by exploring how news media affect the underlying rationale and assumptions of international intervention decision-making. It seems unlikely that policymakers are aware of this type of influence, let alone able to explain how and to what extent it affects their decisions. Therefore, I considered that interviewing decision-makers about how they experience indirect forms of media influence was not a justifiable methodology for the purposes of this thesis.

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[1] Robinson 2002, 16.
[2] See e.g. Gowing 1994, 1996; Minear, Scott and Weiss 1996; Stroebel 2007 for examples of this methodology.

The large-N quantitative approach is not compatible with the goals of this study either, because I attempt to identify forms of news media influence that go beyond the 'trigger effect'. As explained earlier, news media influence entails more than a certain form or quantity of media coverage causing a decision to be made or not. Instead, I theorized that news media can influence foreign policymaking in a more indirect way: news media discourse *enables* certain policies by making them thinkable, meaningful, and legitimate. This means that a certain type of news media discourse will not automatically lead to certain type of policy or action; their interrelation is indirect and constitutive, rather than direct and causal. As a result, looking for correlation between news media discourse and the decision to intervene across a high number of case is not a suited approach either: such indirect effects are nearly impossible to quantify, and thus not identifiable through a quantitative analysis. Instead, identifying indirect influence requires a closer and more detailed study of the decision-making process, which large-N quantitative studies do not provide.

4.2 Methodological approach: a qualitative discourse analysis

Given the limitations of abovementioned methods to study indirect forms of news media influence on foreign policymaking, I decided to pursue a different research methodology for the analytical section of this thesis: a *qualitative discourse analysis*.

4.2.1 Discourse analysis

Generally speaking, *discourse analysis* is a blanket term used for a variety of qualitative research approaches to studying language usage in social contexts. While there remains little agreement about an exact definition of the methodology, discourse analysis approaches generally share two fundamental assumptions.[3] The first assumption relates to a conceptualization of discourse as a 'system of representation' through which the material world is constituted in meaning (see Chapter 3). As these systems are continuously produced and reproduced through communication between individuals, discourses are considered social structures, making them changeable over time and historically contingent. Consequently, a discourse analysis methodology implies studying how language is used to construct social realities, how certain systems of representation become dominant over time, whether there are alternative discourses silenced by hegemonic ones, and thus builds strongly on the constructivist understanding of meaning.[4]

The second assumption relates to an understanding of discourse as being 'constitutive' of things defined by it. By providing a language to speak about phenomena (e.g. analyzing, classifying), discourses make some ways of thinking and acting towards the world intelligible while excluding others.[5] As a result, discourse analysis tends to focus on the way certain hegemonic discursive representations constitute an enabling framework for specific forms of collective action: for example,

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[3] Milliken 1999.
[4] Ibidem, 228.
[5] Ibidem, 229.

how specific societal discourses make certain foreign policy practices appear as legitimate, meaningful, and purposeful, and others meaningless, inadequate, or impracticable.[6] As Milliken puts it:

> Although discourse analysis is concerned with significative practice and the knowledge systems underlying them, it is insignificant to study only the way a discourse constitutes background capabilities for people to understand their social world. The theoretical commitment of discourse productivity also makes it important to explain how discourses […] renders logical and proper certain policies by authorizes and how the implementation of those policies shapes and changes people's modes and changes people's modes and conditions of living, and how it comes to be dispersed beyond authorized subjects to make up summon sense for many in everyday society.[7]

In short, by employing an interpretive rather than a causational logic, discourse analytic approaches aim to explore the way discourses affect certain kinds of social action by not directly determining these actions, but rather by "rendering these actions, plausible or implausible, acceptable or unacceptable, conceivable or inconceivable, respectable or disrespectable."[8] As such, discourse analysis aims to reveal how certain forms of language use establish the ideational conditions of possibility for action, while simultaneously constructing the "wider meaning structures" and knowledge that makes these actions intelligible and legitimate.[9]

4.2.2 Specification and justification of discourse analysis approach

As the main objective of this thesis is to better understand the 'indirect influence' of news media on international intervention decision-making, three epistemological goals are to be reached:

1. Identify the underlying rationale and assumptions of decision-makers during international intervention decision-making.
2. Identify the role of news media reporting in the development and legitimization of these ideas and assumptions.
3. Identify general patterns and mechanisms in the interaction between intervention policy and news media discourse.

In Chapter 3, I explained how post-structuralists consider language the central social medium through which meaning is generated. By carefully studying the language that decision-makers use to describe, explain, and legitimize matters related to a case of international intervention, it therefore becomes possible to unravel the patterns of thinking and assumptions underlying their decisions. Security threats, for example, are not just ontological objects 'out there', but have to be constructed through a discourse of national security. Similarly, policymakers have to articulate the 'root causes' of a conflict in order to develop a peacebuilding strategy that tackles them. In other words, every policy starts from articulating

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[6] Hansen 2006; Larssen 2018.
[7] Milliken 1999, 236.
[8] Yee 1996, 97.
[9] Jackson 2007, 234.

the policy problem in language, making the study of language-use a relevant way to understand the underlying thinking patterns of decision-makers.

To achieve the first epistemological goal, the first part of the empirical analysis consists of a discourse analysis of official government communication around an international intervention – i.e. an analysis of the *intervention policy discourse*. I hereby examine policy texts for the way decision-makers employ representations, labels, and narratives while referring to, explaining, and legitimizing international intervention missions. The main objective is to identify the rationale and assumptions which underlie the intervention decision.[10] In order to identify relevant elements of the official policy discourse, the analysis draws on the three shaping parameters identified in Chapter 3 – logic of interests; logic of effectiveness; logic of appropriateness.

In Chapter 3, I explained how news media discourse functions as an important shaper of public discourse and, consequently, as an 'enabler' of foreign policy. Therefore, to achieve the second epistemological goal, the second part of the empirical analysis focusses on *news media discourse*. The main objective here is to examine the societal context and news media landscape in which the intervention decision-making has taken place. As such, I examine news media articles for the way journalists employ representations, labels, and narratives to describe the conflict prior to the launch of the intervention. In a similar vein as for the official policy discourse, I use the three shaping parameters of intervention decision-making as an overarching framework to identify relevant elements within news media reports.

Finally, to achieve the third epistemological goal, the last part of the analysis consists of a comparison between the policy discourse and news media discourse. The objective is to identify patterns of either reproduction or contestation between the two. By subsequently linking such patterns to the three shaping parameters of intervention decision-making, this should provide insight into the role of news media reporting in the development and legitimization of ideas, representations, and assumptions that underly decisions regarding intervention. In turn, this should enable me to identity general mechanisms of how news media indirectly influence intervention decision-making, and draw conclusions about indirect forms of news media influence on foreign policymaking.

To sum up, the choice for a discourse analysis research method does not necessarily stem from an interest in the semantic dimension of language itself, but rather from the necessity that decision-makers have to use language (written or spoken) to define problems, mobilize support, and legitimize actions taken at home and abroad.[11] Hence, studying language use can provide insight into the ideas and discourses underlying foreign policymaking, and tell us more about the role of news media in shaping

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[10] Jackson 2007, 235.
[11] Broad & Daddow 2010, 208.

and enabling them. After all, as Richard Jackson states: "no investigation can take place directly at the level of ideas. We are, strictly speaking, always studying the dynamics of language."[12]

4.3 Research design, case selection, and data collection

In this thesis, I examine the main research question within a single case study, that is, the French intervention mission '*Operation Serval*' in the Sahara-Sahel region. As discussed in the introduction, the choice for this specific case was motivated by the observation that much literature points to the dominance of a 'security discourse' in order to explain the failure of the Sahel peacebuilding strategy. More specifically, scholars have implied that Western news media played an important role in the popularization and sustainment of this discourse, while little to no research has been conducted on the conflict's representation by Western news media.

4.3.1 A single case-study design

Given discourse analysis' reliance on a detailed study of language, this research methodology tends to be time-consuming. Therefore, research projects employing this method generally examine a relatively small number of cases studies. As Lene Hansen explains:

> Post-structuralist discourse analysis requires detailed knowledge of the discursive and political setting that is studied, including knowledge of how current texts are connected to past ones and which representations and terms have become so institutionalized that they no longer need to be explicitly invoked. In terms of research design and methodology, this disposes discourse analysis towards a smaller number of case studies and this in turn provides a contrast with large-N research projects such those of quantitative foreign policy analysis.[13]

For such feasibility reasons, I decided to limit the empirical analysis to a single, bilateral intervention and news media articles from just one country. Focusing on a single, bilateral mission also carried methodological advantages, as it resolved the empirical problem of weighing the influence of national news media outlets on multilateral decision-making institutions, such as the UN and the EU.

A single case-study design is scientifically justifiable given my research objectives. A single case-study approach should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer 'how' and 'why' questions; (b) the studied objects cannot be manipulated; (c) contextual conditions of the case are important for the outcome; and (d) the boundaries between studied object and context are unclear.[14] This thesis fulfills all criteria: the main questions is a 'how question' (a), and the studied object (intervention decision-making) cannot be manipulated (b). Moreover, the relevance of studying indirect news media effects on foreign policy stems from the assumption that the public discursive context (and thus news media discourse) is an important factor in the international intervention decision-making process (c). Where this context ends and where policymaking starts, however, is impossible to say: news media

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[12] Jackson 2007, 64.
[13] Hansen 2008, 106.
[14] See e.g. Baxter & Jack 2008, 545; Yin 2003.

discourse and foreign policy are mutually constitutive and strongly interwoven (d). For such reasons, a single case study is a logical and justifiable research design for the purposes of this research.

Nevertheless, an important disadvantage of single case studies is their limited external validity. As a single case-study design only focusses on a single research object, the degree my research results can be generalized remains unclear.[15] It is, for example, unlikely that all foreign policy decisions follow the exact same course, so one should be wary of taking a specific case as a 'representative sample' of all interactions between foreign policy decision-making and news media. Therefore, I do not attempt to develop a universal, generalizable theory about the indirect effects of news media on foreign policymaking. Rather, I attempt to explore how such understudied forms of news media influence work in both theory and practice.

4.3.2 Data collection: official policy discourse
The data collected for the analysis of official policy discourse consists of official communication and policy documents produced by the French government about the Sahel conflict and Serval. I followed three main criteria for selecting texts: (a) the document had either to be produced by the French government or transmit utterances of French government officials (e.g. interviews with elected officials); (b) the document had to make references to either the Sahel conflict or Operation Serval; and (c) the document had to be produced between 1 January 2013 and 15 July 2014 (the start and end dates of the Serval mission).

Texts were found by inserting 'Sahel' or 'Mali' into the search engine of five different websites of the French government: the French National Assembly (www.assemblee-nationale.fr); presidential office / executive branch (www.elysee.fr); ministry of Defense (www.defense.gouv.fr). In addition, one general government website (www.gouvernement.fr) and one government transparency website (www.vie-publique.fr) were used, because they provided ways to retrieve documents produced by the French Senate, and French ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose own websites did not have a working search function.

In total, 91 text documents were retrieved, accounting for 947 pages of textual material. These documents can in turn be categorized into public speeches by government officials (19); responses to questions parliamentary questions by cabinet officials (13); policy documents and senate information reports (7); transcribed interviews with government officials (30); and press releases and transcripts of press conferences (21).

4.3.3 Data collection: News Media Discourse
The dataset used for the news media discourse analysis can be described as a collection of newspaper articles on the Sahel published between 1 January 2003, the year generally considered the start of the

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[15] Verschuren & Doorewaard 2010.

Sahel's securitization in existing scholarship,[16] and 15 January 2013, the launching date of Opération Serval. In total, articles from four newspapers were included in the discourse analysis: *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *La Croix*, and *Les Echos*. The choice for these specific newspapers was motivated by several factors. First, all four of them were retrievable through Nexis Lexis, assuring public access to their article archives. Moreover, they are generally considered France's 'quality newspapers' and have a relatively high circulation, ranging from 90,000 to 300,000 monthly subscribers. For this reason, it is likely that their reporting reaches a relatively large number of people in France, increasing their probable impact on French public discourse. Digital news media outlets and radio or TV-stations such as France Info or France 24 were excluded because their archives were not publicly accessible.

The news articles were found by searching for mentions of 'Sahel' or 'Mali' in the titles between 1 January 2003 and 15 January 2013 in Nexis Lexis. This yielded 563 hits. Given this high volume, I chose to only include half of the articles in the actual analysis. To preserve chronological appearance, I included one out of every two published articles. This resulted in analyzing 281 news articles.

4.4 Data analysis and coding procedure

Although discourse analysis methods generally do not have a systematic approach to analyzing texts, I decided to employ a mix of deductive and inductive coding, due to the high volume of primary source material. This method was largely inspired by the *grounded theory* approach to qualitative research.[17]

First, I analyzed all documents by deductively coding relevant data segments into six general categories (see Table 2) derived from the theoretical framework. The goal of this step was not to quantitatively operationalize the data, but rather to make the comparison between news media and policy discourse as orderly and systematic as possible.

Subsequently, I again analyzed all data segments within the six general categories by employing an inductive coding procedure. First, by using *axial coding*, data segments were grouped around recurring phenomena and themes (e.g. references to 'narcoterrorism' or mentions of 'state failure' as a root cause of the conflict). This step enabled a clearer definition of each shaping (sub)parameter and understanding of how such theoretical categories should be translated into practice. Finally, these code groups were once again analyzed by using *selective coding*. This step involved interlinking and comparing the different code groups and categories to each other, so a coherent line of argumentation could be developed.

4.4.1 Translation of quotes

For reasons of continuity, quotes listed in the following chapters are English translations of their original publication in French. Translations were made by the author. See Annex 3 and 4 for a full overview of

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[16] See Baldaro 2018 for an extensive discussion of the start of the Sahel's securitization in 2003.
[17] This research methodology builds on Verschuren & Doorewaard 2010, 155-194.

the original French extracts. Whenever I considered an English translation to not fully grasp its original meaning, I also listed the original French word or extract between square brackets – e.g. [lâchage].

Table 2: Deductive coding categories of primary source material

Category / Shaping parameter	Sub-parameter	Code
Logic of interests	Perception of threat	1.1
	Perception of interest	1.2
Logic of effectiveness	Assumptions about conflict dynamics or conflict context	2.1
	Assumptions about conflict resolution and peacebuilding	2.2
Logic of appropriateness	Ethnical dimension (norms)	3.1
	Cognitive dimension (identity)	3.2

Chapter 5 – Empirical analysis part 1: Policy discourse of 'Opération Serval' (January 2013 – August 2014)

In this chapter, I present the results of the first round of empirical analysis. As explained in Chapter 4, this round entails an analysis of the policy discourse of French intervention mission *Operation Serval* in Mali. The goal of this round of analysis is to give insight into the rationale underlying the intervention's decision-making by studying the language that French policymakers use to describe, explain, and legitimize the Serval operation. I do this by examining official government communication for traces of the three shaping parameters of intervention strategies as defined in Chapter 3 (logic of interests, logic of effectiveness, logic of appropriateness).

5.1 General dynamics in Serval policy discourse

Within the Serval policy discourse, I identify three main phases. The first phase starts in January 2013 with the launch of the mission and goes on until March of the same year. In this period, the policy discourse is dominated by matters of *justification* and *legitimization*: French government officials are clearly in need to justify their decision to intervene in Mali, explain the purpose of the Serval intervention force, and convince their constituencies that the mission is legitimate. Regarding the purpose of the intervention force, for example, elected officials carefully repeat a three-point narrative about the mission's main objectives:

> The first objective is to stop the advance of terrorist groups towards Bamako. The second consists of preserving the existence of the Malian state and permit a recovery of territorial integrity. The third is to promote the implementation of international resolutions regarding the deployment of an African stabilization force and support the Malian army during their reclamation of northern territory.[1]

> I would like to reiterate at the National Assembly that the three objectives of the Serval operation remain the same: first of all, stop the jihadist offensive and weaken it is a much as possible, and that's exactly what is happening now; second, restore Mali's sovereignty and territorial integrity; third and last, establish the conditions for the deployment of African forces in close coordination with our presence.[2]

As French forces have pushed most of the Islamist militants out of Mali by March 2013, the Serval policy discourse from then on enters a second phase. This phase is more technical in nature and witnesses a shift away from seeking legitimization for the decision to intervene and towards the question of how to build long-term peace in the Sahel. A recurring statement during this period, for example, holds that "we are on track to win the war, but we also have to win the peace."[3] Winning peace, however, requires a more comprehensive strategy that, in turn, must be justified towards constituents and fellow lawmakers. As such, the discourse in the second phase is dominated by both technical discussions about

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[1] Jean-Marc Ayrault, prime minister, *Debate at the National Assembly*, 1 January 2013.
[2] Jean-Yves le Drian, minister of Defense, *Response to parliamentary question at the National Assembly*, 20 February 2013.
[3] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *interview with TV5 monde*, 13 March 2013.

effective peacebuilding policies, as well as decision-makers seeking justification for these approaches among members of congress and the general public.

During this phase, three key policy texts are published. The first is the Senate advisory report titled *Mali, Comment gagner la paix ?*, presented in April 2013 by the Senate's foreign affairs commission due to the parliamentary debate and vote on the prolongation of Operation Serval. In July 2013, the report is followed by a second advisory report from the Senate's foreign affairs commission, titled *Sahel: Pour une approche globale*, where a more long-term strategy towards stability in the Sahel is laid out. In April 2013, the French ministry of Defense releases the 2013 revision of the *French White Paper on Defense and National Security*, which is the third key text. All documents contain extensive analyses of the situation on the ground and provide recommendations for policymaking on the Sahel. These reports are frequently cited by French government officials in subsequent months.

The final phase of the Serval policy discourse starts in October of 2013 when, due to persisting instability in the region, it becomes clear that the oft-announced retreat of French forces from Mali will not take place in the near future. For this reason, the dominant policy discourse shifts back to justifying why the French army has to remain engaged in the Sahel in the long term. A key text from this final phase is *La mission d'information sur l'évolution du dispositif militaire français en Afrique et sur le suivi des opérations en cours*, which appeared in July 2014 and provides important recommendations regarding the future of French military operations in Africa. This phase ends with the announcement of the Serval's ending and its successor operation Barkhane in Augustus of 2014, marking a turn towards a more regional approach and permanent presence of French forces in the region.

5.2 Logic of interest

Regarding the question of *why* France decided to launch the Serval intervention, I identify two main ways in which French decision-makers have justified the mission's purpose and relevance. The first relates to concerns over the Sahel becoming a new safe haven for international terror that would threaten French national security in a nearly direct way. The second refers to the French state's responsibility to guarantee the security of French citizens residing in the Sahel region.

5.2.1 Perceptions of threats – the Sahel becoming a safe haven for international terrorism

Throughout the Serval policy discourse, it stands out that French officials have primarily justified their decision to intervene in the Sahel by representing Operation Serval as a 'necessary move' for reasons of national security. This justification generally starts by mentioning that, in early 2012, the Malian state was about to be overrun by an alliance of jihadist groups that quickly advanced on the capital of Bamako. French officials, for example, repeatedly stress that without military intervention, the Malian government would have inevitably collapsed, turning Mali into a so-called "terrorist state":

I would like to remind you of the situation in January of 2013: within a few hours, Mali would not exist anymore because it was about to become a state led by terrorists.[4]

It was indeed absolutely necessary to stop the aggression threatening Mopti and, more importantly, Bamako, because this could lead to the creation of a state led by narcoterrorists.[5]

I've always thought that we had to intervene in Mali: France was the only country capable of doing it and if we had hesitated, Mali would now be a terrorist state […].[6]

In essence, this mission justification builds strongly on a discourse of the Sahel posing a *threat to French national security*. Throughout the Serval policy discourse, five recurring representations can be traced that French decision-makers have drawn on to support this discourse.

A first representation refers to the Sahel's *geographical proximity* to Europe. Repeatedly, French decision-makers emphasize in official communication that the collapse of the Malian state would result in the establishment of a "terrorist sanctuary" close to European territory. During the parliamentary debate on the prolongation of operation Serval in April 2013, for example, the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Laurent Fabius, mentions that Mali and France are "only 2,500 kilometers" apart. By doing so, he represents the collapse of the Malian state as an 'imminent threat' to European security, legitimizing a continuation of French military presence in the region:

The assault of terrorist groups that have now conquered a part of territory of this country has provoked a profound destabilization of the Malian state: it's an unacceptable breach of sovereignty that risks the establishment of a sanctuary for terrorism at only 2,500 kilometers of the national territory. It thus also is a threat for Europe and for France.[7]

In addition, French officials tend to talk about the Sahel's geographical proximity to Europe in metaphorical terms. During a press conference on ongoing military operations in January of 2013, France's minister of Defense, Jean-Yves le Drian, for example, warns against the establishment of a "terrorist state" that would be located "at the gates of Europe", subsequently employing this threat representation to justify the French government's decision to intervene:

It is the security of the region, of France, of Europe, which is at stake. The threat is the establishment of a terrorist state at the gates of Europe and of France, led by groups that have explicitly targeted us for years, such as AQIM. It is precisely this threat that has moved us into acting for over six months now.[8]

A second key representation refers to the *scale* of the terrorist threat in the Sahel. Across the Serval policy discourse, French officials make continuous mention of the supposed close links between local jihadist groups in northern Mali and well-known terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, or the Islamic State. Building on this interconnectivity, French decision-makers often warn that Mali risked becoming the "spill" of an international terrorist network that stretches the Sahel.

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[4] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *declaration at the Senate*, 22 April 2013.
[5] Élisabeth Guigou, president of NA's Foreign Affairs committee, *debate at National Assembly*, 16 January 2013.
[6] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *audition before NA's Foreign Affairs committee*, 17 April 2013.
[7] Jean-Marc Ayrault, Prime minister, *debate at the National Assembly*, 16 January 2013.
[8] Jean-Yves le Drian, minister of Defense, *press conference*, 12 January 2013.

Whether done deliberately or not, they hereby enlarge the danger that a terrorist-led Mali would pose: the threat does not only come from local extremist groups themselves, but also from the installment of globally-operating terrorist groups with proven ability to carry out attacks in the West. Examples of this upscaling of the threat can be found both in closed parliamentary sessions as well as in public interviews with government officials, all adding to the perceived necessity of a military intervention:

> We have discovered massive amounts of weapons. According to the army's chief of operations, it is even safe to say we are facing an "industrial organization of terrorism" in northern Mali with branches to many other countries in Africa. We, for example, had confirmation that certain members of Boko Harm received their military training in Mali.[9]

> From the Atlantic coast to the Red Sea, the Sahel would have become a new sanctuary for jihadists coming from all parts of the world. In Arabic, the Sahel means "border", but this border would not protect us against anything. Quite the contrary: it risked becoming a haven for obscure and blood-thirsty forces. The international community could not let them flourish without putting itself in danger.[10]

> We recently spoke about potential comparisons: it are the same methods, the same terrorists: they might call themselves Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb, or Al-Shaabab in Somalia, but, [in reality] it is a jihadist dramaturgy of kidnappers from all over the Sahel who systematically and indiscriminately abduct passers-by: it's blackmail on a global scale. This behavior is unacceptable! It is for this reason that we came to Mali: to prevent a state with millions of people from being taken hostage and its territory becoming a haven for terrorism from where potential attacks could be initiated in all of Africa, but also in Europe, in France. For this reason, Mali also means our security [...].[11]

A third set of representations stems from a process of *concretization*. While stressing the scale and geographical proximity of jihadist groups in the Sahel adds weight to the risk they pose, the exact way they threaten French national security remains unclear. For this reason, French officials often employ explicit examples to further define and concretize the alleged terrorist threat in the Sahel. In the first half of 2013, both the Senate committee on Foreign Affairs and French minister of the Interior, Manuel Valls, for example, repeatedly state that French citizens or members of the Malian community in France could radicalize or be incited into committing attacks:

> The arrestation of a 37-year-old man with the French nationality among combatants in northern Mali by French forces has once again raised the issue of terrorist infiltrations on national territory and the impact of a "call for jihad" on French nationals that is widespread on the internet.[12]

> The risk would be that the Malian community [in France], counting almost 100,000 people could be receptive to the calls for an armed "jihad" against France.[13]

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[9] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *audition before foreign affairs committee at the National Assembly*, 13 March 2013.
[10] Bruno Le Roux, president of PS faction, *debate at the National Assembly*, 16 January 2013.
[11] Jean-Yves le Drian, minister of Defense, *interview with BFMTV*, 5 March 2013.
[12] Senate committee of Foreign Affairs. *Information report nr. 105 : Mali*, c*omment gagner la Paix ?* (April 2013), 72-73.
[13] Ibidem, 9.

Explicit threats linked to Sahelian groups were published these last months. The situation in Mali could incite individuals or groups into committing attacks, both in France and in other countries.[14]

In a similar vein, French cabinet members often offer extensive descriptions of the large amounts of weapons found in retaken Malian cities. During several media interviews in early 2013, the minister of Defense, Jean-Yves le Drian, for example, draws nearly direct lines between the "tons" of weapons discovered in Mali and the risk of such weapons being used for terrorist attacks in Europe. By doing so, he essentially provides 'evidence' for the terrorist threat being real and out there, further legitimizing the French military presence in the region:

> Day after day, we discover tons of material – and when I say tons, I choose my words carefully: canons, explosives, belts for potential kamikaze attacks, laboratories for engine explosives; they were found on a massive scale – in particular in the Adrar des Ifoghas region, but also throughout the entirety of Mali's territory. In Gao, during patrols intended to identify the type of arms storages I was just talking about, we find equipment everywhere pointing to an organized effort in Mali to establish a rear base for terrorism in all of Africa and Europe. It was therefore necessary to intervene.[15]

A fourth set of representations evokes idea that a collapse of the Malian state would, in turn, lead to a *destabilization of the entire Sahel region*. By using metaphors of a "contamination", an "endemic" or a spreading "cancer", French decision-makers repeatedly make clear that it is not only Mali, but the stability of the entire Sahel or even West Africa which is at risk. This strongly raises the stakes of Operation Serval, contributing to its significance and therefore legitimacy:

> The consequences of the establishment of a terrorist sanctuary at the gates of Europe would not only be disastrous for the West and Europe […], but also for the entire Sahelian subregion and Western Africa, which would be profoundly destabilized. One must remember that Mali is a continental country that borders seven other states…[16]

> Because it was imperative to stop the terrorists, otherwise Mali would have become a terrorist state with a contaminating effect on other countries […]. Unfortunately, terrorism is a bad endemic.[17]

> Plain and simple, our main priority is that the "Malian scenario" does not repeat itself in other "fragile zones" where state failure could enable terrorists to nestle and gain a permanent foothold […]. We should not let a cancer proliferate in the middle of the Sahel that would spread around the region and bring about a "synergy of threats". In this ugly scenario, terrorism, drugs, and piracy would sustain each other while expanding their operation radius without cease.[18]

During the debate in the National Assembly on the launch of Operation Serval in January 2013, the president of the UMP-faction, Jean-François Gompé, even situates the threat of regional spillover in the context of the fight against the Taliban. He argues that without action in the Sahel, all counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan would have been for nothing, further raising the stakes of Operation Serval:

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[14] Manuel Valls, minister of the Interior, *interview with le Parisien*, 14 January 2013.
[15] Jean-Yves le Drian, minister of Defense, *interview with BFM TV,* 5 March 2013.
[16] Senate, *Mali, Comment gagner la paix ?*, 10.
[17] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *interview with France Info*, 14 March 2013.
[18] Ibidem, 16.

What would have been the use of our fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan, if we accepted that a regime threatening international peace and security seized power in Mali with an evident risk of contagion for the entire region?[19]

The fifth and final set of representations that decision-makers draw on to justify the deployment of operation Serval, refers to the *geographical characteristics* of the Sahelian landscape. Across the Serval policy discourse, there are continuous mentions of the "vastness' and "desertedness" of Sahelian states, or talk about the "porosity of borders" in the region. By doing so, French officials portray the Sahel as a large 'zone of lawlessness' where terrorist groups can find refuge and move freely across borders, feeding perceptions of the region posing a threat to French national security:

In these vast spaces with porous borders, it was foreseeable that Operation Serval would cause terrorist groups […] to take shelter and attempt to establish a new sanctuary elsewhere, preferably in "soft zones" where states are unable to provide security. As always, terrorist groups remain mobile and move around freely in these vast spaces, using a route from the Gulf of Guinea to seep into the Sahel, via northern Mali, northern Niger, Libya, until as far as Tunisia.[20]

It's a region called the Adrar des Ifoghas, but the name doesn't really matter. It's a mountainous, desert region, which is as big as the half of France and a real terrorist sanctuary. Evidently, the jihadists and a part of their leaders have taken refuge there.[21]

The combination of these two phenomena [narcotrafficking alongside the establishment of a jihadist sanctuary] make this desert space, a vast set of dunes wherefrom chaotic rock formations emerge, more than ever a zone of lawlessness where trafficking, impunity, and corruption reign.[22]

5.2.2 Perceptions of threats – constructed within a discourse of state failure

Since security threats have to be constructed through discourse (see Chapter 3), the main threat perceptions justifying Operation Serval are clearly shaped by thinking in terms of state stability. The advance of jihadist groups on Bamako was, for example, perceived as threatening by French decision-makers, because it would likely lead to the collapse of the Malian state and enable jihadist groups to establish a "terrorist sanctuary" on its former territory. In a similar vein, French decision-makers state that the collapse of the Malian state would, in turn, risk destabilizing the entire Sahel region, potentially creating a "zone of lawlessness" at "the gates of Europe". The state failure discourse has, in other words, functioned as a lens of interpretation through which decision-makers have interpreted particular events and dynamics in the Sahel as threatening to French national security.

Arguably the best evidence for the influence of the state failure discourse can be found in the French 2013 Defense White Paper and July 2014 Evaluation of French military operations in Africa. In these documents, both Mali and the Sahara-Sahel region are explicitly mentioned as examples of how weak states can produce threats to French national security:

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[19] Jean-François Gompé, president of UMP faction, *debate at the National Assembly*, 16 January 2013.
[20] Senate committee, *Sahel, pour une approche globale,* 76.
[21] Jean-Yves Le Drian, minister of Defense, *interview with France 2,* 20 February 2013.
[22] Senate, *Mali, Comment gagner la paix ?*, 38

In a region where states often struggle to control their territory, transnational dynamics give rise to criminal flows and very destabilizing illegal trafficking (drugs, human beings, weapons, etc.). The possibility that whole territories can escape the control of a state over a long period is a strategic risk of crucial importance for Europe. **The crisis in Mali, which required intervention by France, is an excellent case in point**. It illustrates the importance of the region and the seriousness, for Europe, of the threats emerging there. Internal tensions in the north of Mali and between the north and south of to transform the whole of this sub-region into a hotbed of international terrorism.[23]

Against a backdrop of fragile or failed states, terrorist groups are operating in hitherto safe regions, where they latch onto local conflicts and attempt to radicalize them; **this is happening in the Sahel‑Sahara region** as well as in northern Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula and the Afghanistan-Pakistan area. Claiming allegiance to Al-Qaida, they have an independent operational capability and seek to achieve a global impact by directly targeting Western interests. They may incite radicalized individuals present on our territory to turn to action and join them in their efforts. Some states could also be tempted to return to the terrorist fold. The threat of home-grown terrorism likely to damage national security exists even on our own territory.[24]

5.2.3 Perceptions of Interests – guaranteeing the security of French citizens in the region

Besides citing reasons of national security, a second way in which French officials have justified the Serval intervention is by referring to the large presence of French citizens in the Sahara-Sahel region. At many different occurrences, Serval officials mention that there are at least 6,000 French citizens living in Mali whose security must be guaranteed. By doing so, the decision to intervene in the Sahel mission is legitimized by invoking the French state's responsibility to not only protect its citizens in France, but also in third countries:

Even beyond strategic aspects, there is another domain where our country ensures the defense of European interests, and that is that of consular protection, meaning the safety of European nationals in third countries, such as the Sahel.[25]

France has interests in the Saharan-Sahelian strip, foremost a large presence of nationals, both in this region as well as in neighboring countries in West Africa and the Maghreb.[26]

Let's reiterate the primary issues at stake […]: 6,000 French citizens and 1,000 Europeans residing in Mali, 35,000 French citizens in the Sahelo-Saharan strip; 80,000 in West Africa; 200,000 on the African continent. Numerous French companies carrying out activities there. About 100,000 Malians living in France. Without the intervention of the French army, a whole country would have been handed over to the hostage takers.[27]

As can be read in the latter quote, the responsibility to protect French nationals in third countries is often linked to the kidnappings of Western citizens in the Sahara-Sahel region. In nearly every public speech or official statement, French officials talk about the consequences of Operation Serval for European hostages in the Sahel and frequently answer questions about this issue during press conferences. The president of National Assembly's foreign affairs committee, Elisabeth Guigou, for example, explicitly

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[23] Ministry of Defense, *French White Paper on Defense and Security* (Paris, July 2013), 54.
[24] National Assembly commission of Defense and Armed Forces. *Information Report nr. 2114 : L'évolution du dispositif militaire français en Afrique et sur le suivi des opérations en cours* (Paris, July 2014), 113.
[25] Senate, *Mali, Comment gagner la paix ?*, 31.
[26] Senate, *Sahel : pour une approche globale*, 16.
[27] Senate, *Mali, Comment gagner la paix ?*, 9.

mentions the risks for French hostages before continuing her plea for intervention during the parliamentary debate on the launch of Operation Serval:

> The decision of the President of the Republic of course carries risks, in particular for our hostages, but it is intended to ward off the even greater risk of Mali becoming a sanctuary state for terrorism from which AQIM would have been able to take even more hostages and launch attacks throughout Africa, as well as our country and other European countries.[28]

For such reasons, it seems that besides driving motivations to intervene in the first place, the kidnappings of European citizens also play a central role in the justification of the mission towards the public. French decision-makers, for example, often mention the kidnappings of European citizens to show that the Serval intervention is not just part of a distant foreign policy agenda, but directly contributes to the security of French nationals in third countries. A good example of this practice can be found in the speech of President Hollande at Ndjamena in July 2014, where he carefully lays out the immediate relevance of Operation Serval for French citizens:

> But we also have to protect ourselves, because let's be clear: the threats in African countries, especially here in the Sahel, are not just threats that concern Africa. We can see that they concern our own nationals too: there have been kidnappings, there have been hostage-takings […]. Hence, we are protecting our nationals here, and I can name other examples: in Mali, two journalists near Kidal were killed. So offering protection here, means protecting our nationals, and that already is a priority in itself. But still, if we allow terrorists to flourish in this part of the African continent, there will also be consequences for Europe and for France.[29]

5.3 Logic of effectiveness

As shown above, the perception of the Sahel as a national security threat is strongly underpinned by a discourse of state failure. Yet, the impact of this discourse on Serval decision-making clearly goes further than only shaping perceptions of threats: the failed state discourse has also played a fundamental role in shaping assumptions among French policymakers about Sahelian conflict dynamics and, consequently, assumptions about effective peacebuilding approaches.

Regarding Sahelian conflict dynamics, I identify two main assumptions that are widespread among French policymakers. First, violent conflict in the Sahel is driven by a new, opportunistic coalition of jihadist and criminal trafficking groups, usually referred to as narcoterrorism. Second, narcoterrorism could gain momentum in the region because Sahelian states were unable to adequately provide services to their citizens and control borders, making state failure the assumed root cause of conflict in the region. As a result of these assumptions about the conflict, peacebuilding activities have been dominated by providing hard security in the short term, and capacity building and economic development in the long run.

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[28] Élisabeth Guigou, president of Foreign Affairs committee, *debate at the National Assembly*, 16 January 2013.
[29] François Hollande, President of the Republic, *presidential speech at Ndjamena*, 19 July 2014.

5.3.1 Assumption 1 about Sahel conflict dynamics – 'narcoterrorism' as the main driver of violence

Throughout the Serval policy discourse, French decision-makers frequently imply that violence in Mali is driven by 'external' rather than domestic actors. In an interview with Le Monde, for example, Jean-Yves le Drian makes an explicit distinction between local "Malians" and external "foreign fighters" who came in and "subjugated" the local population to fundamentalist laws:

> The situation in Gao is very different from the north. The north is where the most radical and doctrinarian forms of international jihadism have emerged due to the influx of foreign fighters. In Gao, we can speak of Malians: there have been historic tensions between the different Arab, Tuareg, Fulani and Songhai communities […]. What is certain, however, is that the Malian population has welcomed the French army as a force of liberation, which, in fact, it was. I was in Bamako together with the president and we felt this feeling, this emotion of a population that did not have to fear anymore after being subjugated for weeks to the yoke of fundamentalist laws and having lived under the yoke of terrorism. There was a real liberation, just like in the northern part, meaning that the jihadists, the terrorist groups there, were not welcomed by the population, nor did they mingle with the population; they are exteriors, they are international groups.[30]

This notion of an external imposition of fundamentalism can also be identified at many other occurrences throughout the Serval policy discourse. In the first Senate report, for example, the rapporteurs state that "the radical Islam as imposed by terrorist movements is very foreign to local traditions. The traditional application of the sharia by traditional religious leaders of local tribes or ethnic groups (the cadis) was in no way 'rigorist', while both the status of women (traditionally not veiled) and norms concerning social regulation corresponded to those of a tolerant and open society."[31]

In essence, both the Senate's foreign affairs committee and Jean-Yves le Drian here suggest that jihadist violence in northern Mali is an 'externally imposed' phenomenon, brought in by foreign fighters. This view differs strongly from academic literature, where the violence in northern Mali is often considered a domestic 'response' to widespread grievances in the region and exclusion from political decision-making (see Introduction). In a later interview with France 2, le Drian makes this point even clearer by stating explicitly that jihadist groups "want" to establish a zone of lawlessness across the entirety of Western Africa, so they can attack Europe:

> These are groups that want to establish a zone of lawlessness between Guinee-Bissau, the Golf of Guinee and […] Sudan to quickly access the huge Sahel, which is a zone where all types of trafficking occur – drugs, arms, hostages – and is used by fundamentalist as cover-up for their terrorist methods and a movement that can, subsequently, act in Europe. Therefore, it is a situation that is bad.[32]

While it is likely that French officials intentionally employed the representation of an external imposition to justify the deployment of French troops into Mali, a close study of policy documents reveals that the assumption of violence in northern Mali being driven by an external, international

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[30] Jean-Yves Le Drian, minister of Defense, *interview with Le Monde,* 13 February 2013.
[31] Senate, *Mali : Comment gagner la paix ?*, 46.
[32] Jean-Yves le Drian, minister of Defense, *interview with France 2*, 20 February 2013.

jihadist network instead of local actors is pervasive and deeply institutionalized into Serval decision-making. More specifically, this assumption is part of a recurring narrative about violence the Sahel being driven by 'narcoterrorism', which is continuously produced and reproduced in both public speeches and policy texts.

In short, this narcoterrorism narrative holds that the instability of the Sahel region is driven by a new type of transnational actor that blends criminal and jihadist elements. It centers around the idea that, in the Sahel, drug trafficking and religious extremist groups have become deeply intertwined and cooperate to push back the authority of the Malian state. Their shared goal is to establish an Islamist caliphate that stretches the Sahara-Sahel region. Within this state, the local population is subjugated to Sharia-law in order to cover up terrorist and transnational crime activities.[33]

Regarding this narrative, a first key assumption that can be identified concerns the *motives* for religious and criminal actors to form an alliance. French decision-makers, for example, assert that these groups work together for mostly *opportunistic* reasons, rather than shared political or religious convictions. This assumption of opportunism is pervasive in all policy documents I analyzed:

> The logic behind a collaboration or even an alliance between armed groups (notably the MUJAO) and certain narcotrafficking Arabs certainly was more opportunistic in nature, than political or religious. Nonetheless, this collaboration is very much existing now and in particular explains the pockets of insecurity around Gao.[34]

> The strength of MUJAO is to have succeeded in combining the effects of ideology and drug trafficking to recruit and indoctrinate young people, mainly in the Gao region. [...] we note a shift [...] from terrorism based on a doctrine, towards "narcoterrorism" adorned with an ideological facade borrowed from radical Islamism, in order to recruit more effectively.[35]

> The civil and military authorities of the countries visited in the Sahelo-Saharan strip agree that they face rebel groups with a dual specificity: regarding their motivations (i.e. their "agenda"), they intertwine, to varying degrees, political demands (international jihadism or local separatism) and economic interests (trafficking of all kinds).[36]

Due to this assumed opportunistic character of the alliance between jihadists and criminal, the perception arises that many of the armed groups advancing from northern Mali are not religious fundamentals, but rather criminals adopting an extremist "facade"' to cover up and preserve their illegal activities. This perception, in turn, holds more implications for the assumptions about Sahelian conflict dynamics: French officials, for example, seem to assume that violence in the region is largely driven by 'greed', rather than political grievances or genuine religious conviction:

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[33] For a more extensive study on conflict narratives in Mali, see Dowd & Raileigh 2013. For a more in-depth study on the narcoterrorism narrative, see Lacher 2013.

[34] Senate, *Mali : Comment gagner la paix ?*, 43.

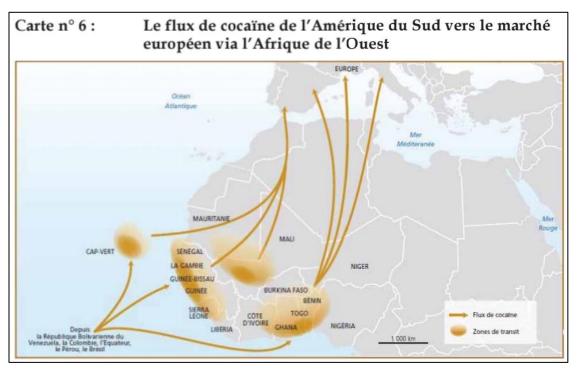[35] Senate, *Sahel : pour une approche globale*, 34.

[36] NA Committee for Defense & Armed Forces, *L'évolution du dispositif militaire français en Afrique*, 129.

It is for this reason that we are not in a logic of war against a religion either, because this displayed ideology is largely a facade. Behind this facade, there is drug trafficking and conflicts of interest […].[37]

[The narcoterrorists] have only one method: instrumentalize Islam, a religion of peace for the vast majority of Muslims, in order to justify their fight against democracy and women's rights. They thus mask the mafia nature of their organizations, which rely on arms and drug trafficking, just like in the Sahel.[38]

I would like to raise the issue of terminology here, which is always significant. It would be a serious mistake to think that the difficulties in Mali […] are linked to Islam. Muslim people are peaceful, and that is why I personally don't use the word "Islamist", which our Arab friends tend to translate as "Muslim". No, in this case, it's a matter of fighting narcoterrorist groups which have attacked a predominantly Muslim population, the Malian population. We must therefore avoid making amalgams that only reinforce the problems. It aren't the Muslims here who are to blame, but the narcoterrorist groups; they must be fought everywhere. I think you will agree, Mr Bompard. Let's not resort to improper assimilations.[39]

Further examples of how institutionalized the narcoterrorism discourse is into Serval decision-making can be found in advisory reports from the Senate's foreign affairs commission. Within such reports, the majority of geographical maps depict the Sahara-Sahel region as a key shackle in international smuggling networks. Sometimes these depictions are relatively implicit: the second Senate report, for example, contains a series of maps where large arrows mark illegal trafficking routes across the Sahara:

Source: Sahel : pour une approche globale, 107.

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[37] Pascal Canfin, minister of Development, *interview with Radio Classique*, 22 March 2013.
[38] Élisabeth Guigou, president of Foreign Affairs committee, *debate at the National Assembly*, 16 January 2013.
[39] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *debate at the National Assembly*, 27 February 2013.

Carte n° 10 : Trafics de drogue, d'armes et piraterie au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest

Source: Sahel : pour une approche globale, 115.

Others, however, go a lot further: in a map caption from the first Senate report, for example, the Sahel is literally called a "hub for cocaine trafficking" ["plaque tournante du trafic de cocaine"].[40] Later on, Serval policymakers make mention of an "explosion of narcotics" or speak about a "new West African drug route" where cocaine is shipped from South America to West African coastal states and smuggled across the Sahel to sell on European markets.[41] The main significance of such maps and captions is that they visually reinforce the representation of the Sahel as a 'zone of lawlessness', feeding a narcoterrorist-based interpretation of conflict dynamics in the region.

In addition, these maps are often supported with references to the increased amounts of drugs and arms which have been seized in the Sahel since the 2000s. These mentions imply that problems in the region are rooted in trafficking – in particular the smuggling of cocaine. Both Senate advisory reports from April and July 2013, for example, even explicitly mention that the Sahel has always been "a gray economic zone" with a long trafficking tradition of gasoline, cigarettes, migrants, arms, and cannabis.[42] Trafficking, however, "took another dimension with the arrival in West Africa of cocaine produced in

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[40] Senate, *Mali : comment gagner la paix ?*, 101.
[41] Senate, *Sahel : pour une approche globale*, 107-108.
[42] Senate, *Mali : comment gagner la paix ?,* 100.

South America."[43] According to the rapporteurs, "the arrival of cocaine has been a real shock for the Sahelian economies, as the revenues generated are higher than those drawn from 'traditional' forms of trafficking in the region – including that of cannabis."[44] Following this line of logic, drug trafficking is considered a key factor of destabilization by the report's authors, because it undermines the Sahel's economic, social, and governmental structures:

> The impact of drug trafficking on economic and social structures is devastating: corruption and protection offered by the security apparatus […] gradually erode good governance, criminalize economic structures, and make the rents of drug trafficking a major economic activity in these disadvantaged areas. Besides increasing crime and corruption, or the associated health effects of drug consumption, the arrival of narcotics generally goes hand in hand with an acceleration of weapon flows within populations.[45]

In the conclusion of these reports, the rapporteurs go even further by drawing nearly direct lines between the start of cocaine trafficking and the outbreak of the Malian war:

> The social, political, and economic consequences of the arrival of cocaine in West-Africa have not stopped taking its toll yet. These consequences have, without a single doubt, precipitated the Malian destiny.[46]

From such examples, it becomes clear that the narcoterrorism narrative is not just justifying rhetoric. Rather, narcoterrorism is an institutionalized discourse among Serval policymakers, shaping assumptions about the main drivers and causes of violence in the Sahel – most notably by drawing attention towards trafficking and jihadist groups at the expense of local grievances.

5.3.2 Assumption 2 about Sahelian conflict dynamics – State failure as the conflict's root cause
A second key assumption I identify throughout the Serval policy discourse relates to the idea that narcoterrorist groups could gain momentum in the region because of the weakness and instability of many Sahelian states. As such, Serval policymakers tend to assume that *state failure* is an important root cause of conflict in the Sahel. I trace recurring two lines of reasoning about how state failure contributes to armed conflict.

The first concerns the way that narcoterrorist groups were able to gain support from local populations: when states fail to provide sufficient services to their citizens (e.g. due to corruption or inadequate means), non-state actors such as trafficking or jihadist groups become able play into local grievances and intercommunal tensions by providing alternative government services, such as security. As a result, these non-state actors can wield support from the local population and eventually function as a 'legitimate' substitute for the central government. The French minister of Foreign Affairs, Laurent Fabius, provides a clear example of this reasoning during an interview with TV5 Monde in March 2013:

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[43] Senate, *Mali : comment gagner la paix ?*, 101.
[44] Senate, *Sahel : pour une approche globale,* 108.
[45] Senate, *Mali : Comment gagner la paix ?*, 102-103.
[46] Ibidem, 103.

> It may seem that [jihadist groups] indeed deliver social services et cetera. But in reality, the MUJAO is a narcoterrorist group, it's a proven fact: they live off drugs […]. The truth is that they exploit the existing shortcomings in public services and those of the state. And that's why they can sometimes have a degree of adhesion [on the local population]. It's not a justification at all, because nothing is worse than giving in to movements like this that don't care at all about the well-being of the population, and simply use a number of deficiencies or shortcomings to gain a stranglehold on the population and do their business. That is the bottom line of reality.[47]

This line of reasoning often appears in policy documents as well. The first Senate report, for example, contains a detailed discussion of how the "dissatisfaction of pastoral populations" in Mali's north alongside "the weakening of the Malian state" have largely set the stage for the Tuareg rebellion:

> [The Tuareg rebellion] must be understood within a new context that emerged since the mid-2000s […] characterized by the dissatisfaction of pastoral populations in the north, a cycle of violence and continuous reprisals, alongside a progressive weakening of Malian state structures. In other words, the return of […] mercenaries from Libya (and their arms arsenals) has functioned as the spark to an explosive cocktail where all elements were alrighty united: irredentism, corruption within central government structures, the destabilizing impact of narcotrafficking on traditional forms of redistribution…[48]

The second way in which weak states are considered a root cause for armed conflict in the Sahel is Sahelian states' incapacity to control borders and exercise sovereignty over their territories. As explained, French decision-makers seem convinced that illegal trafficking has played a key role in the destabilization of the region. Consequently, the inability of Sahelian states, and in particular their security apparatus, to exercise sovereignty and control illegal trafficking is broadly considered a key underlying cause for conflict in the region. President Hollande, for example, states during a press conference in September 2013 that the establishment of "terrorism" in northern Mali is directly related to the absence of the state and the Malian army in the region:

> Syria may seem far away from Mali […] but we notice that, nowadays, in an international form of terrorism, there are groups and individuals who go from one country to another […] and live off chaos and instability. So why was there terrorism in northern Mali? Because there was lawlessness, because there was no state anymore, because the army was no longer present.[49]

This second line of reasoning is also pervasively present in the both the 2013 Defense White Paper and the 2014 Evaluation of French military operations in Africa. Here, the incapacity of Sahelian states to protect their borders is repeatedly linked to security problems, often in nearly direct ways:

> A state that no longer controls its borders and its territory can become a sanctuary for criminal groups, a transit space for trafficking, or a rear base for terrorist groups, enabling them to plan action on a large scale. By fueling crime and rebel movements in the areas where they develop, these activities can be the source of intrastate conflicts […]. This failure concerns states of varying levels of development and size and applies to all or part of their territory. For example, it affects areas far from the capital that are beyond the control of the central power, such as the Sahel […]. **When these upheavals occur in a country with a fragile sense of national unity, where the borders resulting from decolonization enclose considerable ethnic, linguistic or**

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[47] Laurent Fabius, Minister of Foreign Affairs, *interview with TV5 Monde*, 13 March 2013.
[48] Senate, *Mali : comment gagner la paix,* 38-39.
[49] François Hollande, President of the Republic, *press conference in Bamako*, 19 September 2013.

religious diversity, and where there is no strong national project to replace the struggle against the colonizers, the likelihood of civil war is further increased.[50]

The interstate borders in the Sahelo-Saharan strip and in sub-Saharan Africa [are] unanimously described as "porous" […]. According to the French Embassy in Burkina Faso, a line of 500 kilometers belonging to the Malian-Burkinabe border is, for example, devoid of any border post, and border patrollers have just one liter of fuel per day at their disposal. Similarly, the Chief of Staff of MINUSMA recognized in March 2014 that the Malian-Algerian border area was a "gray zone" from a security perspective, as no security forces come there […]. The reasons are various: lack of equipment suited for the distances in question, "lack of motivation", other priorities, etc. He, however, acknowledged that action along the Algerian border was essential to "cut off the links between the 'fortified castle' Tigharghar and the north [of Mali]". **This porosity is taken advantage of by armed jihadist, terrorist, or rebel groups. In Niger, for example, the rapporteurs noticed that the local authorities were particularly concerned about the establishment of Boko Haram rear bases in the south of the country**.[51]

5.3.2 Assumptions about peacebuilding – A three-step process of security, governance, and development

The narcoterrorist and state failure readings of Sahelian conflict dynamics have, in turn, carried important implications for the assumptions about effective peacebuilding approaches among Serval policymakers. French officials, for example, tend to describe peacebuilding in the Sahel as a clear-cut process containing three steps. The first step of this process refers to a dimension of *security* that is to be achieved through military intervention and peacekeeping; the second to a *governance* dimension that is to be achieved through the organization of democratic elections and state capacity building; and the third to a *developmental* dimension that is to be achieved through closer economic cooperation and development aid:

> There are always three aspects when we talk about Mali. There is the security aspect, the political aspect, and then the economic aspect.[52]

> In Mali, there are three permanent actions: there is security action – without security, nothing is possible, so that's the military aspect; there is democratic action – democratic dialogue, preparation of elections; and then there is economic action for development. And we have to keep all these aspects in mind.[53]

> Beyond Mali, the report describes multiple shocks that destabilize the Sahel (poverty, demographic explosion, the rise of radical Islamism, trafficking, terrorism, piracy...). These shocks call for a comprehensive response at the European level that combines military security, political governance reform, and the promotion of economic and social development on a regional scale.[54]

Interestingly, this three-step process reflects many of the above-mentioned assumptions about Sahelian conflict dynamics. Regarding the first aspect of *security*, for example, the perceived necessity of providing security clearly derives from the assumption that violence in the Sahel is driven by

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[50] Ministry of Defense, *French White Paper on Defense and Security*, 38-39.
[51] NA Committee for Defense & Armed Forces*, L'évolution du dispositif militaire français en Afrique*, 118-119.
[52] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *interview with BFM TV and RMC*, 3 April 2013.
[53] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *interview with TV5 Monde*, 13 March 2013.
[54] Ministry of Defense, *Sahel: pour une approche globale - synthèse rapport*, 16 April 2013, 4.

opportunistic, greedy actors rather than widespread grievances among the local population. As shown earlier, Serval officials tend to view these so-called narcoterrorist groups as the main instigators and spoilers of the conflict, making it imperative to defeat them before the country could ever start a peace process. Improving immediate security hence becomes a key condition for peace: there is no place for opportunistic narcoterrorist groups in the peace process, leaving no other choice than eliminating these groups with military force. In fact, without their defeat, the subsequent steps of improving governance or stimulating economic development are doomed to fail, making security and military action an indispensable first step of the peace process:

> Without security, nothing is possible. Next Wednesday or Thursday, there will be a vote at the United Nations. We are very hopeful that the Security Council will vote unanimously in favor of our resolution defining the conditions under which MISMA will be transformed into MINUSMA and establish the conditions under which troops will intervene in this country to ensure stability and the return of democracy.[55]

> That's because all African countries have understood that no development at all is possible on their continent if the issues of terrorism and narcoterrorism are not under control.[56]

> Indeed, AQIM terrorists are still present in the north of the country. If they are asked to organize the election, it's very unlikely they will agree to do so! But given Mali's intrinsic difficulties, one should not impose so many additional conditions that the holding of elections becomes impossible. Therefore, security must be provided – the troops are doing their job in a remarkable manner – dialogue must be initiated, and all technical aspects should be in order so the elections can be held on the scheduled date and in the presence of international observers.[57]

In a similar vein, the other peacebuilding dimensions of *governance* and *development* clearly derive from the assumption that state failure constitutes the root cause of conflict in the Sahel. These two dimensions even closely follow the two lines of reasonings identified in section 5.3.1. When talking about governmental action, for example, French officials tend to emphasize the necessity to "restore the territorial sovereignty and integrity of the Malian state."[58] According to this perception, the main source of instability is the weakness of the Malian state: the central government in Bamako simply lacks the legitimacy and capacity to exercise sovereignty over its territory, creating opportunities for non-state actors such as narcoterrorist groups.

As a result, French decision-makers often assert that peacebuilding efforts should center around inscribing more legitimacy to the central government in Bamako. These efforts usually involve democratic reforms, such as the organization of free and fair elections, the decentralization of political power, or creating forums for dialogue and reconciliation between the north and the south of Mali. Both Laurent Fabius and Jean-Yves le Drian repeatedly stress the importance of a legitimate government during media interviews in order to end the conflict:

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[55] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *declaration at the Senate*, 22 April 2013.
[56] Pascal Canfin, minister of Developmental Cooperation, *debate at the National Assembly*, 22 April 2013.
[57] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *debate at the National Assembly*, 27 February 2013.
[58] See e.g.: Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *interview with France 3*, 17 March 2013.

The end of our mission must coincide with a political solution in Mali. This requires two essential elements. First, a presidential election must be organized as soon as possible: in July [...]. This timetable is essential, because the future political authority in Mali requires national and international legitimacy. The second is the organization of the Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission in accordance with the roadmap. It must be up and running as soon as possible.[59]

The strengthening of local capacities and the inclusion of locally elected officials disposing of traditional legitimacy will support political institutions and, because it is necessary, help re-legitimize the state, which has obviously been strongly weakened. The objective of the Malian authorities […] is to reinstall the state throughout the entirety of Malian territory.[60]

The assumed importance of democratic reforms is also clearly visible in the second Senate report from July 2013. In the report's summary, it is for example stated that:

[…] the second and most important phase of Malian reconciliation should be directed by the new president and government that are to be elected in August. This second phase should focus on: the sharing of budgetary and development aid resources, decentralization and the creation of a legislative assembly representing the territorial communities, the political and social integration of minorities, and the development of infrastructure and services to the population in the north of the country.[61]

Besides democratic reforms, a second set of governmental actions often mentioned by Serval officials relates to reinforcing the capacities of the Malian state – in particular its security apparatus. The authors of the first Senate report, for example, devote no less than an entire chapter on the necessity of reforming and reinforcing the Malian army, calling its current state a "danger for the political stability of the country":

C. THE MALIAN STATE MUST RESTORE ITS ADMINISTRATIVE AND SECURITY CAPACITIES

The internal security forces [of Mali] need to be rebuilt. [Your rapporteurs noticed] a lack of equipment and logistics, disorganization, questionable loyalty to institutions, and poor motivation. Most notably, the Secretary General of the Ministry has described situations where discipline is flouted and hierarchical rules are not respected […]. Some experts not only doubt their capacity to face a terrorist threat, but also their ability to manage a medium or high intensity public order disturbance. Others even consider that certain units – in particular ones within the national police force – are a danger to the political stability of the country, as they are likely to "collapse" ["basculer"].[62]

Later in the report, the rapporteurs even label the strengthening of security force an "urgent" matter and explicitly advise to set up a capacity building mission:

Your rapporteurs therefore believe that an in-depth audit of the internal security forces, with the aim of setting up a capacity building mission, is a priority […]. It is becoming urgent to act on the issue of strengthening internal security forces.[63]

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[59] Jean-Yves le Drian, minister of Defense, *interview with Le Monde*, 12 March 2013.
[60] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *public speech at Lyon*, 19 March 2013.
[61] Ministry of Defense, *Sahel : pour une approche globale - Synthèse rapport*, 2.
[62] Senate, *Mali : Comment gagner la paix ?*, 84.
[63] Ibidem, 85.

Finally, the dimension of developmental action closely corresponds to the assumption that narcoterrorist groups could gain momentum in the region due to the failure of Sahelian states to provide adequate services to their citizens. More specifically, French officials frequently assert that improving economic conditions in the Sahel is a key long-term solution, as this will prevent narcoterrorist groups from regaining a foothold in the region in the future. The first Senate report, for example, contains a full chapter titled '*Development and security on a regional scale are the only long-term solutions*', in which the rapporteurs call for a "comprehensive approach" in order to end to the conflict.[64] Here, they clearly consider development and security to be linked, stating that:

> […] to turn a military success into a political success, a comprehensive approach is needed to rebuild the country. There is no security without development, and no development without security.[65]

Later on, they argue that "economic development and the reconstruction of state structures (e.g. administration, justice) are the surest means to prevent crises", further signaling the assumed importance of regional economic development for long-term stability.[66]

Other examples of this perceived need of a comprehensive approach can be found in the first Senate report. In the report's recommendation list, the rapporteurs even warn that "the forces of decomposition will inevitably take over again" if the "long-term challenges", such as economic underdevelopment, are not sufficiently tackled:

> Recommendation 4 – The factors of fragility that led to the collapse of Mali are shared by several states in the region. The fight against such long-term challenges must involve the European Union, encompass the whole of the Sahel, and tackle the structural causes (economic underdevelopment, demographic explosion, trafficking of all kinds, especially cocaine, problems of governance ...). Otherwise, the forces of decomposition will inevitably take over again.[67]

5.4 Logic of appropriateness

Regarding the moral and ethical considerations that have shaped Serval decision-making, two main points stand out. First, French officials tend to legitimize the mission by representing the Serval operation as being both <u>legally and morally just</u>. Second, these considerations stem, in turn, from an <u>awareness about France's doubled-edged relationship</u> with Mali and other Sahelian countries.

5.4.1 Ethical dimension – intervention as legally and morally just

Throughout the Serval policy discourse, French officials frequently assert that the decision to launch the operation followed an official request by the Malian government to help stop the jihadist advance on the capital of Bamako. As such, the intervention in Mali is represented as one which respects the sovereignty

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[64] Senate, *Sahel : Pour une approche globale*, 87
[65] Idem.
[66] Ibidem, 88.
[67] Senate, *Mali* : *Comment gagner la paix ?*, 5.

of the country and is supported by both the UN, Mali, and neighboring Sahelian states. French officials often employ this argument to underscore that the decision to deploy troops into Mali is in strict accordance with international law:

> Our intervention in Mali is legitimate. First of all, it was upon request of the Malian President. It is based on the resolution of the UN Security Council and therefore France is acting in accordance with international law. France is not alone. Firstly, because it is supported by the European countries who provide us with all forms of assistance. Secondly, because we are working with African countries who will themselves form the core of the international force whose mission will be to enable Mali to recover its territorial integrity.[68]

> This is not an operation that violates the sovereignty of an independent country. Quite the contrary: it's about providing assistance to a country in great danger, whose territorial integrity had been violated by terrorist groups intending to impose their law – and what a law! – that would not just threaten its sovereignty, but even the state's survival if the armed Islamists had been able to pursue their raid down south. France's intervention was executed under Article 51 of the UN Charter and followed by a Security Council meeting, which confirmed the legitimacy and legality of the French intervention.[69]

A second way in which French decision-makers tend to defend the appropriateness of their mission, is by delegitimizing the enemy they are combatting. In official government communication, armed groups in the north of Mali are, for example, systematically described as brutal, opportunistic, and evil. According to this representation, these groups are not at all interested in the well-being of the population and commit numerous human rights violations to stay in power. In this light, the launch of the Serval intervention is not only legally correct, but also morally justifiable because it "liberates" the Malian people from extremist rule:

> Who would have said one year ago that Mali would have regained its sovereignty, its freedom, its self-confidence, and its pride? Who would have said that Mali could be a democracy again, while one year ago – remember that; time flies by – jihadism dominated the country: hands were cut off in Gao and Timbuktu, and we wondered how long it would take before terrorism took over Bamako. We did not want that to happen. The President of the Republic therefore decided, upon request of the Malian authorities and in coordination with the United Nations, to put a stop to it.[70]

> Back then, the north of Mali was occupied by Islamist terrorist movements that imposed their terrible law: AQIM and MUJAO, joined by Ansar Dine, an Islamist Tuareg movement opposed to the MNLA. Numerous human rights violations were committed there: amputations, sexual assaults, stonings, recruitment of child soldiers...[71]

> International military action was necessary to prevent the establishment of a terrorist state. The jihadists in northern Mali and their Al-Qaeda affiliates only have one goal: impose despotic, blood-thirsty, and medieval regimes at a worldwide scale. Their fundamentalism constitutes a new form of fascism.[72]

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[68] François Hollande, President of the Republic, *presidential speech at Tulle*, 19 January 2013.
[69] Senate, *Mali : Comment gagner la paix ?*, 9.
[70] Jean-Yves le Drian, minister of Defense, *speech for French forces at N'Djamena*, 1 January 2014.
[71] Senate, *Mali : Comment gagner la paix ?*, 34.
[72] Jean-Yves le Drian, minister of Defense, *Debate at the National Assembly,* 16 January 2013.

5.4.2 Cognitive dimension – awareness about the double-edged French-Malian relationship

As explained in section 3.3.1, moral and ethical considerations do no not emerge in a vacuum but are dependent on the perceived self-identity of a state. In the case of Operation Serval, the abovementioned tendency by French officials to stress the legality and morality of the mission clearly derives from an awareness about the double-edged relationship between Mali and France.

On the one hand, Malian-French relations are considered close and friendly: due to their history, the two countries share many citizens and cultural ties. French officials, for example, continuously emphasize the "deep-rooted friendship" between the nations, often by referring to the Second World War. In multiple speeches, President Hollande recalls the efforts made by soldiers of Malian descent during the liberation of France, describing Operation Serval as an "act of reparation" and "a lesson of solidary" with a befriended nation:

> Mr. President, dear Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, I know that your grandfather gave his life for France and that your father himself experienced war. I think of the many Malian families whose history is linked to France: it was our duty, our turn, to come to the help of Mali! Mali and France, dear Ibrahim Boubacar, are united. Together as Africans and Europeans, we have given the most beautiful lesson in solidarity between peoples for the security of Mali, for the Sahel, but also for Europe, when it comes to the fight against terrorism.[73]

> But [Operation Serval] was also an act of reparation because, as I said in Bamako, I have not forgotten the sacrifice of soldiers of Malian origin during the two great wars of the last century. It was therefore legitimate for the French people, for French soldiers to come in and liberate Mali. Thank you for this honor, thank you once again for your coming to Paris, and know that the Malian people and the French people, through this distinction, through the reward and the effort of our soldiers, are inseparably connected. Long live France, long live Mali, long live the friendship between France and Mali![74]

Moreover, due to its strong military position in Africa after decolonization, France has traditionally acted as a safeguard for West-African regimes facing security challenges. This perceived self-identity clearly carries through in the Serval policy discourse: French officials, for example, repeatedly assert that France was the only country with the capabilities to quickly respond to the Malian president's request for assistance. France allegedly "bears a responsibility" to protect its African 'friends' whenever they are in need of assistance. French officials draw extensively on this theme during speeches and press conferences about Operation Serval:

> Mali is not France's business. But as the former colonial power, we do bear a responsibility.[75]

> France was the only country able to intervene, because our troops were not far away. So we intervened. Why did we intervene? To stop the terrorist attack, to retake cities, and to ensure that the international community could say: "This is how we should act". We did it and everyone

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[73] François Hollande, President of the Republic, *presidential speech at Bamako*, 19 September 2013.
[74] François Hollande, President of the Republic, *press conference*, 2 February 2013.
[75] Jean-Jacques Candelier, member of Parliament, *debate at the National Assembly*, 22 April 2013.

acknowledges that the intervention carried out by French and African forces was extremely effective.[76]

In fact, this was not only an act of friendship, but also one of responsibility by not giving in to the terrorists. It was also an act of solidarity towards the Malian people and West Africa, where France must ensure the development of the African continent.[77]

By intervening in Mali, France has played its role, held its ground, and will continue to do so by presuming its military effort.[78]

On the other hand, France's colonial history with the Sahel region has clearly cast a shadow on Serval decision-making too. In numerous speeches and press conferences, for example, Serval officials seem urged to counter even the slightest allegations of "neo-colonialism" and respond hostile to remarks about the mission being driven by "imperial interests":

Some commentators have tried to frame the French intervention in Mali as a resurgence of 'Françafrique', where the former colonizer acts as a policeman in its former colony and infringes its sovereignty in the name of an alleged, hidden agenda. Such allegations don't match the analysis: within a framework of international legality, the European and French interests at risk, alongside the call for help from a pivotal country in West Africa, fully justify the French intervention.[79]

For us, it's not about conquering a territory, increasing our sphere of influence, or defending commercial and economic interests. That time is over. On the contrary, our country, because it is France, must come to the help of a friendly nation.[80]

We, the French, have no business in interfering in the political dialogue belonging to the Malians. We are not in a neo-colonial logic: it is up to them to find compromises between them. We can accompany them, we can facilitate the process, but it is first and foremost the responsibility of the Malians to find this compromise by looking at other states. I am thinking of its neighbor Niger where this compromise has been found, so it is possible. It is possible in Mali. Now it is their responsibility.[81]

It is exactly against this backdrop that the abovementioned emphasizing of the morality and legality of the Serval operation should be read: due to its history of colonialism, deploying French troops into this region of Africa was a very sensitive issue. At all costs, French officials had to make clear that military operations were conducted in coordination with the Malian authorities and respected Mali's sovereignty. This made Serval in large part a diplomatic, rather than purely military challenge.

While it remains hard to tell from speech alone how such considerations have exactly impacted decision-making, it seems likely that the (post) colonial context has considerably limited the policy options at disposal for French officials. To take the example of the recent decision to withdraw French troops from Mali: not responding to the demand of the Malian government to leave its territory would very likely be interpreted as a clear sign of neo-colonialism. As a result, French decision-makers had

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[76] Laurent Fabius, minister of Foreign Affairs, *interview with Al-Jazeera*, 10 April 2013.
[77] François Hollande, President of the Republic, *presidential speech at Paris,* 15 July 2013.
[78] Jean-Marc Ayrault, prime minister, *declaration at the Senate*, 22 April 2013.
[79] Senate, *Mali : Comment gagner la paix ?*, 9.
[80] François Hollande, President of the Republic, *presidential speech at Tulle*, 19 January 2013.
[81] Pascal Canfin, minister of Development, *interview with Radio Classique*, 22 March 2013.

little choice but complying with the demands of the Malian transitional government, even though France still had many security interests in the region.

5.5 Conclusion of policy discourse analysis

Building on the findings in the paragraphs above, I conclude that the underlying rationale of operation Serval decision-making can be summarized into three main elements:

1. *Logic of interests (why intervene?).* French decision-makers have justified Operation Serval by representing the intervention as necessary for reasons of national security. The decision to launch the Serval intervention was driven by the perception that a collapse of the Malian government would result in the establishment of a terrorist sanctuary "at the gates of Europe", meaning a direct threat to French national security. This threat perception, in turn, was constructed within a discourse of 'state failure', which was strongly institutionalized in decision-making circles.

2. *Logic of effectiveness (how intervene?).* French officials assumed that conflict in the Sahel is essentially driven by 'narcoterrorism' and rooted in the weakness of Sahelian states. Narcoterrorists are external armed groups that blend criminal and religious elements for mostly opportunistic reasons. Decision-makers broadly assumed that these groups could gain momentum due to the incapacity of Sahelian states to provide services, control borders, and exercise sovereignty over their territory, making state failure the root cause of the conflict. These two assumptions, in turn, had important implications for perceptions of effective peacebuilding approaches: due to the assumed opportunistic nature of narcoterrorists, defeating them and providing immediate security become conditions for starting the peace process. In a similar vein, the assumption of state failure being the root cause of the conflict has oriented long-term peacebuilding activities towards democratic reforms, capacity building, and economic development.

3. *Logic of appropriateness (what constraints to intervening ?).* Serval decision-making has been heavily influenced by an awareness of the double-edged relation between France and Mali. French officials consistently made clear that the operation is legally and morally just, and that France was the only country capable of intervening. Moreover, they strongly denounced allegations about the mission being driven by neo-imperial interests. This potentially points to a serious constraint on policy options, as the sovereignty of Mali had to be respected at all costs during decision-making.

In the next two chapters, I show how these elements relate to news media reporting on the Sahel in the years preceding Operation Serval.

Chapter 6 - Empirical analysis part 2: Sahel news media discourse in French quality newspapers (2003 – 2013)

In this chapter, I present the second half of results of the empirical analysis. This part consists of a analysis of the Sahel discourse in French news media between 2003 and 2013. Across the newspapers included in the analysis (*Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Les Echos*, *La Croix*), I identify five main phases of news media discourse that preceded the launch of Operation Serval. These phases were characterized by shifts in the dominant Sahel discourse which, in turn, tended to be triggered by impactful news events.

6.1 Phase 1: conventional phase (until December 2007)

Until December of 2007, the French news media discourse around the Sahel was dominated by three main themes: *humanitarianism*, *illegal migration*, and *security*. In contrast to the Serval policy discourse which, as shown in Chapter 5, was heavily securitized, media coverage of the Sahel until late 2007 was relatively void of security concerns. In general, the newspapers I analyzed tended to describe the Sahel as a poor, underdeveloped region hit by different shocks. Given its relative distance to everyday life in France, the region only made it into the French press during exceptional events, such as famines, droughts, or plagues of grasshoppers.[1] In these instances, the Sahel was foremostly represented within a discourse of *humanitarianism*: it concerned a poor, far-away region in need of humanitarian aid and development assistance.

Several examples of this humanitarian discourse can be found in reporting on the visit of President Jacques Chirac to Niger and Mali in October 2003, where the two countries were continuously described as "among of the poorest of the world."[2] Journalists from Les Echos later added that the two countries were "considered a real laboratory for experimenting with two of Paris' key objectives: the fight against poverty […] and economic governance."[3] In a similar vein, a La Croix editor wrote that "by visiting Mali and Niger, Chirac hopes to promote his recent proposals […] aimed at encouraging the development of Africa."[4]

As can be seen in the aforementioned extracts, French journalists tended to cover Sahelian news events in a rather isolated and distant way: barely any connections were made between developments in this part of the world and their consequences for France or Europe. More examples of this distant style of coverage can be found in the Tuareg rebellion of 2006: while later clashes between armed Tuareg and the Malian army spurred major concerns over the implications of a destabilized Sahel for European

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[1] See e.g. 'Les criquets pèlerins s'élancent à l'assaut du Sahel', *Le Monde* (8 July 2004); 'Trente années de sécheresse au Sahel', *Le Monde* (30 November 2004); 'La famine touche l'ensemble du Sahel', *Le Monde* (3 August 2005); 'Le Niger en proie à la famine', *Le Figaro* (30 July 2005).

[2] See e.g. 'Première visite de Jacques Chirac au coeur du Sahel', *Les Echos* (22 October 2003); 'Afrique : Jacques Chirac s'envole pour le Niger et le Mali', *La Croix* (22 October 2003); 'Chirac l'Africain à la rencontre du Sahel', *Le Figaro* (23 October 2003).

[3] Idem.

[4] 'Afrique : Jacques Chirac s'envole pour le Niger et le Mali', *La Croix* (22 October 2003).

security, media reporting on the 2006 Tuareg uprising was surprisingly void of such considerations. In fact, French news media barely paid any attention to the confrontations, not publishing more than some basic facts that were directly copied from AFP press releases. In the rare articles that contained more background information, the clashes were almost uniquely contextualized within a series of Tuareg uprisings that occurred in the 1990s, for example by stating that the violence "raises fears of a resumption of the Tuareg insurgence" among Malian authorities.[5] Such events were, however, in no way linked to broader questions concerning France's interests in Africa or to their potential implications for European security. This all points to the dominance of a largely non-securitized, humanitarian discourse.

A second discourse that can be identified during the first phase is one of *illegal migration*. The Sahel and Mali in particular made the news when French politicians unveiled plans to curb illegal immigration to France. As a result, the Sahel was often described through a prism of a 'policy question' regarding the high number of Malians residing in France illegally. The 7 February 2003 edition of La Croix, for example, contained a series of articles on how the "conditions for the return of Malian immigrants" would be a "hot topic" during the official visit of then minister of Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, to Bamako.[6] This discourse would further gain momentum in May 2006 when Sarkozy presented his contested 'law on selective immigration' and again visited Bamako. As the law would make it easier for highly educated Africans to obtain a French visa, the plan drew much criticism for contributing to a "brain drain" in Mali, temporarily pushing the news media discourse on the Sahel to politically-ideological discussions about French immigration policy.[7]

Yet interestingly, these discussions about immigration policy often resulted in a representation of the Sahel that would later form the basis of Serval policymakers' assumptions about conflict dynamics in the region. Many background articles or reportages from this phase, for example, explained the large number of Malians coming to France by referring to the systemic lack of economic opportunities and great deficiencies of the Malian state – in particular corruption.[8] As such, this explanation already contained many elements of the failed state discourse that would eventually develop into assumptions about the root causes of conflict in the Sahel (see 7.2 for a more extensive discussion of this effect).

A third discourse that can occasionally be identified throughout the earliest phase is one of *security*. Even though security would never become the dominant Sahel discourse throughout the earliest phase, certain events do signal a gradual start of securitization of the region in news media reports. The

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[5] 'L'attaque de casernes au Mali fait craindre une reprise de la rébellion touarègue', *Le Monde* (24 May 2006).

[6] 'Mali : Nicolas Sarkozy veut négocier le retour des Maliens', *La Croix* (7 February 2003); 'Mali : Peu de Maliens veulent rentrer au pays', *La Croix* (4 March 2003); 'Retour sur… l'aide « au retour » ne suffit pas aux Maliens de Kayes', *La Croix* (12 April 2003).

[7] See e.g. 'La visite de Nicolas Sarkozy au Mali et au Bénin suscite des critiques', *Les Echos* (18 May 2006); 'Nicolas Sarkozy séduit mais ne convainc pas les Africains', *La Croix* (22 May 2006).

[8] See e.g. 'Le Mali compte sur le codéveloppement pour gérer les flux migratoires', *Le Monde* (4 November 2003); 'Mali : Peu de Maliens veulent rentrer au pays', *La Croix* (3 March 2003); Retour sur… l'aide « au retour » ne suffit pas aux Maliens de Kayes, *La Croix* (12 April 2003).

first signs of the Sahel's securitization can be traced back to a series of articles from 2003 on the disappearance of 31 Western tourists in the Sahara. As no group claimed responsibility for these kidnappings, there was a lot of speculation about who were behind the abductions in news media outlets. In the 4 August 2003 edition of Le Figaro, for example, journalists spoke of "the mystery surrounding the kidnapping in the Sahara", and in La Croix from 13 April 2003, the event was described as "an agonizing enigma which grows thicker by the day."[9]

Soon, two hypotheses would become dominant in reporting about the identity of the kidnappers: either, the tourists were taken by an Islamist group with ideological motives, allegedly the *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* (GSPC), or they were captured by one of the many trafficking groups active in the Sahara, motivated by ransom payments. Later on, news media outlets started suggesting that both hypotheses could simultaneously be true, given the increased interwovenness between these types of actors:

> Was it an armed Islamist group belonging to the GSPC, as Algiers claims one of the many smuggling gangs that roam the Sahara, or both? According to the testimony of one of the hostages released in May, […] the kidnappers seemed to be motived by money from the very start. Moreover, the GSPC […] has never publicly claimed responsibility for these kidnappings and has never before operated south of the Sahara. On the contrary, the autonomous group of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, ideologically close to the GSPC, matches the profile of the kidnappers […]. Since 1997, Belmokhtar is operating in the vast area between Laghouat and Tamanrasset, owing his notorious more to various forms of trafficking […] than to his hardline Islamist feats of arms.[10]

While not labeled as 'narcoterrorism' yet, the assumed interwovenness between criminal and Islamist elements strongly reflects the narcoterrorism discourse I described in Chapter 5. In following years, traces of this discourse would increasingly appear in French news coverage on the Sahel. Examples can be found in articles on the precautionary cancellation of a Paris-Dakar rally stage on 12 January 2004 where "the presence of armed gangs near the route" was cited as the organization's main motivation.[11] Later in the article, the decision was contextualized by referring to the cancellation of multiple stages during the 2000 edition of the race:

> The precautionary principle had also pushed [the organization] to stop the race for five days in 2000, following the announcement of a terrorist threat in Niger […]. This time, the word terrorism was not mentioned. It would be banditry. Nevertheless, the route was changed to circumvent the area.[12]

While the label of narcoterrorism was neither explicitly employed here, the back-to-back mentioning of "banditry" and "terrorism" once again showed some remarkable traces of the narcoterrorism discourse in news media reports, almost ten years before the start of Operation Serval. This practice was repeated

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[9] 'Algérie : Le mystère des touristes disparus au Sahara', *La Croix* (13 April 2003); 'Otages du Sahara : demande de rançon', *Le Figaro* (4 August 2003).
[10] 'Otages du Sahara : demande de rançon', *Le Figaro* (4 August 2003).
[11] 'Rallye : Le Paris-Dakar reprend son souffle', *La Croix* (12 January 2004).
[12] Idem.

in reporting on the launch of an American-led surveillance system called *the Pan-Sahel Initiative* in May 2004, where La Croix journalists described it as an initiative "to fight against bandits, smugglers, and terrorists who use border areas to their advantage."[13] In a La Croix background article from the same day, crime and Islamist groups were linked even more directly:

> A French officer who knows the region well recalls that "the Saharawis, the Tuaregs, the Toubous mostly have a 'contrabandist' mindset... rather than an Islamist one." Some of them are involved in pure banditry. Not being able to engage in "razzias" anymore, they sell their services for a certain time to the highest bidder, and why not to Islamist groups? After all, it's a story of making money […].[14]

6.2 Phase 2: gradual securitization (December 2007 – December 2009)

While the tourist abductions of March 2003 certainly increased media attention for the Sahel's security challenges, French news media initially made few connections between the hostage-takings in the Sahel and their implications for national security. This, however, started to change by the end of 2007 when French citizens were for the first time killed in the region, signaling the first major shift in the Sahel news media discourse.

In 2008 and 2009, I identify a gradual securitization of the Sahel news media discourse: coverage of the region started to revolve increasingly around security issues at the expense of other themes, such as development or migration. This shift was triggered by a single event: the killing of four French tourists in Mauritania in December 2007. While the event was relatively similar to the tourist kidnappings of March 2003, its explanation and contextualization by French news media differed remarkably. Rather than representing it as a 'mystery' as happened back then, the attacks were now predominantly described as a 'sign' that globally-operation terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda, were gaining a foothold in the Sahel. On 27 December 2007, Le Figaro journalists, for example, called the killings an example of the "qaedisation" of the region.[15] In a long-read titled '*Why Al-Qaeda attacks Westerners*' from that same day, they explained into great detail how the events belonged to a broader shift in the movement's strategy:

> [Al Qaeda's] top leaders have repeatedly disagreed over what strategy should be pursued: a defensive jihad in the land of Islam (dar al-islam), such as Afghanistan, or an offensive jihad in the land of conflict (dar al-harb) by taking the fight to infidel countries […]. Nowadays, the movement clearly intends to fight on both fronts, but with a recent refocus on "apostate" Muslim countries. While Iraq and Afghanistan remain the main fronts, several speeches by Ayman al-Zawahiri, the terrorist organization's nr. two and main ideologist, have made the interests of Western countries supporting such "treacherous" Arab states a priority target […]. The Algiers carnage on 11 December and the quadruple murder in Mauritania seem to show that the message has been well received in the Maghreb and throughout the sub-Saharan strip.[16]

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[13] 'Les Etats-Unis lancent leur initiative « pansahelienne »', *La Croix* (24 October 2004).
[14] 'Le Sahara est le nouveau théâtre d'ombre des islamistes', *La Croix* (24 October 2004).
[15] 'Les meurtriers d'al-Qaida traqués au Sahel', *Le Figaro* (27 December 2007).
[16] 'Pourquoi Al-Qaeda attaque les Occidentaux ?', *Le Figaro* (27 December 2007).

While initially writing that the attack was carried out by an "armed gang", journalists from Le Monde later provided a more global-jihadist explanation of the event as well, stating that "in September, the number two of the jihadist movement Al-Qaeda, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, has urged Muslims in North Africa to 'cleanse' their territories of French and Spanish presence."[17] Such examples show that journalists no longer interpreted hostage-takings in the Sahel as individual events driven by ransom payments, but as part of a 'global jihad' that threatened the security of all Westerners. Local security-related events, in other words, were now constructed into a wider, coherent set of security threats, signaling the definitive start of the Sahel's securitization in French news media.

The securitization of the Sahel news media discourse would gain further momentum in early 2008 when more abductions of Westerners took place. In Le Figaro's edition from 23 March 2008, for example, the recent kidnapping of an Austrian couple in Mali was described as "illustrative of the instability that reigns in the region."[18] Similarly, in a Le Monde article from 5 January 2008, journalists wrote that the cancellation of the 2008 Paris-Dakar rally "reveals a growing insecurity in the Sahel region", describing the region as a "no man's land of sand and dunes which has become the refuge and rear base of Islamist groups."[19] Later on, they even linked the rally's cancellation to the December 2007 killing of French tourists in Mauritania, calling the event "the latest episode in the latent war waged by armed Islamist groups."[20] Le Monde's edition from 11 January 2008 contained another extensive story on how French intelligence service thwarted a terrorist attack at the Eiffel Tower. Despite the event itself taking place in France, the interception was situated in a pattern of security-related events in the Sahel:

> The threat is taken seriously. In particular because it comes after the execution of four French tourists in Mauritania by an Al-Qaeda-linked Salafist group on 24 December. The attack was followed by explicit threats against French interests in North Africa, prompting the ministry of Foreign Affairs to request the cancellation of the Paris-Dakar Rally for the first time in its 30-year history, which was supposed to pass through the Mauritanian desert.[21]

After a period of diminished pertinence, the Sahel made it back to the forefront of French news in the summer of 2009 as renewed confrontations had flared up between the Malian army and armed Tuaregs. Interestingly, media coverage of these clashes differed strongly from earlier ones. As explained, French news outlets had usually labeled confrontations between ethnic Tuaregs and Malian authorities a "Tuareg rebellion", contextualizing the violence in a series of Tuareg uprisings during the 1990s. In 2009, however, most journalists tended to describe the clashes in the light of Al-Qaeda's expansion in

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[17] 'Quatre touristes français tués par une bande armée en Mauritanie', *Le Monde* (25 December 2007); 'Nouakchott évoque la piste islamiste dans l'assassinat de quatre touristes français', *Le Monde* (26 December 2007).
[18] 'Incertitudes sur le sort des otages autrichiens à l'heure de l'ultimatum', *Le Figaro* (23 March 2008).
[19] 'L'annulation du Dakar révèle une insécurité croissante au Sahel', *Le Monde* (5 January 2008).
[20] Idem.
[21] 'Un appel terroriste visant la tour Eiffel a été intercepté au Portugal', *Le Monde* (11 January 2008).

the region. Les Echos journalists, for example, did not even mention the word Tuareg anymore in their reporting, instead speaking of "confrontations between Al-Qaeda and the Malian army."[22]

A popular narrative emerging in this timeframe held that many local armed groups in the Sahel were uniting themselves under the banner of *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM). As can be read in the following Le Figaro extract, French journalists offered extensive descriptions of how Al-Qaeda was quickly gaining ground in the region, in particular among ethnic Tuaregs:

> The countries of the Sahel […] seem to have become the preferred territory of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Originally established in Kabylia, the movement, which originated from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), has been multiplying its operations there for several years […]. Based on the organizational chart found on Islamist websites, AQIM would have a pyramidal structure, with an "executive council", led from Algeria by Emir Abdelmalek Droukdel, a civil engineer and former Afghan. Droukdel is said to have succeeded in federating all the small groups operating in the region: a mixture of hardline Islamists, highwaymen, and ethnic militias, mostly formed by Tuaregs.[23]

For such examples, it becomes clear that the dominant discourse around Tuareg violence in the Sahel had changed significantly towards the end of 2009. Where French journalists had traditionally focused reporting on the underlying reasons for the Tuaregs to fight the Malian army, they now covered the fights between Tuareg rebels and the Malian army in the light of an "internationalization" of AQIM's activities.[24] In other words, the dominant news media discourse around Tuareg violence in the Sahel had shifted towards a narrative about Al-Qaeda quickly gaining ground in the Sahel, including among Tourages, away from a discourse based on a historic 'Tuareg question'.

In turn, journalists' focus on the Islamist aspect of Tuareg violence at the expense of underlying causes resulted in a stronger securitization of the Sahel within French news media. It was no longer the historic struggle of Tuaregs that made the confrontations newsworthy, but instead the involvement of well-known terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda. This would usually result in a representation of the Sahel as a 'dangerous region' where 'international terrorism' was nestling, feeding perceptions of the region being a threat to Western security.

6.3 Phase 3: rapid securitization (December 2009 – January 2012)

The second major shift in Sahel news media discourse occurred in December 2009. This shift as well was triggered by a single news event, that is, the kidnapping of Pierre Camatte in northern Mali on 23 November 2009. As he was the first French citizen to be kidnapped in the Sahel, his abduction strongly increased attention for the region and accelerated the ongoing securitization of the Sahel discourse in French news media. Media attention reached a high point with the first execution of a French captive in April 2010, leading to true explosion of coverage by French media outlets. As a result, the dominant

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[22] See e.g. 'Affrontements mortels entre Al-Qaida et l'armée au Mali', *Les Echos* (9 July 2009).
[23] 'Les pays du Sahel, terrain de prédilection des groupes islamistes armés', *Le Figaro* (10 August 2009).
[24] See e.g. 'Au Maghreb, l'ambition de s'en prendre à la France', *Le Monde* (8 September 2009).

Sahel discourse would definitively shift to one of a security threat by the end of the phase, overshadowing all other perspectives.

In all newspapers I analyzed, Camatte's kidnapping in late 2009 was primarily contextualized by French media as a confirmation that "the Sahel has become one of the principal theaters" for Al-Qaeda.[25] Having drawn attention to the Sahel's security challenges, the event, for example, was followed by a series of articles evoking that the "global threat of Al-Qaeda" was now "spreading into Mali."[26] In February 2010, Le Figaro even started publishing articles concerning the Sahel under the rubric of "terrorism" instead of "international affairs", further underscoring the shift in the dominant Sahel discourse towards security.

Within this timeframe, a new narrative started to appear as well concerning the expansion of Al-Qaeda in the Sahel. This narrative held that the growth of the organization's activities in the region must be seen as a sign of weakness rather than strength, as it pointed to a successful counterterrorism campaign in other parts of the world:

> As disturbing as these new hostage takings are, we should not be under any illusion: Al-Qaeda is a desperate organization. After being wiped out in Iraq, it tried in 2006 to establish itself in the Maghreb by merging with the former Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), renaming itself al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The new organization, however, faced a hardened Algerian army, hostility from the local population, and increased coordination between Maghreb states in the domain of counterterrorism. The decline of AQIM in the Maghreb has pushed Islamist groups south of the Sahara, where, as Mathieu Guidère explains, "the al-Qaeda phenomenon remains attractive, as the populations of the Sahelian countries are unaware of the horrors that have discredited the armed Islamists in Algeria."[27]

This narrative was, in turn, clearly underpinned by a discourse of state failure: it was assumed that Al-Qaeda could gain momentum in the Sahel, because Sahelian states were too weak to exercise full sovereignty over their territories and to control borders. As a result, from December 2009, French news outlets increasingly started to depict the Sahel as an "immense gray zone", where armed groups could "act with complete impunity."[28] In Le Monde's edition from 4 June 2009, for example, the increase in jihadist activity in 2009 was almost directly linked to the weakness of the Malian army:

> The local armed forces of these poor countries do not have the human and material resources to fight [the Islamists] effectively. This despite the support of Algeria, the military power of the region. Since it cannot intervene on Malian territory, the Algerian army has for years been providing its neighbor with military equipment and fuel. Yet so far, this assistance has not produced any convincing results in the fight against Islamist groups.[29]

While the Sahel news media discourse was quickly becoming more security-focused towards the end of 2009, securitization further accelerated in June 2010 due to the first-time execution of a French citizen

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[25] 'Quatre Européens otages d'al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique', *Le Figaro* (2 December 2009).
[26] 'Le Mali touché par la "menace globale" d'Al-Qaida', *Le Monde* (3 December 2009).
[27] 'Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique, de l'Algérie au Sahel', *La Croix* (26 July 2010).
[28] 'Un otage britannique a été exécuté par les groupes islamiques liés à Al-Qaida', *Le Monde* (4 June 2009).
[29] Idem.

in the region. Le Figaro's editorial board, for example, wrote on 27 July 2010 that "the assassination of hostage Michel Germaneau by terrorists adhering to AQIM confirms that the Sahara has become an extremely dangerous region, where significant resources must be devoted to restoring security."[30] The newspaper's edition of two days later contained another lengthy op-ed, in which the author argued that "Europe cannot turn its back" to a multilateral counterterrorism initiative in the region, "because the [security] risks are shared between Sahelian, Maghrebian, and European countries."[31] In similar vein, a La Croix columnist stated on 26 July that AQIM had "assumed all its horrors" by executing Germeneau, labeling the movement "the greatest threat to France of this moment." He concludes his column by arguing that "in the long run, it is vital to bring an end to this movement. The recent course of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb leaves us with little alternatives."[32]

The abovementioned extracts show that, as of July 2010, the dominant representation of the Sahel in French news media had definitively shifted towards a security threat. This would remain the case throughout the second half of 2010 and 2011, where nearly all coverage of the Sahel revolved around hostage-takings and journalists repeatedly explained such events as international terrorist groups expanding their activities into Africa. In these years, communiques about release negotiations or updates on the well-being of French captives would often function as a 'hook' for background articles on broader developments and debates. When AQIM, for example, instructed French diplomats to negotiate the release of French hostages directly with Osama Bin laden, the event spurred a series of follow-up articles on how local armed groups in the Sahel were increasingly integrated into the "call for a global jihad."[33] In a similar vein, the executions of French hostages in July 2010 and January 2011 were followed by multiple stories on alleged discussions within the French government about whether or not they should negotiate with "Islamist terrorist movements".[34]

In addition, reporting from 2010 and 2011 saw a strong increase in the casual use of securitized language. Examples of this trend can be found in articles evoking that "the arc of terrorism in the Sahelian region" would be a central topic during the G7-summit of January 2011[35], or the French government dissuading French citizens to travel "to a zone where AQIM is like a fish in water."[36] Likewise, in a an article from May 2011, a Le Monde journalist plainly called the Sahel "one of the

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[30] 'Le combat contre al-Qaida au Sahel', *Le Figaro* (27 July 2010).
[31] 'Sahel : un enjeu régional, une responsabilité pour l'Europe', *Le Figaro* (29 July 2010).
[32] 'La Spirale', *La Croix* (26 July 2010).
[33] See e.g. 'Otages au Sahel : AQMI se politise et fait allégeance à Ben Laden', Le Figaro (20 October 2010); 'Afrique, Afghanistan : Al-Qaida menace Paris', *Le Monde* (28 October 2010).
[34] See e.g. 'Nicolas Sarkozy contient la polémique après l'exécution de l'otage français au Mali', *Les Echos* (27 July 2010); 'Le gouvernement récuse les soupçons d'instrumentalisation', *Le Monde* (29 September 2010); 'Sahel : la France opte pour le durcissement face à AQMI', *Le Monde* (8 January 2011); 'Les attaques d'AQMI entraînent la France dans une escalade militaire au Sahel', *Le Monde* (10 January 2011).
[35] 'Après l'assassinat de deux Français au Sahel, Sarkozy et Obama unis face au défi du terrorisme', *Le Figaro* (11 February 2011).
[36] 'Paris redoute des enlèvements au Mali', *Le Figaro* (20 January 2011).

world's most dangerous zones".[37] Such examples show that the Sahel's representation as a security threat was becoming increasingly accepted and institutionalized in journalistic circles.

A final observation from this phase concerns the emergence of the narcoterrorist narrative. While its roots date back to 2003 (see section 6.1.1), it was between 2010 and 2011 that the narrative started to become prominent in reporting on the Sahel, especially in relation to Al-Qaeda's expansion in the region. According to the narrative, the growth of the movement must be seen against a backdrop of poorly controlled borders and pervasive smuggling, which had destabilized the region for years. Examples of this narrative can especially be found in reporting from July 2010, where La Croix journalists described the movement as a "scattered group" that contained both "radical Islamists aiming to overthrow [Sahelian] governments" and "common criminals who primarily want to make their illegal business flourish, ranging from cigarette and drug trafficking to kidnappings."[38] Le Figaro articles from mid-2010 contained several similar descriptions of the group:

> The line between terrorism claiming to be Islamic and banditry is fine. Some terrorist groups outsource a part of their activities to criminals and other armed groups that are more driven by financial than political motives, for instance those holding the Spanish hostages kidnapped in Mauritania and now taken to Mali.[39]

> AQIM has quickly become a nightmare for the countries of the region, gaining men, technical skills, and logistical means with each kidnapping, while building opportunistic alliances with trafficking gangs.[40]

In the second half of 2011, the narcoterrorist narrative gained a new element due to the start of the civil war in Libya. Drawing on the Sahel's representation of porous borders and endemic smuggling, French news media published multiple articles in July 2011 on how AQIM would be "profiting" from the NATO intervention in Libya, as this had caused an influx of Tuareg fighters and heavy arms into Sahelian countries.[41] Much of such reports tended to further fuel the security threat representation of the Sahel, especially through some nearly sensational stories on Nigerian border patrols seizing "640 kg of military grade explosives", or the disappearance of 10,000 surface-to-air missiles after the retreat of Gaddafi's forces in Libya. Le Figaro's edition from 20 October 2011, for example, contained a long-read in which the missing missiles were linked to a recent attack on an Israelian aircraft, spurring fears that heavy weaponry had "ended up in the wrong hands."[42] Such articles are emblematic of the of far-reaching securitization of the Sahel that had now become the mainstream:

> According to well-informed sources, AQIM has already obtained several missiles and is seeking to acquire the know-how to use them. French intelligence services fear that the stocks of

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[37] 'Paris renforce la sécurité de ses représentations à l'étranger', *Le Monde* (3 May 2011).

[38] Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique, de l'Algérie au Sahel', *La Croix* (26 July 2010).

[39] 'Sahel : un enjeu régional, une responsabilité pour l'Europe', *Le Figaro* (29 July 2010).

[40] 'Ce que cache l'insécurité au Sahel', *Le Figaro* (22 September 2010).

[41] See e.g. 'La révolution en Libye fragilise le Sahel', *Le Monde* (7 September 2010); 'Des armes de Kadhafi passent entre les mains d'Aqmi au Sahel', *Le Figaro* (7 July 2011); 'La chute de Kadhafi devrait mettre un terme aux trafics illégaux dans la bande sahélienne', *La Croix* (29 August 2011).

[42] 'Des armes de Kadhafi passent entre les mains d'Aqmi au Sahel', *Le Figaro* (2 July 2011).

ammunition and explosives will be used to launch new attacks against French interests in the Maghreb or on French territory. In July, a jihadist equipped with 20 kg of explosives was arrested in Tunis while preparing an attack against the French embassy in Tunisia or Qatar. More recently, the Tunisian army had to use heavy military resources, including helicopters, to stop a group of AQIM fighters attempting to enter its territory. Several "delicate" interceptions have been carried out in recent months by French forces on the border with Niger. But the smuggling operations dismantled are only the tip of an iceberg that could have a contaminating effect on the entire region.[43]

Following the trend of securitization, by the end of 2011, French news media would frequently employ the amalgam of a "powder keg" ["poudrière"] to describe the current situation in the Sahel. According to this representation, the region had become so destabilized that it would only be a matter of time before a proverbial spark made everything detonate. The unquestioned use of the powder keg amalgam might be the best example of how stark the discourse on the Sahel had changed over the years, as it points to a further normalization of strongly securitized representations in reporting:

> [...] in recent years, the Sahel has turned into a powder keg. With Western hostage-taking for ransom, control of drug trafficking, alliances with smugglers, AQIM has built up a treasure containing tens of millions of euros to buy weapons and bribe either locals and high-ranking officials [...]. French intelligence services fear that the stock of ammunition and explosives can be used for new attacks on French territory or against French assets in the Maghreb.[44]

> The north of the country has become a real powder keg that escapes any form of control. A zone of lawlessness where one comes across drug traffickers, disappointed Tuareg rebels, highwaymen, heavily armed former Ghaddafi soldiers, and AQIM fighters.[45]

6.4 Phase 4: Sahel as a 'warzone' (January 2012 – May 2012)

The third shift in the Sahel news media discourse took place in January 2012. While still being heavily securitized, the dominant Sahel discourse in French news media shifted during this phase towards a *warzone*. Due to the region's classification of a 'warzone' instead of only a 'security threat' or a 'zone of lawlessness', news media started situating news events in Sahel in a war context, resulting in more attention for the conflict's main actors, causes, and consequences. But given the growing complexity of the conflict, French journalists increasingly struggled to grasp all its dynamics, consequently resorting to simple narratives to cover the conflict. Due to their frequent repetition, such simplified representations would often develop into assumptions about the conflict throughout 2012.

I trace the shift towards a discourse of war to a series of articles from January 2012 on renewed confrontations between Tuareg rebels and the Malian army. Building upon the narrative of narcoterrorism and the region's pervasive representation as 'a zone of lawlessness', French news media mostly explained these clashes as 'outfall' from the Libyan civil war. According to this explanation, many Tuaregs had fought alongside Gaddafi and were forced to relocate south when his regime fell, leading to an influx of heavily armed Tuaregs into northern Mali:

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[43] 'Des armes de Kadhafi passent entre les mains d'Aqmi au Sahel', *Le Figaro* (2 July 2011).
[44] 'La nouvelle poudrière du Sahel', *Le Figaro* (19 October 2011).
[45] 'Au Mali, la poudrière du Nord', *La Croix* (22 November 2011).

Clashes broke out yesterday in northern Mali between the army and Tuaregs. These confrontations are the first since the return of hundreds of armed ex-rebels […] who had fought alongside [Gaddafi] before his fall. The fighting illustrates the growing insecurity in the vast territory that is northern Mali, where Al‑Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb also operates.[46]

Malian authorities seem determined to match the firepower of the rebels, most of whom are former Tuareg fighters from Libya. These battle-hardened soldiers returned home in July with stocks of heavy weapons recovered from the former regime's arsenals in the back of their pickups and 4×4 vehicles. Their leader, Colonel Mohammed Ag Najim, an ex-battalion commander of Muammar Gaddafi's commandos, had become close to the opponents of the Libyan dictator before the fall of the regime.[47]

While initially speaking of "confrontations" or "clashes" between the Malian army and Tuareg rebels, most French journalists had moved, by March 2012, to labelling the violence as a "conflict" or "war".[48] Drawing on the powder keg amalgam that had become popular in late 2011, journalists often described the return of armed Tuareg fighters as the proverbial spark that had made the region "explode".[49] In subsequent months, this amalgam would frequently reappear in reporting and, eventually, shape assumptions about the immediate cause of the conflict. An example of this development be found in a reportage titled '*At the center of tensions in the Sahel: the Malian powder keg*' in Le Monde's edition from 28 March 2012. Aside from the article title, words as "shockwave" or "explosive concentration" show how journalists used powder keg-like amalgams to describe how the return of Tuareg rebels from Libya constituted the immediate cause for the Malian conflict:

Arms trafficking, Tuareg rebellion, coup d'état... the fall of Gaddafi has upended a region already heavily destabilized by jihadism […]. As soon as the Gaddafi regime collapsed, it was obvious that its fall would have repercussions throughout the entire Sahara-Sahel region, as there is no rebellion or force the regime has not financed, armed, fought, or sponsored over the past four decades. The shockwave only took six months to reach northern Mali [...]. At this moment, Mali constitutes the explosive center of an immense grey zone, stretching from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, where trafficking feeds Islamist extremists of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Tuareg guerrilla movements, and staff members of the Malian army, which is gangrened by corruption.[50]

In these months, a similar development can be traced around the assumed main actors and root causes of the conflict. As French journalists now considered the Sahel a warzone, they increasingly started to focus on the underlying causes of the war and it became broadly assumed that the weakness of Sahelian states was a key factor of instability. In fact, in all newspapers I analyzed, state failure was either directly or indirectly mentioned as the root cause of the conflict: all background articles published between January and April 2012, for example, cited the "absence of the state" in northern Mali as a key factor of

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[46] 'Mali : premiers combats avec les rebelles touareg depuis leur retour de Libye', *Les Echos* (18 January 2012).

[47] 'Les rebelles touaregs passent à l'attaque au Mali', *Le Figaro* (19 January 2012).

[48] See e.g. 'La guerre civile enfle danse le nord du Mali', *Le Figaro* (15 March 2012); 'Les rebelles touareg en guerre contre Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique ?', *Le Monde* (5 April 2012); 'Mali et Syrie menacés : L'obligation des pays à sauvegarder leur patrimoine en temps de guerre est difficilement respectée', *Le Figaro* (10 April 2012); 'Au Sahel, la guerre contre l'islamo-gangstérisme', *Le Monde* (22 October 2012).

[49] See e.g. 'Les rebelles touaregs passent à l'attaque au Mali', *Le Figaro* (19 January 2012).

[50] 'Au cœur du Sahel sous tension, la poudrière malienne', *Le Monde* (28 March 2012).

instability.[51] Similarly, journalists from Le Figaro stated in January 2012 that "the lack of state presence in these desert provinces adds to the malaise." According to them:

> Bamako has let the situation [in the north] deteriorate for years and, as nature despises a vacuum, AQIM has gradually occupied the area at the expense of the Tuaregs. The jihadists were able to establish rear bases with complete impunity. Result: nobody has control over anything now.[52]

The deficiencies of the Malian state would receive even more news media attention after March 2012, when mutinous soldiers committed a coup d'état against the then Malian president. In the aftermath of the coup, journalists from Le Monde wrote that the "the rebellion was not about establishing a military balance of power: it revealed the rottenness of a regime."[53] In Le Figaro and Les Echos, the coup was directly related to the "inertia" or "incompetence" of the Malian regime, all the more showing how news media tended to represent state failure as the root cause of violence in the region:

> The region is plagued by multiple instabilities. The most obvious one is linked to the Tuareg rebellion that triggered the coup. The military that overthrew the Malian regime blamed the current government for its "incompetence" and lack of resources to fight the rebellion in the north, embodied by the Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad (MNLA).[54]

> The absence of a state in Libya, the continuous violence between tribes, and the enormous, uncontrolled arsenal of arms circulating after the [Libyan] civil war, threaten the entire Sahel. This alongside a dissemination of thousands of missiles into the Sahelian "gray zone" reinforcing, amongst others, Islamist movements, the armament of Tuareg independence fighters eager to return to Mali, and the "inertia" ["lâchage"] of President Toumani Touré to do something about it […]. The coup in Bamako was the result.[55]

In tandem with the growing attention for state failure, French news media also started to increasingly explain the Malian war in a context of narcoterrorism. Reporting from the first quarter of 2012 was, for example, filled with mentions of how the state's absence in northern Mali had created a "gray zone" where terrorists and traffickers could freely move and cooperate. In a background article titled '*The civil war in northern Mali is escalating; an ever-expanding "gray zone" is being given over to fighters, Islamist terrorists and traffickers*', Le Figaro journalists described extensively how a Tuareg rebel leader would have taken an "Islamist turn" for "mainly strategic reasons".[56] While denying a real political alliance, articles from this timeframe clearly fed rumors of increasing collaboration between Islamists, criminals, and Tuareg rebels:

> The desert confines are not easily accessible to media – in particular due to presence of al‑Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) katiba who track Westerners in order to fuel their hostage business. According to authorities in Bamako, AQIM is providing assistance to Tuareg rebels. Allegedly, members of al-Qaeda have participated in attacks in Tessalit and Menaka, and

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[51] See e.g. 'Les Européens « profondément inquiets » pour le Sahel', *Les Echos* (26 March 2012); 'Violents combats, crise humanitaire et impasse politique au Nord-Mali', *Le Monde* (12 March 2012); 'Le Mali est menacé de partition', *La Croix* (1 April 2012).

[52] 'Les rebelles touaregs passent à l'attaque au Mali', *Le Figaro* (19 January 2012).

[53] 'La révolution libyenne et AQMI ont déstabilisé le nord du Mali', *Le Monde* (22 March 2012).

[54] 'Les Européens « profondément inquiets » pour le Sahel', *Les Echos* (26 March 2012).

[55] 'De la Libye au Mali ?', *Le Figaro* (14 April 2012).

[56] 'La guerre civile enfle dans le nord du Mali', *Le Figaro* (15 March 2013).

Islamist combatants were involved in the massacre of several dozen Malian soldiers in Aguelhok. While links exists, there is no real political alliance between the armed Islamists and the traditional Tuareg rebellion. But the two do share certain interests.[57]

The narcoterrorist and failed state discourses would move even further to the forefront of reporting after 6 April 2012, when the MLNA proclaimed the independence of northern Mali from the rest of the country. In combination with the coup d'état in Mali of two weeks before, the event raised serious concern over the stability of the country. Subheadings from Le Figaro articles in April 2012 were, for example, filled with alarmist statements about the current course of the Sahel, describing Mali as an "ailing state" that would be "sinking into inextricable chaos":

> Mali is sinking into unprecedented crisis and no one longer denies it. On Sunday, Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, head of the junta that has been in power since the March 22 coup against President Amadou Toumani Touré, acknowledged this by ordering the immediate restoration of the constitution and institutions.[58]

> Mali is facing a double sovereignty crisis: an institutional crisis, caused by the coup d'état of Captain Sanogo's military junta. And a territorial crisis, following the proclamation of the independence of Azawad by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the interference of terrorists in the north, some of whom are allied with the "Islamo-Tuareg" movement Ansar Dine. This second crisis had no chance of being resolved without a resolution of the first.[59]

> New hostage-takings, a looming famine in a drought-stricken region, Islamist fighters from the Nigerian movement Boko Haram parading through the streets of Gao: northern Mali is sinking into inextricable chaos.[60]

> The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) will send troops to the region's two ailing states [les deux États malades de la région], Mali and Guinea-Bissau, both recent victims of military coups.[61]

In May 2012, such alarmist reports were mostly replaced by background articles focusing on the consequences of a collapse of the Malian state. Both Le Figaro and La Croix's editions from this month, for example, contained long-reads headlining '*The crises in Mali threaten security in the Sahel*' and '*The destabilization of the north of Mali threatens the entire Sahel*'. As the article titles show, journalists for the first time explicitly evoked the risk of a "contagion" of the entire Sahel in case the Malian government would be overrun.[62] At the end of May 2012, such fears became all the more strengthened with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Tuareg secessionist group MNLA and the jihadist faction Ansar Dine. As Ansar Dine had often been linked to AQIM, the agreement was broadly described by the French press as 'evidence' for the growing Islamic threat in the Sahel.[63] This

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[57] 'La guerre civile enfle dans le nord du Mali', *Le Figaro* (15 March 2013).
[58] 'Le Mali s'enfonce dans la crise', *Le Figaro* (3 April 2012).
[59] 'Mali : le MNLA, un allié embarrassant ?', *Le Figaro* (14 April 2012).
[60] 'Les voisins du Mali redoutent un « nouvel Afghanistan »', *Le Figaro* (17 April 2022).
[61] 'Force de paix africaine pour le Mali et la Guinée-Bissau', *Le Figaro* (28 April 2022).
[62] 'Les crises au Mali menacent la sécurité du Sahel', *Le Figaro* (9 May 2012); 'La déstabilisation du nord du Mali menace tout le Sahel', *La Croix* (4 May 2012).
[63] Examples of this contextualization can be found in e.g. 'Mali : les rebelles touaregs proclament un État islamiste', *Le Figaro* (28 May 2012); 'L'alliance avec les djihadists', *Le Monde* (4 June 2012).

pattern is indicative for news media coverage trending towards attention for the conflict's implications for European security, signaling a final shift in the dominant Sahel discourse in French news media.

6.5 Phase 5: Sahel as a 'jihadist occupation' (June 2012 – January 2013)

In the second half of 2012, French news media would barely mention Tuaregs anymore in their reporting on the Malian conflict, speaking instead of "Islamists" or "jihadists" that had "occupied" the north of Mali.[64] In a similar vein, journalist frequently labeled the Sahel a "jihadist sanctuary". Such changes point to a final shift, where a '*jihadist occupation*' threatening European security became the dominant Sahel discourse in French news media.[65]

During the final phase, reporting on the Sahel no longer revolved around developments in the Malian war itself, but instead on the conflict's implications for both surrounding countries and Europe. This shift can be traced to a series of articles from June 2012, describing how a new jihadist group, *le Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO), was quickly winning ground in northern Mali at the expense of secular Tuareg rebel groups, such as the MLNA. Given the conflict's growing fragmentation and complexity of alliances, French news outlets clearly struggled to distinguish all fighting factions in the region, using more generalizing terms, such as "Islamist rebels" or "armed Islamist groups", to now describe the conflict:

> Mali's transitional Prime Minister, Cheick Modibo Diarra, met yesterday with Burkina Faso's mediator Blaise Compaoré, after promising to accelerate the process of forming a national unity government as demanded by the ECOWAS. The goal is to unite all the country's forces to reconquer northern Mali, which has been occupied by armed Islamist groups since late March.[66]

Importantly, this change in labeling coincided with a broader shift in the dominant explanation of the conflict. In previous phases, the violence in northern Mali was essentially explained as an opportunistic alliance of secessionist Tuaregs, traffickers, and Islamist groups exploiting the weakness of the Malian state. However, from the second half of 2012, French news media started describing the Malian conflict as an ideologically-driven "occupation" by Islamist fighters, motivated by the imposition of sharia law.[67]

This shift in the dominant explanation of the conflict resulted in mainly two types of articles. The first category concerned articles centering around the 'who' part of so-called Islamist groups: who exactly were these new actors, why were they fighting in northern Mali, and how did their presence affect the local population? French news outlets seemed particularly interested in eyewitness accounts of the daily life under jihadist rule, publishing many articles on MUJAO's use of extreme ideological

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[64] See e.g. 'Au Mali, la crise politique s'éternise tandis que les islamistes occupent le nord du pays', *Le Figaro* (31 July 2012); 'Des djihadistes affluent dans le nord du Mali', *Le Figaro* (23 October 2012); 'Au Mali, Gao tombe aux mains des djihadistes', *Le Monde* (28 June 2012).
[65] For examples of the jihadist sanctuary, see e.g. 'La France veut éviter la constitution d'un Etat terroriste au Sahel, *Le Monde* (13 July 2012)'; 'Le Mali risque-t-il de devenir un fief des djihadistes ?', *La Croix* (10 July 2012).
[66] 'Mali : la transition s'accélère', *Les Echos* (18 July 2012).
[67] See e.g. 'Mali : des "centaines" de djihadistes arrivent dans le Nord', *Le Monde* (21 October 2012).

violence.[68] On 22 October 2012, even Le Monde's editorial board devoted attention to such violence, calling the movement's behavior "barbaric" in its editorial commentary.[69] Similarly, Le Figaro journalists offered some nearly sensational descriptions of how daily life in Gao had changed after the movement took over in August of 2012:

> Gao has gotten used to sharia law. In the northern Malian river city, which has been in the hands of [MUJAO] for weeks now, not a single woman goes around without her veil. "Even little girls must be covered, and nurses too, otherwise they will be punished", said Ousmane Daba, one of the leaders of the Gao Regional Youth Council. The bars have all been closed, as well as the dance halls. The most famous ones ended up in flames. Others were turned into mosques […]. In the Njawa district, a training camp has already turned dozens of kids into neo-Islamists. They teach the strictest Islam and thereby use the most expeditious methods. The kids, now fully indoctrinated ["la tête gonflée"], then return to their homes with a stick and, sometimes, a Kalashnikov in their hands. The mood in Gao has changed.[70]

In October of 2012, journalists from Le Figaro would go even further by literally calling a military intervention an effort to "liberate the north of Mali from the Islamist yoke".[71] Likewise, Le Monde's edition from 2 July 2012 headlined that northern Mali was now "subjected to an Islamist tyranny".[72]

Based on this large, if not disproportionate amount of media attention, I argue that French news outlets were somewhat biased towards extreme forms of ideological violence in their reporting on the Sahel. Other examples of this bias can be found in reporting on jihadist groups demolishing historical patrimony in Timbuktu throughout the second half of 2012: while such events had little value from a political or security perspective, the destructions drew a ton of attention from French journalists, who often reported them in a nearly sensational way. La Croix's reporting on the destructions, for example, clearly represents violence in the northern Mali as driven by religious extremism:

> The spokesman of the Islamist group Ansar Dine, […] declared on Saturday morning, June 30, that his movement would "destroy all the mausoleums in the city today. All the mausoleums without exception" only before adding: "God is unique. All this is 'haram' (forbidden in Islam). We are Muslims. UNESCO, what is that?", recalling the fate that had been reserved for the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan which were destroyed in March 2001 by the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies […]. The Ansar Dine Islamists instantly put their words into practice. They first attacked the Sidi Mahmoud shrine in the north of the city, which had already been desecrated in early May by members of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an Ansar Dine ally. "They broke (and) knocked down the wall" of the site's fence, "it's very serious," said one of the witnesses while crying. Then in a few hours, the Islamists destroyed the mausoleums of Sidi Moctar and Alpha Moya in this mythical city. "They simply raped Timbuktu today. This is a crime," said another witness […].[73]

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[68] See e.g. 'Les islamistes sèment le chaos à Tombouctou', *Le Figaro* (3 July 2012); 'Nord du Mali : les islamistes interdisent la musique profane sur les radios', *Les Echos* (23 August 2012); 'Dans le nord du Mali, les rebelles islamistes fixent les règles', *La Croix* (28 May 2012); '« Tombouctou se meurt! »', *La Croix* (11 May 2012); 'Mali : la charia au quotidien dans l'antre d'al-Qaida', *Le Figaro* (11 October 2012).

[69] 'Au Sahel, la guerre contre l'islamo-gangstérisme', *Le Monde* (22 October 2012).

[70] 'Mali : les islamistes s'enracinent à Gao', *Le Figaro* (16 August 2012).

[71] 'Mali : Paris souhaite une intervention militaire rapide', *Le Figaro* (17 October 2012).

[72] 'Le nord du Mali en butte à la tyrannie islamiste', *Le Monde* (2 July 2012).

[73] 'Au Mali, des islamistes s'en prennent aux mausolées de Tombouctou', *La Croix* (30 June 2012).

In the second category of articles, it was the international political response and the conflict's implications for Europe that stood central. Especially from August 2012, French news media started devoting more attention to the way the international community had responded to the conflict, for example by citing alarmist reports about the deteriorating humanitarian situation, or describing what consequences a "collapse" of the Malian state would carry for European security.[74] Moreover, reporting from the second category often contained comparisons with conflict zones elsewhere, in particular Afghanistan. In a story on an African Union security meeting, for example, Le Figaro journalists cited the Beninois president's statement that "Mauritania, Algeria, Libya, and even Chad are key players to avoid this area becoming a Sahelian Afghanistan", without providing further nuances.[75] Likewise, Les Echos journalists casually copied the "Sahelistan" label, evoked by the French minister of Foreign Affairs, in an article from July 2012 on the rising international-political concerns over the conflict:

> While political leaders are worried about the emergence of a "Sahelistan", as Laurent Fabius put it, Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara indicated that ECOWAS would "soon" submit a new request for a resolution to the UN Security Council concerning an intervention that he considers "inevitable".[76]

In the final months of 2012, news media coverage of the Sahel almost exclusively revolved around the international-political and diplomatic developments regarding the conflict. When jihadist groups, for example, started marching onto Bamako in October 2012, French news media barely mentioned on-the-ground developments anymore. Instead, they focused their reporting on the adoption of an UN Security Council resolution that allowed the use of military force in Mali, explaining the event as the international community taking a firmer stance against terrorist threats in "new jihadist theaters", such as the Sahel and Syria.[77] In the aftermath of the resolution's adoption, French media outlets shifted attention towards the discussions within the French government about a potential military intervention in Mali, further underscoring the political prism through which the conflict was now predominantly covered.[78]

A similar trend can be traced in the coverage of the hostage-takings of new French citizens in October 2012: as shown, previous hostage-takings in the Sahel were primarily represented as a 'mystery', or as an 'indication' of the growing insecurity in the region. But by the end of 2012, French news media tended to situate the hostage-takings within broader political and diplomatic developments

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[74] See e.g. 'Le Mali, un nouveau test pour l'Europe de la défense', *Les Echos* (9 November 2012); 'Mali du Nord : les djihadistes visent l'Europe, selon le président nigérien', *Le Monde* (12 November 2012).
[75] 'L'Afrique veut l'aide de l'ONU pour résoudre la crise au Mali', *Le Figaro* (9 June 2012).
[76] 'Au Mali, le bras de fer politique est engagé', *Les Echos* (31 July 2012).
[77] See e.g. 'Mali-Syrie : les nouvelles terres du djihad pour les Français', *Le Figaro* (4 October 2012).
[78] See e.g. 'Le Drian annonce une intervention au Mali dans « quelques semaines »', *Le Monde* (15 October 2012); 'L'Europe de la défense veut relever le défi du Sahel', *Le Figaro* (16 November 2012); 'Le Mali, un nouveau test pour l'Europe de la défense', *Les Echos* (9 November 2012); 'L'UE examine différentes options pour aider le Mali', *Les Echos* (12 October 2012); 'La France à la manœuvre pour planifier l'intervention africaine au nord du Mali', *Le Figaro* (20 October 2012).

of the conflict, for example by highlighting how the safety of French hostages impacted political deliberations over military intervention in Mali:

> The fate of the six French hostages held in the Sahel by groups linked to al-Qaeda is also largely taken into account. On Tuesday, François Hollande received the families of the two engineers captured last November. "We came out of this meeting convinced that the president was taking the matter in hand, but we are very anxious because of the current tensions and the possibility of a military intervention," said Jean-Pierre Verdon, the father of one of the hostages, who regrets that "negotiations are stalling." Welcomed at the Élysée Palace in September, the relatives of the four other prisoners kidnapped two years ago in Niger also confessed to being very concerned. "It is difficult to understand what is going on. What is the objective of a military mission in northern Mali? "Is it intended to eliminate the leaders of al-Qaeda? And if so, has the government planned a simultaneous mission to rescue the hostages?" asks Pascal Lupart, president of the support committee. In Dakar, François Hollande assured that France's determination to intervene as soon as possible in Mali would not harm the prisoners.[79]

The increased media attention for the international response to the conflict did, however, not result in less securitization. In fact, reporting on the Sahel from late 2012 was still strongly underpinned by concerns over security. Evidence for this underpinning can be found in mostly short and casual explanations of news events in late 2012: such events were generally explained in heavily securitized language, with little nuancing or questioning of the labels employed.

In October 2012, for example, Le Figaro journalists called the Sahel as "a zone where the international community wants to stop the advance of the jihadists."[80] And one month later, they bluntly described the purpose of a potential military intervention as "the eradication of Al-Qaeda in the region. In concrete terms, this means avoiding the reconstitution of a terrorist sanctuary in the region."[81] In a similar vein, Les Echos' edition from 9 November 2012 contained a lengthy article on how Mali constituted a "test" for European defense. According to the author:

> [Islamist groups] not only represent a threat to the region but also to European countries. France could find itself in the front line in this conflict […]. The rebellion, which is said to include 4,000 to 6,000 fighters but which will continue to be strengthened by the arrival of jihadists, could also spread into other countries in the region, risking the creation of a rear base for international terrorism in the middle of the Sahel, as has been the case in Taliban-led Afghanistan and in Somalia.[82]

In Le Figaro as well, the Sahel was repeatedly labeled as a "test" for European defense towards the end of 2012. In an article from 16 November 2012, for example, a journalist wondered whether the conflict would relaunch talks on European Defense policy, now "Islamists have taken control of northern Mali and hereby threaten the security of the Old Continent."[83] Likewise, journalists from Les Echos explained increased security cooperation between Tunisia and Algeria as a chance to "address the situation in Mali,

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[79] 'Mali : Paris souhaite une intervention militaire rapide', *Le Figaro* (17 October 2012).
[80] 'La DGSE dément la présence d'agents du Qatar dans le nord du Mali', *Le Figaro* (26 October 2012).
[81] 'Mali : la diplomatie au service de l'intervention militaire', *Le Figaro* (5 November 2012).
[82] 'Le Mali, un nouveau test pour l'Europe de la défense', *Les Echos* (9 November 2012).
[83] 'L'Europe de la défense veut relever le défi du Sahel', *Le Figaro* (16 November 2012).

whose north is occupied by armed Islamists […], threatening the lives of French hostages and French interests in the Sahel."[84]

The repeated and casual application of heavily securitized labels here show that considering the Sahel as an imminent security threat had become close to common sense by the end of 2012. Journalists did no longer justify or nuance such representations in their reporting, pointing to a definitive normalization of the security threat discourse in journalistic circles.

6.6 Conclusion of news media discourse analysis

After analyzing 10 years of French news media reporting on the Sahel prior to launch of Operation Serval, I can draw two main conclusions.

First, the discourse through which French newspapers explained and described news events in the Sahel went through a relatively gradual, yet fundamental development towards security. While news media coverage of the region initially contained multiple perspectives and themes, the end of 2007 marked the start of a securitization trend that further accelerated throughout 2010 and 2011. By the end of 2011, news media barely paid attention to topics other than security, repeatedly describing the region as an immense 'zone of lawlessness' where globally operating terrorist groups were expanding their activities. As a result, the region was commonly represented as a dangerous space, where Islamist terrorists, bandits, and hostage-takers could freely roam. This only temporarily changed during the first half of 2012 when French journalists situated news events, such as prolonged confrontations between the Malian army and Tuareg rebels, within a context of war instead of purely security. However, in the second half of 2012, the increasing complexity of the conflict forced French journalists to report on the Malian conflict in more generalized terms, pushing the dominant news media discourse back to one of a security threat. By the end of 2012, it had become conventional wisdom within journalistic circles that the "jihadist occupation" of Mali's north posed a major threat to European security, almost naturally calling for action.

Second, despite the transition towards security, I identify a relatively stable influence of narcoterrorist and state failure discourses. These discourses were more underlying and mostly shaped French journalists' assumptions about news events unfolding in the Sahel. Meanwhile, their reporting would further strengthen these discourses, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. In the aftermath of the 2003 tourist kidnappings, for example, the emerging idea of fluidity between jihadist and criminal trafficking groups made journalists move away from distinguishing between 'ideological' and 'non-ideological' violence in their description of Sahelian news events, as was common before. This trend clearly carried through in reporting from 2010 and 2011 on Al-Qaeda's expansion into the Sahel: news media

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[84] 'Mali : Alger et Tunis vont coopérer en matière de sécurité', *Les Echos* (4 December 2012).

repeatedly described the movement as a scattered group of common criminals, dissatisfied Tuareg rebels, and radical Islamists, cooperating for mostly strategic reasons rather than shared ideology.

In a similar vein, reporting on the Sahel was largely influenced by thinking in state stability. While the first traces of this discourse can be dated back to articles from 2003 on the underlying reasons for Malians to illegally migrate to France, the state failure discourse particularly became prevalent in 2010 and 2011. By repeatedly depicting the Sahel as an immense "gray zone", French news media clearly assumed that the advance of Al-Qaeda in the region was closely linked to the weakness of Sahelian states, most notably due to their inability to control borders and exercise sovereignty over their territory. During the phase of war, news media built forward upon this assumption in their contextualization of events, making "the absence of the state" the assumed root cause of the conflict.

Chapter 7 - Discussion of results: Identifying general mechanisms

In this chapter, I discuss the results of the two rounds of empirical analysis. Building on a framework of post-structuralism and different logics of action, I explain how news media has, indirectly, influenced the Serval decision-making process in three main ways: 1) the creation of a 'receptive societal context' for the intervention's justification; 2) the popularization of specific understandings of conflict dynamics; 3) the delegitimization of certain non-state armed actors, contributing their exclusion from the peace process.

7.1 Media Effect 1: contributing to a 'receptive societal context' for intervention justification

Based on the evidence from the Serval case, I argue that the first way in which news media indirectly influence intervention decision-making is by creating or contributing to a societal context that is receptive towards specific forms of intervention justification. This form of influence connects to the *logic of interest* and essentially concerns decision-makers' ability to legitimize their decision to intervene towards the general public and other lawmakers.

As explained extensively in Chapter 5, French officials have justified the purpose of the Serval intervention in two main ways:

1. Invoking the risk to national security of the Sahel becoming a sanctuary for terrorism.
2. Invoking the French state's responsibility to protect its citizens in third countries.

However, as discussed in Chapter 3, state leaders only have a limited capacity to articulate threats to the state. Decision-makers can label certain objects a security threat but whether these threats are accepted as such and, consequently, the decisions officials make to counter them, depends on the societal context. In addition, security threats do not exist in a material sense but have to be constructed through discourse. For this reason, decision-makers are to some extent dependent on the dominant societal discourse to successfully justify interventions, in particular those justified by invoking a national security threat, as was the case for Operation Serval.

Following this line of logic, I find that news media have increased French decision-makers' ability to justify the launch of launch Operation Serval by shifting the dominant media discourse on the Sahel to one of a security threat. As shown in Chapter 6, the launch of operation Serval was preceded by a yearslong securitization of the Sahel discourse in the French press. While the earliest signs of securitization date back to 2003, it was in particular between 2007 and 2011 that news media pushed the Sahel's representation as a threat to France's national security. Often, such developments would even be explicitly linked to the kidnapping and killing of French citizens in the region, all contributing to a Sahel discourse dominated by representations of a security threat.

Given news media's proven ability to shape public discourse, these representations of the Sahel likely resonated in French society, even long before Serval officials invoked the risk of a 'terrorist

sanctuary' to justify their decision to intervene. As such, I argue that news media contributed to a *societal context* that was *receptive* for decision-makers' justification of Operation Serval: news media had shaped the public discourse around the Sahel in such a way, that it become possible for decision-makers to justify Operation Serval through the invocation of an alleged terrorist sanctuary. In other words, news media reports had created conditions in which decision-makers' warning against a potential terrorist sanctuary in the Sahel was broadly considered a legitimate threat, both by constituents and lawmakers. Eventually, this would enable French decision-makers to invoke the risk of a 'terrorist sanctuary' as a justification for launching Operation Serval, without having to further explain it.

In more technical terms, news media reports had inscribed legitimacy into the threat representations articulated by French officials, hereby enhancing their credibility. As a result, it was relatively easy for French officials to justify their decision to intervene in Mali: after all, these threat representations were already broadly considered accurate and thus a legitimate reason to intervene. Interestingly, I find that nearly all threat representations employed by French officials to support their discourse can be traced to news media reports published long before the launch of the intervention. This would suggest that news media had a relatively big influence on the ability of French officials to justify the launch of Operation Serval. It, however, remains hard to tell how big the role of news media exactly was in this process, as the analyzed database of policy discourse does not indicate where French officials exactly got their representations from.

To formulate this first effect in a more general way: by shaping the dominant societal discourse on an issue, actor, or geographical region, news media can enhance decision-makers' ability to justify the purpose and necessity of an intervention. By consequence, they can increase the probability of international intervention. This effect in particular concerns interventions justified by invoking national security threats, as decision-makers' credibility while articulating threats is dependent on the societal context.

7.2 Media Effect 2: popularizing and legitimizing specific understandings of conflict dynamics

The second effect of news media on intervention decision-making that I identify is a popularization and legitimization of specific understandings of conflict dynamics. This influence essentially connects to the *logic of effectiveness* and relates to the way decision-makers understand the conflict they consider to intervening in, as well as their ability to mobilize support for intervention strategies based on such understandings.

In Chapter 3, I explained how language and, consequently, discourse plays a key role in the way individuals perceive the world around them. In this light, foreign policymaking must be seen as a *discursive practice*. Decision-makers have to construct the problems their foreign policies respond to, but problems do not exist in a material or ontological sense: they only become viewed as such due to their constitution in discourse. Therefore, foreign policymaking must be seen as an ongoing practice that

is dependent on representations of the foreign policy problem it aims to resolve. In the case of an international intervention, the key policy problem is the conflict, making intervention policies strongly dependent on the dominant representations of this conflict in both policymaking circles and in society.

Assumptions about a conflict do not emerge in a vacuum either. Rather, they are constructed through a dominant discourse that makes individuals interpret conflict dynamics in a certain way. Much scholarship has shown how institutionalized discourses can push policymaking into a specific direction and even withstand much negative feedback (see section 3.3). This in particular occurs when representations of a conflict get repeated to such an extent that they are no longer viewed as a specific interpretation, but as unquestioned 'facts'.

In Chapter 5, I showed how the dominance of narcoterrorism and state failure discourses led Serval officials to making two fundamental assumptions about Sahel conflict dynamics:

1) Violence in the Sahel is primarily driven by narcoterrorism
2) The root cause of instability in the Sahel is state failure

In turn, it seems that these assumptions have largely contributed to a three-step peacebuilding strategy that centers around providing immediate security in the short term, while improving governance and fostering economic development in the long run.

By analyzing news media articles up to 10 years prior to Operation Serval, I find a remarkable correlation between representations of Sahel conflict dynamics articulated by French news media and by Serval policymakers. As shown in 6.1, I trace the first symptoms of the narcoterrorist discourse to a series of news media articles from 2003 on the disappearance of Western citizens in the Sahara. This discourse would increasingly reappear in following years and become dominant in 2010 and 2011, as part of the explanation for Al-Qaeda's expansion in West Africa. According to this discourse, the movement was a lot less coherent than its name suggests and actually consisted of a mix of jihadists, criminals, traffickers, and ethnic militias, united by a shared interest of pushing back the Malian state. In other words, news media repeatedly signaled there was a thin line between trafficking, banditry, and terrorism in the Sahel, representing violence as a largely opportunistic rather than ideological act. In Chapter 5, I showed how French officials tended to make very similar assumptions.

A similar process can be identified in relation to the discourse of state failure: from 2009, French news media tended to explain the expansion of Al-Qaeda in the Sahel through the Sahelian states' inability to control their borders and defend their territory. Likewise, journalists repeatedly cited the "incompetence" or "inertia" of the Malian government to fight off the Tuareg rebellion in their explanation of the March 2012 coup d'état in Mali. In a similar vein, Serval policy documents were filled with references to the incapacity of Sahelian states to control their borders or exercise sovereignty over their territory.

While it is nearly impossible to tell whether news media reporting was the direct reason for the narcoterrorism and state failure discourses being dominant in Serval decision-making circles, the proven ability of news media to shape public discourse makes it plausible that reporting on the Sahel has popularized and therefore legitimized, to some extent, state failure and narcoterrorism-centered representations of conflict in the Sahel. Given the pervasiveness of the state failure and narcoterrorism discourses in news media reporting on the Sahel, news media has likely helped such discourses becoming dominant in French decision-making circles, which would, in turn, shape Serval officials' assumptions about Sahel conflict dynamics. As such, I argue that news media reporting has indirectly facilitated Serval officials' choice for an intervention strategy that centered around security, governance, and development. This effect, however, remains largely hypothetical, as the single case study design of this research project does not enable me to make any strong causal claims, nor draw detailed conclusions about the degree of such influence.

Yet, given the fact that decision-makers are usually reliant on multiple groups (e.g. epistemic communities, military staff, fellow lawmakers) for the development of an intervention strategy, it seems probable that news media's yearslong repetition of narcoterrorist and state failure discourse have, at least, made it easier for Serval officials to rally support for a strategy based on such interpretations of the conflict. In essence, I argue that news media have legitimized specific representations of conflict in the Sahel and, consequently, helped determine what interpretations of Sahel conflict dynamics were broadly viewed as accurate and which not. In the case of Operation Serval, for example, news media reporting probably made it easier for French officials to rally support for an intervention strategy centering around counterterrorism, as the dominant media discourse tended to portray jihadist groups as the main spoilers of the conflict.

To formulate this second media effect in more general terms: much scholarship has shown how decision-makers' assumptions about conflict dynamics are constituted through representation, making perceptions of effective intervention strategies largely dependent on the dominant conflict discourse in decision-making circles. Through reporting, news media inevitably diffuse representations of a conflict and hereby help create, sustain, or reinforce the dominant discourse around a conflict. Given this role in the creation of a dominant conflict discourse, news media likely impact decision-makers' assumptions about conflict dynamics and, by consequence, influence decision-makers' perceptions of effective intervention strategies – all the more because decisions about intervention strategies tend to involve multiple groups (i.e. epistemic communities and other lawmakers). While the degree of this effect remains unclear, it seems likely that news media indirectly influence preferences for intervention strategies by making certain approaches to intervention appear as more effective than others. This happens in particular when certain representations are popularized to such an extent that they become broadly viewed as common sense.

7.3 Media Effect 3: selectively delegitimizing non-state actors

The final media effect I identify is a selective delegitimization of non-state actors, in particular so-called Islamist terrorist groups. This effect connects to the *logic of appropriateness* and relates to the extent that decision-makers can include non-state actors into the peace process.

As explained in Chapter 3, decision-making does not only revolve around perceptions of how efficiently a particular policy will resolve a problem, but also depends on the normative context in which it takes place. Regardless of a policy's perceived effectiveness, decision-makers must account for existing norms that make certain actions more appropriate than others. Norms can therefore constrain policy options. Moreover, in the case of foreign policymaking, norms are to a large extent shaped by a state's collective identity. For this reason, decision-makers sometimes act in accordance with a collective identity, even though this might limit the effectiveness of a policy.

Following this line of logic, I argue that news media have limited the ability of Serval decision-makers to negotiate with conflict actors other than the Malian government. As shown in Chapter 6, French news media coverage of the Sahel tended to follow violent events involving French citizens, such as hostage-takings, robberies, or killings. Such events drew much media attention and would often function as a hook for background articles on the region – most notably in the domain of security and (counter)terrorism. Hence, non-state actor violence received disproportionate amounts of coverage in French media.

In turn, news media's tendency to report disproportionately on non-state actor violence resulted in a Sahel news media discourse where non-state armed actors were predominately represented as the main instigators of violence in the region. This would diminish their status as legitimate parties to the conflict. Meanwhile, news media's repeated labeling of violence in northern Mali as a "jihadist occupation" would represent the Malian government as the legitimate actor, further reinforcing this dynamic.

Adding up the pervasive narcoterrorist and state failure explanations in reporting on the conflict, I find that news media have contributed to a popular perception that the Malian was, in essence, an opportunistic attempt by extremist and crime actors to push back the authority of the Malian state with brutal violence. Many authoritative institutions have, however, nuanced such representations of the conflict, suggesting that the Malian state did not necessarily dispose over great legitimacy throughout its territory, and that its army was structurally involved in human rights violations as well – most notably against ethnic Tuaregs.[1] But as such violence did not have a direct link with France, French news media

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[1] For detailed reports on extrajudicial killings of ethnic Tuaregs by the Malian armed forces, see e.g. Amnesty International 1992, 1994; Human Rights Watch 2017.

did not consider it newsworthy and therefore did not report on it: I did not find one single article published between 2003 and 2013 that provided this perspective.

For above-mentioned reasons, I argue that French news media reporting on the Sahel has contributed to a selective delegitimization of non-state conflict actors in French public discourse. This made it harder for French decision-makers to include such actors into the peace process. Starting negotiations with groups that previously executed French hostages would likely be considered improper and therefore hard to justify towards the general public and lawmakers – all the more when such groups have drawn much negative coverage and condemnation in news media.

The clearest example of this delegitimization effect can be found in reportages from 2012 on daily life in northern Mali after Islamist groups took power. As shown in 6.5, news media reported extensively on the atrocities committed by jihadist groups, signaling a bias towards extreme forms of ideological violence. Alongside the disproportionate amount of coverage of the violence, they would often condemn it in strong terms (e.g. by speaking of "barbaric behavior", "horrors", an "Islamist yoke" or "tyranny"), making it difficult for decision-makers in a democratic state like France to justify a response to such groups other than military defeat. In other words, French news media's repeated highlighting of the brutality of Islamist groups has, to some extent, worked as a constraint on Serval decision-making, as reporting tended to portray such groups as brutal and therefore unsuited for negotiations. In fact, as shown in 5.1, French officials even employed this representation in order to justify Operation Serval by portraying the mission as Mali's 'liberation' of 'extremist rule'.

To formulate this effect in more general terms: given the tendency of news media outlets to report on news events involving citizens from their country and on extreme forms of ideological violence, news media are likely to disproportionately cover violence committed by non-state actors, especially so-called Islamic terrorist groups. As a result, they contribute to a delegitimization of non-state armed actors in public discourse, likely reducing the decision-makers' room for maneuver to include them in the peace process. In the most extreme cases, this might result in a promotion of mission mandates allowing the usage of military force.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion & reflection

In this thesis, I attempted to take a closer look at the complex relationship between news media and foreign policymaking by studying how news media indirectly influence international intervention decision-making. This focus on more indirect forms of news media influence stems from the observation that the majority of scholarship on media-policy interactions has revolved around the question of whether news media coverage can directly move governments into deciding to intervene – the so-called 'trigger effect' – and is generally answered through quantitative, large-N positivist studies.

To fill this gap, I first developed a theoretical framework that would enable a better study and definition of indirect news media influence on intervention decision-making. As laid out in Chapter 3, this meant conceptualizing foreign policymaking as a *discursive practice* and situating decision-makers in a broader public sphere. As such, I theorized that news media 'enables' certain forms of policymaking, most notably due to their ability to shape public discourse. In addition, I attempted to define and better operationalize the concept of 'international intervention decision-making' by identifying three theoretical parameters shaping intervention action: *the logic of interest*, a *logic of effectiveness*, and a *logic of appropriateness*.

Applying this framework to the case of Operation Serval, I found through a qualitative analysis of the mission's policy discourse and Sahel discourse in French newspapers that news media indirectly influence international intervention decision-making in three main ways. First, by shaping public discourse, news media can either increase or decrease the ability of decision-makers to sucessfully justify an intervention towards the general public and lawmakers. This in particular concerns interventions that are justified through national security, as decision-makers' credibility while articulating security threats is dependent on the societal context. News media can, for example, make it easier for decision-makers to intervene by heavily securitizing the region where an intervention is considered, as this enhances the legitimacy of a justification based on national security concerns. Second, through reporting, news media inevitably diffuse particular representations of a conflict and, consequently, contribute to the establishment of a dominant conflict discourse. As assumptions about conflict dynamics are constituted through discourse, news media indirectly affect the way decision-makers understand and interpret a conflict's dynamics, hereby making certain approaches to intervention appear as more effective than others. Therefore, news media can also influence the strategy of interventions – all the more because intervention strategy development usually involves multiple groups (e.g. epistemic communities, other lawmakers), whose support is needed. Third, due to news media's tendency to focus on events involving citizens from their country and radical forms of ideological violence, they tend to delegitimize certain non-state armed actors in reporting. As a result, news media likely reduce the decision-makers' room for maneuver to include non-state armed actors into peace talks;

it would simply go against the normative context to negotiate with actors that are broadly viewed as violent, barbaric, and therefore non-legitimate.

All in all, I conclude that news media's influence on intervention decision-making goes further than 'pressuring' governments into launching an intervention. News media also influence decision-making in more indirect and subtle ways. Due to news media's ability to shape public discourse, news media establish societal conditions that make specific mission justifications, threat representations, and understandings of conflict dynamics to be broadly perceived as accurate, and therefore legitimate. In turn, this broader legitimacy enables specific representations to become dominant and, ultimately, to develop into 'facts', while others just remain unsupported interpretations. In other words, the key mechanism underlying news media influence over decision-making is to generate or contribute to broader legitimacy for the representations articulated and perceived by decision-makers, consequently enabling the decisions that derive from them. For this reason, I argue that news media's influence on decision-making should be understood as the ability to 'enable' certain decisions, rather than directly 'causing' or 'triggering' them.

Finally, regarding the influence of news media on intervention dynamics in the Sahel specifically, I conclude that French newspapers – at least between 2003 and 2013 – have indirectly contributed to the militarized to peacebuilding that is often criticized in academic literature. As discussed in the introduction, research on intervention dynamics in the Sahel has pointed to the dominance of simplified discourses (e.g. state failure, ungoverned spaces, Sahelistan) to explain the failure of peacebuilding in the Sahel, despite nearly ten years of international presence. Scholars have in particular argued that such simplified discourses made Western policymakers interpret fundamental problems in the region (e.g. governance grievances, political marginalization, systemic poverty, and intercommunal conflicts over natural resources) as simply 'jihadist violence' or Sahelian states being unable to exercise sovereignty over their territory. As a result, peacebuilding efforts in the Sahel have primarily revolved around statebuilding (e.g. capacity building and the training of armed forces) and hard security action (e.g. counterterrorism and peacekeeping), which did not effectively address the underlying causes of violence in the region.

I find that French news media have contributed to the dominance of the jihadist and state failure discourses in Serval policymaking circles in two main ways. First, due to their tendency to report on events involving French citizens, French news media have disproportionately highlighted violence committed by so-called Islamist terrorist groups in the Sahel. Moreover, French news media were somewhat biased toward extreme forms of ideological violence, further generating attention for the violence committed by non-state armed actors. By contrast, little to no attention was paid to violence committed by the Malian armed forces, despite abundant evidence showing that they as well committed repeated human rights violations between 2003 and 2013. For these reasons, it seems that news media

coverage has contributed to assumptions of 'Islamist terrorism' being the main source of violence in the region, even though much research has nuanced or contradicted such views.

Such assumptions were all the more strengthened by news media's explanation of the conflict through a lens of narcoterrorism. By repeatedly stating that so-called Islamist terrorists in the Sahel cooperated closely with criminals, traffickers, and ethnic militias, news media tended to represent all conflict in the Sahel as being connected, in some way, to jihadist groups. Confrontations involving ethnic Tuareg militias were, for example, repeatedly described as simply "clashes between the Malian army and jihadist groups", rather than secessionist groups fighting for independence due to yearslong repression and local grievances. This dynamic is especially visible in reporting from the second half of 2012, when French news media shift their explanation of the Malian conflict to a "jihadist occupation", strongly feeding perceptions of jihadism being the main source of violence in the region. In turn, such perceptions would orient decision-makers towards intervention strategies that focus on hard security issues such as counterterrorism, even though academic researchers have often doubted the effectiveness of such approaches.

The second way in which news media reporting has contributed to the militarized approach to peacebuilding, is by repeatedly representing the Sahel as a zone of lawlessness. Since the end of 2007, French news media repeatedly described the Sahel as a desertic "gray zone" where terrorists, bandits, and illegal traffickers freely roam and expand their activities. Often, such developments were even explicitly linked to the kidnapping and killing of French citizens in the region, making news media to label the region a "sanctuary" for actors threatening the security of French citizens. Each of such representations, however, tended to support perceptions of Sahelian states being incapable of exercising sovereignty over their territory. More specifically, such representations would feed into assumptions of state weakness being an underlying cause of violence in the region: by repeatedly situating violent events or security threats within a context of limited statehood and porous borders, French news media promoted the perception that jihadist groups were able to expand in the region because the Malian state was absent or too weak to stop them. Ultimately, such representation was likely to have made decision-makers assume that "the absence of the state" constituted a key root cause of violence in the region, especially when combined with the assumption that jihadist, trafficking, and criminal actors had become increasingly interwoven.

In other words, the continuous representation of the Sahel as a zone of lawlessness in French news media have largely fed assumptions among policymakers that state weakness was an important underlying cause of conflict in the Sahel. In turn, this assumption made decision-makers perceive policies that focus on improving state sovereignty (e.g. capacity building programs or military training missions) as effective, while little empirical research supports this approach.

8.1 Limitations and opportunities for future research

Evidently, this research project faces some major limitations. First and foremost, its single case study design does not enable me to make any hard claims about causality, nor about the generalizability of the three types of indirect media influence I identified through the Serval case. For example, my conclusion that news media affect decision-makers' perceptions of effective intervention strategies (media effect 2) builds in large part on the similarity I found between dominant representations of Sahel conflict dynamics in news media reports and Serval policy documents. By drawing on existing scholarship on the interactions between news media discourse, public opinion, and policymaking, it becomes likely that news media have shaped French decision-makers' assumptions about the Malian conflict and, by consequence, influenced their perceptions of effective intervention strategies – all the more when considering that such policies usually require support from other lawmakers and, to some extent, the general public.

However, as I only studied one intervention, it is impossible to say whether these forms of influence also occurred in cases other than Operation Serval. Moreover, the overall research design makes it complicated – if not impossible – to conclude whether news media coverage was the direct 'cause' for Serval officials viewing the conflict through a prism of state failure and narcoterrorism. Similar questions could be raised concerning my conclusion about the creation of a receptive societal context (media effect 1): was it really the securitized news media discourse that enabled Serval to be justified through the invocation of a national security threat? Or if not directly responsible, to what extent did this context then exactly enhance decision-makers' credibility when articulating this alleged national security threat? Unfortunately, giving detailed answers to such questions would require a way bigger comparative analysis of multiple intervention cases, falling outside the scope of a master thesis. Besides, my main research objective was to provide a first exploration of what indirect media effects could look like, rather than a doing a generalizable, large-N study. Such considerations, however, do not alter the fact that being unable to prove causality is a limitation when attempting to study influence (see section 2.4 for more discussion on the role of causality in influence research).

Meanwhile, not proving causality should neither be equaled to inconclusiveness. In fact, I even show in Chapter 2 how there are serious theoretic flaws attached to defining the relationship between news media discourse and foreign policy in a direct causal way, as the two are mutually constitutive of each other. As such, this study provides several starting points for future researchers aiming to further specify the relationship between foreign policy and news media discourse. For example, given my finding that a large portion of news media's influence stems from their ability to generate legitimacy for intervention justifications, it seems highly interesting to experiment with large-N quantitative models linking representations employed by decision-makers while justifying interventions to the dominant representations of the conflict by news media, and see if there is correlation between such variables. Besides giving insight into the generalizability of my claims, such studies could help us better

understand what exact parts of foreign policymaking are the most susceptible to news media influence. In a similar vein, given my observation that French news media tend to disproportionality report on non-state actor violence, a more systematic study on the inclusion of non-state actors into peace negotiations in relation to their representation by news media would seem potentially fruitful too.

In sum, while this study may not provide hard evidence for a causal relationship between news media discourse and foreign policymaking, it contains insights intor the general mechanisms underlying indirect forms of media influence on decision-making and how such forms of influence can be successfully identified. An understanding of such matters is key to better define the relationship between foreign policy and news media, and move away from dichotomous, direct causal conceptions that contain theoretical flaws.

A second key limitation relates to the factor of intentionality. As my research methodology mainly relies on the study of language use, it remains somewhat unclear whether French officials intentionally employed certain threat representations of the Sahel to legitimize their justification of Operation Serval, or whether it was the public Sahel discourse being so dominated by security threat representations that French officials genuinely viewed the region as a threat and, consequently, employed common threat representations to convince others of the necessity to intervene. In essence, this points to a typical structure-agency debate that is common in many scientific disciplines. But given intentionality's strong impact on the questions and directions of influence, my inability to assess the intentionality of decision-makers while articulating (threat) representations can to some extent be considered a shortcoming in this study.

This shortcoming could be fixed quite easily by including interviews with government officials into the analysis and, for example, ask them questions about their understanding of a conflict, or more directly, about their intentions when justifying a given intervention. While such methodologies have been used before (and have even much drawn criticism on their own; see Chapter 2 and 4), the limited scope of a master thesis research project did not allow me to do so.

Meanwhile, the issue of intentionality should not be overemphasized either: it is, for example, broadly acknowledged that individuals, such as decision-makers, can act independently while simultaneously being driven by larger meaning structures, such as discourses. Structures and agents are, in other words, not mutually exclusive. In fact, in Chapter 3, I even explained extensively how the relationship between foreign policy and news media discourse resembles a circular rather than unidirectional motion, in large part because when decision-makers evoke a 'national security threat', this also affects the ways journalists (and other decision-makers) perceive and therefore report on threats. In turn, their reporting affects what representations decision-makers perceive as accurate and the ones they can successfully employ to justify an intervention.

As such, I argue that Serval officials could have very well intentionally 'instrumentalized' specific threat representations of the Sahel to justify the operation and hereby shape the public discourse around the Sahel, while simultaneously being influenced by this very public discourse in their weighing of what representations of the Sahel would result in a legitimate form of justification. After all, there has to be an explanation for decision-makers viewing certain representations as more 'effective' justifiers than others. This slightly nuances the severity of not being able to assess intentionality, as a decision-maker's intention does not seem to fundamentally alter the mechanisms underlying news media's influence on decision-making – at least not in the forms I identified through this study.

A third key limitation of this study is of more analytical nature and relates to the challenge of identifying discourses in primary data. Despite the extensive theoretical discussion that my analysis builds on, I experienced more difficulty than expected while analyzing the dataset for shifts in the dominant Sahel discourse. Because discourses are relatively ambiguous analytical concepts, it was, for example, hard to pinpoint when and how the discourse had exactly changed. In line with this difficulty, it was challenging to systematically distinguish between ideas, perceptions, assumptions, representations, narratives, and discourses, because they tend to overlap in practice (and, to some extent, in theory as well). Ultimately, I decided to mainly focus on representations and discourses, but as can be read in the analysis chapters, I sometimes had little choice but using other concepts too.

Following from these limitations, it would seem helpful for future researchers to gain a better theoretical understanding of the differences between such concepts, as well as handling clearer definitions of them in the analysis. In terms of theory development, it would be particularly interesting to gain a better understanding of how conflict representations bring about perceptions, and how such perceptions, in turn, translate into assumptions about conflict dynamics. While it seems logical that perceptions are at the basis of most assumptions, assumptions likewise shape how individuals perceive the world around them. Despite the importance of this process for the outcomes of this study, I could find little literature on this topic, signaling opportunities for future research. On a more practical note, I would also recommend future researchers to consider using the concept of *framing* in their analysis, as frames tend to be easier to identify within primary source material and correspond closer to the way individuals make sense of reality. Even though literature on framing is abundant, a frame-based methodology would likely improve the quality of the analysis by enabling a more systematic identification of changes in the dominant discourse.

A fourth set of limitations concern the time scope of the dataset I analyzed. As this dataset contained articles from 1 January 2003 until 15 January 2013, it did not include articles published during the Serval intervention. To some extent, this was a deliberate choice because it would simplify the study: excluding articles from during the intervention would circumvent the problem of determining who influenced who, in case of correlation between the news media and policy discourse. Nonetheless, this

exclusion also carried several downsides: most importantly, this meant that the most recent – and thus arguably the most influential news media articles – were not included in the analysis. It would, for example, be highly interesting to see if key moments in the decision-making of Operation Serval (e.g. the prolongation of the mission's mandate in April 2012 by the National Assembly, or the decision to replace the mission with Operation Barkhane in July 2014), corresponded to shifts in the dominant media discourse. Such a focus on key moments in decision-making would likely allow a clearer and more detailed identification of influence, as the news media discourse can be directly linked to concrete decisions rather than overall strategies or justifications of the intervention.

A fifth and final limitation of this study concerns to the language and translation of the dataset. As probably noticed, this thesis is written in English, while the dataset only contains texts originally published in French. Despite my best efforts to translate French quotes as accurately as possible into English throughout the manuscript, it was at times hard to preserve the precise meaning of certain words or phrases when translating. While this would not be so problematic in most research contexts, in a discourse analysis setting it does create difficulties, because translation inevitably results in (slight) alterations of the primary research object: language use. For this reason, I would highly recommend future researchers to write their research project in the same language as the dataset they plan to analyze. This would take away significant dilemmas while translating and improve the accuracy of the discourse analysis. After all, "no investigation can take place directly at the level of ideas. We are, strictly speaking, always studying the dynamics of language."[1]

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[1] Jackson 2007, 64.

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Annex 2: References news media discourse analysis (chronological order)

Article Title	Newspaper	Date of Publication
Mali : Nicolas Sarkozy veut négocier le retour des Maliens	La Croix	7 February 2003
Mali : Peu de Maliens veulent rentrer au pays	La Croix	4 March 2003
Retour sur… l'aide « au retour » ne suffit pas aux Maliens de Kayes	La Croix	12 April 2003
Algérie : Le mystère des touristes disparus au Sahara	La Croix	13 March 2003
Otages du Sahara : demande de rançon	Le Figaro	4 August 2003
Première visite de Jacques Chirac au cœur du Sahel	Les Echos	22 October 2003
Afrique : Jacques Chirac s'envole pour le Niger et le Mali	La Croix	22 October 2003
Le Mali compte sur le codéveloppement pour gérer les flux migratoires	Le Monde	4 November 2003
Le Paris-Dakar reprend son souffle	La Croix	12 January 2004
Les criquets pèlerins s'élancent à l'assaut du Sahel	Le Monde	8 July 2004
Le Figaro, Le Niger en proie à la famine	Le Figaro	30 July 2005
La famine touche l'ensemble du Sahel	Le Monde	3 August 2005
Trente années de sécheresse au Sahel	Le Monde	30 November 2004
La visite de Nicolas Sarkozy au Mali et au Bénin suscite des critiques	Les Echos	18 May 2006
Immigration : Nicolas Sarkozy séduit mais ne convainc pas les Africains	La Croix	22 May 2006
L'attaque de casernes au Mali fait craindre une reprise de la rébellion touarègue	Le Monde	24 May 2006
Quatre touristes français tués par une bande armée en Mauritanie	Le Monde	25 December 2007
Nouakchott évoque une piste islamiste dans l'assassinat de quatre touristes français	Le Monde	26 December 2007
Pourquoi Al-Qaeda attaque les Occidentaux	Le Figaro	27 December 2007
L'annulation du Dakar révèle une insécurité croissante au Sahel	Le Monde	5 January 2008
Un appel terroriste visant la tour Eiffel a été intercepté au Portugal	Le Monde	11 January 2008
Les otages autrichiens transférés au Mali par al-Qaida	Le Figaro	12 March 2008
Incertitudes sur le sort des otages autrichiens à l'heure de l'ultimatum	Le Figaro	28 March 2008
Détenu depuis janvier, un otage britannique a été exécuté par les groupes islamiques liés à Al-Qaida	Le Monde	9 June 2009
Affrontements mortels entre Al-Qaida et l'armée au Mali	Les Echos	9 July 2009

Les pays du Sahel, terrain de prédilection des groupes islamistes armés	Le Figaro	10 August 2009
Au Maghreb, l'ambition de s'en prendre à la France	Le Monde	8 September 2009
Quatre Européens otages d'al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique	Le Figaro	2 December 2009
Le Mali touché par la "menace globale" d'Al-Qaida	Le Monde	3 December 2009
Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique, de l'Algérie au Sahel	La Croix	25 July 2010
La Spirale	La Croix	26 July 2010
Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique, de l'Algérie au Sahel	La Croix	26 July 2010
Sahel : un enjeu régional, une responsabilité pour l'Europe	Le Figaro	27 July 2010
Nicolas Sarkozy contient la polémique après l'exécution de l'otage français au Mali	Les Echos	27 July 2010
Sahel : un enjeu régional, une responsabilité pour l'Europe	Le Figaro	29 July 2010.
Ce que cache l'insécurité au Sahel	Le Figaro	22 September 2010
Sahel : Le gouvernement récuse les soupçons d'instrumentalisation	Le Monde	29 September 2010
Otages au Sahel : AQMI se politise et fait allégeance à Ben Laden	Le Figaro	20 October 2010
Afrique, Afghanistan : Al-Qaida menace Paris	Le Monde	28 October 2010
Sahel : la France opte pour le durcissement face à AQMI	Le Monde	8 January 2011
Les attaques d'AQMI entraînent la France dans une escalade militaire au Sahel	Le Monde	10 January 2011
Paris redoute des enlèvements au Mali	Le Figaro	20 January 2011
Après l'assassinat de deux Français au Sahel, Sarkozy et Obama unis face au défi du terrorisme	Le Figaro	11 February 2011
Paris renforce la sécurité de ses représentations à l'étranger	Le Monde	3 May 2011
La révolution en Libye fragilise le Sahel	Le Monde	7 September 2010
Des armes de Kadhafi passent entre les mains d'Aqmi au Sahel	Le Figaro	7 July 2011
La chute de Kadhafi devrait mettre un terme aux trafics illégaux dans la bande sahélienne	La Croix	29 August 2011
La nouvelle poudrière du Sahel	Le Figaro	20 October 2011
Au Mali, la poudrière du Nord	La Croix	22 November 2011
Mali : premiers combats avec les rebelles touareg depuis leur retour de Libye	Les Echos	18 January 2012
Les rebelles touaregs passent à l'attaque au Mali	Le Figaro	19 January 2012
Violents combats, crise humanitaire et impasse politique au Nord-Mali	Le Monde	12 March 2012

La guerre civile enfle dans le nord du Mali	Le Figaro	15 March 2012
La révolution libyenne et AQMI ont déstabilisé le nord du Mali	Le Monde	22 March 2012
Les Européens « profondément inquiets » pour le Sahel	Les Echos	26 March 2012
Au cœur du Sahel sous tension, la poudrière malienne	Le Monde	28 March 2012
Le Mali est menacé de partition	La Croix	1 April 2012
Les rebelles touareg en guerre contre Al Qaida au Maghreb islamique ?	Le Monde	5 April 2012
Le Mali s'enfonce dans la crise	Le Figaro	3 April 2012
Mali et Syrie menacés : L'obligation des pays à sauvegarder leur patrimoine en temps de guerre est difficilement respectée	Le Figaro	10 April 2012
Mali : le MNLA, un allié embarrassant ?	Le Figaro	14 April 2012
Les voisins du Mali redoutent un « nouvel Afghanistan »	Le Figaro	17 April 2012
Force de paix africaine pour le Mali et la Guinée-Bissau	Le Figaro	28 April 2012
La déstabilisation du nord du Mali menace tout le Sahel	La Croix	4 May 2012
Les crises au Mali menacent la sécurité du Sahel	Le Figaro	9 May 2012
« Tombouctou se meurt! »	La Croix	11 May 2012
Mali : les rebelles touaregs proclament un État islamiste; Les deux mouvements de la rébellion du nord du pays ont annoncé leur fusion	Le Figaro	28 May 2012
Dans le nord du Mali, les rebelles islamistes fixent les règles	La Croix	28 May 2012
L'alliance avec les djihadistes	Le Monde	4 June 2012
L'Afrique veut l'aide de l'ONU pour résoudre la crise au Mali	Le Figaro	9 June 2012
Le Monde, Au Mali, Gao tombe aux mains des djihadistes	Le Monde	28 June 2012
Au Mali, des islamistes s'en prennent aux mausolées de Tombouctou	La Croix	30 June 2012
Le nord du Mali en butte à la tyrannie islamiste	Le Monde	2 July 2012
Les islamistes sèment le chaos à Tombouctou	Le Figaro	3 July 2012
Le Mali risque-t-il de devenir un fief des djihadistes ?	La Croix	10 July 2012
La France veut éviter la constitution d'un Etat terroriste au Sahel	Le Monde	13 July 2012
Mali : la transition s'accélère	Les Echos	18 July 2012
Au Mali, la crise politique s'éternise tandis que les islamistes occupent le nord du pays	Le Figaro	31 July 2012

Au Mali, le bras de fer politique est engagé	Les Echos	31 July 2012
Mali : les islamistes s'enracinent à Gao	Le Figaro	16 August 2012
Nord du Mali : les islamistes interdisent la musique profane sur les radios	Les Echos	23 August 2012
Mali-Syrie : les nouvelles terres du djihad pour les Français	Le Figaro	4 October 2012
Mali : la charia au quotidien dans l'antre d'al-Qaida	Le Figaro	11 October 2012
L'UE examine différentes options pour aider le Mali	Les Echos	12 October 2012
Le Drian annonce une intervention au Mali dans « quelques semaines »	Le Monde	15 October 2012
Mali : les islamistes menacent Hollande	Le Figaro	15 October 2012
Mali : Paris souhaite une intervention militaire rapide	Le Figaro	17 October 2012
La France à la manœuvre pour planifier l'intervention africaine au nord du Mali	Le Figaro	20 October 2012
Mali : des « centaines » de djihadistes arrivent dans le Nord	Le Monde	21 October 2012
Au Sahel, la guerre contre l'islamo-gangstérisme	Le Monde	22 October 2012
La DGSE dément la présence d'agents du Qatar dans le nord du Mali	Le Figaro	26 October 2012.
Mali : la diplomatie au service de l'intervention militaire	Le Figaro	5 November 2012
Le Mali, un nouveau test pour l'Europe de la défense	Les Echos	9 November 2012
Mali du Nord : les djihadistes visent l'Europe, selon le président nigérien	Le Monde	12 November 2012
L'Europe de la défense veut relever le défi du Sahel	Le Figaro	16 November 2012
Mali : Alger et Tunis vont coopérer en matière de sécurité	Les Echos	4 December 2012

Annex 3: Overview of original quotes (Chapter 5)

Ref. nr.	Original Quote
1.	Le premier objectif est d'arrêter l'avancée des groupes terroristes vers Bamako. Le deuxième consiste à préserver l'existence de l'État malien et à lui permettre de recouvrer son intégrité territoriale. Le troisième est de favoriser l'application des résolutions internationales à travers le déploiement de la force africaine de stabilisation et l'appui aux forces armées maliennes dans leur reconquête du Nord.
2.	Vous m'avez interrogé sur l'évolution de la situation. Je veux rappeler à la représentation nationale que les trois objectifs de l'opération Serval restent les mêmes : premièrement, stopper l'offensive djihadiste et lui porter les coups les plus sévères possibles, et c'est ce qui se passe ; deuxièmement, restaurer le Mali dans sa souveraineté et dans son intégrité : troisièmement, établir les conditions pour le déploiement de la force africaine en relais de notre présence.
3.	Nous sommes en train de gagner la guerre mais il faut aussi gagner la paix, c'est l'élément central.
4.	Je veux rappeler la situation en janvier. À quelques heures près, le Mali n'existait plus car il allait devenir un État dirigé par des terroristes.
5.	Il fallait en effet absolument arrêter une agression qui menaçait Mopti et au-delà Bamako et qui pouvait aboutir à la création d'un État dirigé par des narcoterroristes.
6.	J'ai toujours pensé qu'il nous fallait intervenir au Mali : la France était la seule à pouvoir le faire et si nous avions hésité, le Mali serait aujourd'hui un État terroriste […].
7.	L'assaut des groupes terroristes qui ont conquis une partie du territoire de ce pays a provoqué une profonde déstabilisation de l'État malien, une atteinte inacceptable à sa souveraineté et la constitution d'un sanctuaire terroriste à près de 2 500 kilomètres du territoire national. C'est donc toute une région, déjà vulnérable, dont la sécurité et la stabilité sont mises en danger. C'est aussi une menace qui pèse sur l'Europe et sur la France.
8.	C'est la sécurité de la région, de la France, de l'Europe, qui est en jeu. La menace, c'est la mise en place d'un Etat terroriste à portée de l'Europe et de la France, pris en main par des groupes qui nous visent explicitement depuis des années, à commencer par AQMI. C'est ce qui nous a déterminés à agir depuis plus de six mois maintenant.
9.	Nous avons découvert des armes en masse, ce qui a conduit le chef d'état-major des armées à parler à juste titre d'une « organisation industrielle du terrorisme » au Nord du Mali, avec des ramifications dans beaucoup d'autres pays africains. Nous avons ainsi eu confirmation que certains membres du groupe Boko Haram ont reçu une formation militaire au Mali.
10.	De l'Atlantique à la mer Rouge, le Sahel s'apprêtait à devenir le nouveau sanctuaire des djihadistes des quatre coins de la planète. Si, en langue arabe, Sahel signifie « frontière », cette frontière ne nous protégeait de rien. Au contraire, elle menaçait de servir de refuge à des forces obscurantistes et sanguinaires. La communauté internationale ne pouvait pas se permettre de les laisser prospérer sans se mettre en danger.
11.	On parlait tout à l'heure de comparaison potentielle, ce sont les mêmes méthodes, ce sont les mêmes terroristes : ils s'appellent Boko Haram, Aqmi, Shebab en Somalie, mais c'est une dramaturgie djihadiste sur l'ensemble de la zone du Sahel, avec systématiquement des ravisseurs qui enlèvent telle ou telle personne de passage, de manière indifférenciée et qui fait

	du chantage global. Cette démarche est inacceptable ! C'est pour cela que nous sommes allés au Mali, parce que nous ne voulions pas qu'un État lui-même soit pris en otage avec des millions de personnes, et que ce territoire devienne un sanctuaire à partir duquel des actes terroristes pourraient être initiés sur l'ensemble de l'Afrique, mais aussi en Europe, en France. Donc le Mali, c'est aussi notre sécurité […].
12.	L'arrestation par les forces françaises, début mars, d'un homme de 37 ans de nationalité française figurant parmi les combattants adverses au Nord-Mali a relancé la question des infiltrations terroristes sur le territoire national et de l'impact de « l'appel au djihad » qui est largement véhiculé par Internet.
13.	Le risque serait que la communauté malienne sur le territoire national, forte de près de 100 000 personnes, soit susceptible d'être contaminée par des appels au « djihad » armé contre la France à la suite de l'intervention au Mali. Ses représentants ayant très largement exprimé leur soutien à l'intervention française, ce scénario semble très improbable pour l'instant.
14.	Des menaces explicites de groupes sahéliens ont été publiées ces derniers mois. La situation au Mali peut inciter des individus ou groupes à commettre des attentats, aussi bien en France qu'à l'étranger.
15.	On découvre jour après jour des tonnes de matériels - et quand je dis des tonnes c'est un mot qui est pesé de ma part : des canons, des explosifs, des ceintures pour kamikazes potentiels, des laboratoires pour les engins explosifs, tout cela dans l'Adrar des Ifoghas en particulier, de manière massive. On en trouvait aussi dans tout le territoire du Mali. À Gao, quand on fait des patrouilles pour aller identifier des pistes de dépôts qu'on nous a indiqués, on découvre partout du matériel qui montre qu'il y avait une volonté d'organiser, à partir du Mali, une base arrière qui pouvait entraîner du terrorisme dans toute l'Afrique et aussi en Europe, donc il fallait intervenir.
16.	Les conséquences de l'établissement d'un sanctuaire terroriste aux portes de l'Europe auraient été désastreuses non seulement pour les Occidentaux et les Européens, comme viennent tristement le rappeler les récentes prises d'otages, mais aussi pour toute la sous-région sahélienne et l'Afrique occidentale, qui aurait été profondément déstabilisée : le Mali est un pays continental qui a 7 frontières…
17.	Parce qu'il fallait arrêter les terroristes, sinon le Mali serait devenu un État terroriste avec la contagion sur tous les autres pays […]. Malheureusement, le terrorisme est un mal endémique.
18.	L'enjeu est tout simplement que le « scénario malien » ne se reproduise pas, demain, dans une autre « zone molle » où les défaillances des États auraient ouvert la voie à un nouvel enkystement terroriste […]. Il ne faudrait pas laisser proliférer, au cœur du Sahel, un cancer qui viendrait ensuite diffuser alentour et opérer un « couplage » des menaces. Dans ce scénario repoussoir, terrorisme, drogue et piraterie s'entretiendraient mutuellement en élargissant sans cesse leur rayon d'action.
19.	A quoi aurait servi le combat en Afghanistan, contre les Talibans, si nous acceptions qu'un régime menaçant la paix et la sécurité internationales s'établisse au Mali avec un risque évident de contagion pour la région ?
20.	Dans ces vastes espaces aux frontières poreuses, il était prévisible que l'effet de l'opération Serval ne conduise les groupes terroristes [..] à se mettre à l'abri et à chercher à se constituer un nouveau sanctuaire, de préférence dans les « zones molles » où les États ne sont pas en mesure d'assurer la sécurité. Comme ils l'ont toujours fait, les groupes terroristes restent mobiles et circulent librement dans ces vastes espaces, le long d'une route qui part du Golfe

	de Guinée pour pénétrer dans le Sahel, via le Nord Mali, le Nord Niger, la Libye et jusqu'à la Tunisie.
21.	C'est une région qui s'appelle l'Adrar des Ifoghas, mais peu importe le nom. C'est une région montagneuse, désertique, qui est grande comme la moitié de la France, et où il y a un vrai sanctuaire terroriste, où manifestement les djihadistes sont réfugiés, les chefs, une partie d'entre eux.
22.	Ces deux phénomènes se conjuguent pour faire plus que jamais de cet espace désertique, vaste ensemble de dunes d'où émergent des rochers chaotiques, un espace de non droit où règnent les trafics, l'impunité et la corruption.
23.	Dans une région où la capacité des États à contrôler leur territoire est souvent fragile, les dynamiques transnationales sont à l'origine de flux criminels et de trafics illicites très déstabilisants (drogue, êtres humains, armements…). La possibilité que des territoires échappent durablement au contrôle d'un État est un risque stratégique de première importance pour l'Europe. La crise du Mali, qui a nécessité l'intervention de la France, est à cet égard exemplaire. Elle illustre l'importance de la région et la gravité pour l'Europe des menaces qui s'y développent. Les tensions internes dans le Nord Mali et entre le nord et le sud du pays se sont conjuguées avec l'affaiblissement de l'État malien, favorisant l'implantation de groupes terroristes. Ceux-ci, après avoir bénéficié des trafics qui sévissent dans cette partie du Sahara, y ont établi des bases arrière, avant de chercher à s'emparer de tout le Mali, menaçant de transformer l'ensemble de la sous-région en un foyer de terrorisme international.
24.	Sur fond d'États fragiles ou faillis, des groupes terroristes sévissent dans des régions jusqu'alors préservées où ils parasitent des conflits locaux qu'ils tentent de radicaliser : zone sahélo-saharienne mais aussi nord du Nigeria, Somalie, Syrie, Irak, péninsule arabique et zone afghano-pakistanaise. Se réclamant d'Al-Qaïda, ils disposent d'une capacité opérationnelle indépendante et cherchent à avoir un impact global en visant directement les intérêts occidentaux. Ils peuvent inciter des individus radicalisés présents sur notre territoire à passer à l'acte et conjuguer leur action avec eux. Certains États pourraient en outre être tentés de recourir à nouveau à des modes d'action terroristes. Sur notre territoire même persiste la menace d'un terrorisme domestique susceptible de porter atteinte à la sécurité nationale.
25.	Au-delà même des aspects stratégiques, il est un autre domaine dans lequel notre pays assure la défense des intérêts européens, c'est celui de la protection consulaire, c'est-à-dire de la sécurité des ressortissants européens dans les pays tiers, comme au Sahel.
26.	La France a des intérêts dans la bande-sahélo saharienne, au premier rang desquels de nombreux ressortissants, tant dans cette région que dans les pays voisins, qu'il s'agisse de l'Afrique de l'Ouest ou du Maghreb.
27.	[…] il soit permis de rappeler les principaux enjeux pour notre sécurité : 6 000 Français et 1 000 Européens résident au Mali, 35 000 Français dans la bande sahélo-saharienne ; 80 000 en Afrique de l'Ouest ; 200 000 sur le continent africain. De très nombreuses entreprises françaises y exercent des activités. Environ 100 000 Maliens vivent en France. Sans l'intervention de l'armée française, c'est tout un pays qui aurait été livré aux preneurs d'otages.
28.	La décision du Président de la République comporte bien sûr des risques, en particulier pour nos otages, mais elle veut conjurer le risque plus grand encore que le Mali devienne un État sanctuaire du terrorisme à partir duquel AQMI aurait été en mesure de prendre encore plus d'otages et de lancer des attentats partout en Afrique ainsi que contre notre pays et d'autres pays européens.

29.	Mais, nous avons aussi nous même à nous protéger, parce que, comprenons-nous bien, les menaces qui frappent les pays africains, notamment, ici, au Sahel, ce ne sont pas des menaces simplement qui concernent l'Afrique, on voit bien que cela peut concerner nos propres ressortissants. Il y a eu des enlèvements, il y a eu des otages […]. Donc, nous protégeons nos ressortissants et je peux en citer d'autres, au Mali, deux journalistes, près de Kidal qui ont été tués. Donc, nous protéger ici, c'est protéger nos ressortissants, cela c'est déjà un premier aspect. Mais ensuite, si nous laissons les terroristes prospérer dans cette partie-là du continent africain, il y aura des conséquences aussi en Europe et en France.
30.	La situation à Gao est très différente de celle du Nord. Le Nord est le théâtre où était en train de s'organiser le djihadisme international avec les éléments les plus radicaux et doctrinaires à cause de l'arrivée des combattants étrangers. À Gao, nous parlons de Maliens. Il y a historiquement des tensions entre diverses communautés arabes, touaregs, peuls, songhaïs […]. En tout cas, ce qui est certain, c'est que la population malienne a accueilli l'armée française comme une armée de libération, ce qu'elle était. J'étais avec le président de la République à Bamako et on sentait cette ferveur, cette émotion, d'un peuple qui n'a plus peur, alors qu'ils avaient été pendant des semaines sous le joug des lois fondamentalistes, sous le joug des terroristes, là il y avait une vraie libération, et sur la partie Nord non plus. C'est-à-dire que ces djihadistes-là, ces groupes terroristes-là ne sont pas accueillis par la population, ne sont pas mêlés à la population, ils sont extérieurs, ce sont des groupes internationaux.
31.	[…] ce sont des groupes qui veulent faire vivre une zone de non-droit entre la Guinée-Bissau, le golfe de Guinée, et le Soudan pour aller vite à un très grand Sahel, qui est une zone où se passent tous les trafics – trafic de drogue, trafic d'armes, trafic d'otages – et qui est utilisée par les fondamentalistes comme devanture pour faire passer une méthode terroriste et un mouvement qui peut, ensuite, agir en Europe. Donc c'est une situation qui est grave.
32.	[…] il apparait que l'islam radical imposé par les mouvements terroristes est très étranger aux traditions locales. L'application coutumière, par tribu ou groupe ethnique, de la charia, par les chefs religieux traditionnels (les cadis), n'avait rien de « rigoriste », et tant le statut des femmes (traditionnellement non voilées) que les normes de régulation sociale étaient ceux d'une société tolérante et ouverte.
33.	-
34.	La collaboration voire l'alliance désormais bien réelle entre les groupes armés (notamment le MUJAO) et certains narcotrafiquants arabes répondait sûrement à l'origine à une logique opportuniste, beaucoup plus qu'à une logique politique ou religieuse. Elle est toutefois aujourd'hui bien réelle et explique notamment la présence de poches d'insécurité autour de Gao notamment.
35.	La force du MUJAO est d'être parvenu à combiner les effets de l'idéologie et du narcotrafic pour recruter et endoctriner des jeunes, principalement dans la région de Gao. [...] on souligne la mutation des groupes terroristes, d'un terrorisme doctrinaire à un « narcoterrorisme », paré d'un vernis idéologique emprunté à l'islamisme radical pour mieux recruter.
36.	Les autorités civiles et militaires des pays visités dans la bande sahélo-saharienne s'accordent à dire qu'ils font face à des groupes rebelles qui ont la double particularité : s'agissant de leurs motivations (leur « agenda ») : d'entremêler, dans des proportions variables, des revendications politiques (djihadisme international ou séparatisme local) et des préoccupations économiques (trafics en tous genres).
37.	C'est pour cela que l'on n'est pas dans une logique non plus de guerre contre une religion, parce que c'est largement une façade cette idéologie affichée. Derrière, il y a des narcotrafics, des conflits d'intérêt […].

38.	Ils n'ont qu'une méthode : instrumentaliser l'islam, religion de paix pour l'immense majorité des musulmans, afin de justifier leurs combats contre la démocratie et les droits des femmes. Ils masquent ainsi le caractère mafieux de leurs organisations, basées sur le trafic d'armes et de drogues, comme au Sahel.
39.	Je voudrais ici vous reprendre sur la terminologie, qui est toujours significative. Ce serait une grave erreur de considérer que les difficultés qui existent au Mali ou ailleurs sont liées à l'islam. Les musulmans sont pacifiques, et c'est la raison pour laquelle, personnellement, je n'emploie pas le mot « islamiste », que nos amis arabes ont souvent tendance à traduire par « musulman ». Non, en l'occurrence, il s'agit de combattre des groupes narcoterroristes, qui se sont attaqués à une population très majoritairement musulmane, la population malienne. Il faut donc éviter de faire des amalgames, qui ne font que renforcer les problèmes. Ce n'est pas la responsabilité des musulmans qui est ici engagée mais celle de groupes narcoterroristes qu'il faut combattre partout - je pense que vous en conviendrez, Monsieur Bompard. Ne faisons pas d'assimilation impropre.
40.	[…] l'Afrique de l'Ouest, plaque tournante du trafic de cocaïne […].
41.	-
42.	Le Sahel a toujours été une zone d'économie grise, où les frontières agissent comme des aimants, des « adjuvants » pour le développement de la contrebande et des trafics en tout genre.
43.	[…] c'est toutefois une autre dimension que prennent les trafics dans les années 2000 avec l'arrivée, en Afrique de l'Ouest, du transit de la cocaïne produite en Amérique du Sud.
44.	L'arrivée de la cocaïne a constitué un véritable choc pour les économies sahéliennes, tant les revenus procurés sont supérieurs à ceux tirés des trafics « traditionnels » dans la région – y compris celui du cannabis.
45.	Les impacts du trafic de drogue sur les structures économiques et sociales sont dévastateurs : la corruption et les protections offertes à tous les niveaux par les appareils sécuritaires et les tous premiers cercles du pouvoir gangrènent progressivement la gouvernance, criminalisent les structures économiques et font de la rente du narcotrafic une activité de premier plan dans ces zones déshéritées sur le plan économique. Outre la hausse de la criminalité et de la corruption, et les effets sanitaires associés à la consommation de drogue, l'arrivée de stupéfiants va généralement de pair avec une accélération de la circulation des armes au sein des populations.
46.	Les conséquences sociales, politiques et économiques de l'arrivée de la cocaïne en Afrique de l'ouest n'ont pas fini de faire sentir leurs effets. Elles ont, sans nul doute, précipité le destin malien.
47.	Il y a l'apparence qu'effectivement vous pouvez avoir des gens qui rendent des services sociaux, etc., mais la réalité, c'est que le MIUJAO est un groupe narcoterroriste, c'est établi, ils vivent de la drogue […]. La vérité c'est qu'ils utilisent les carences qui pouvaient exister des services publics, celles de l'État. Et c'est une explication à l'adhésion qu'ils peuvent parfois avoir, ce n'est pas du tout une justification car rien n'est pire que de céder à des mouvements comme ceux-là qui se fichent totalement du bien-être de la population et qui utilisent simplement un certain nombre de carences ou de lacunes pour avoir la mainmise sur la population et faire leurs affaires, voilà le fond de la réalité.
48.	[La rébellion touareg] s'inscrit dans un contexte renouvelé depuis le milieu des années 2000 […] caractérisé par une insatisfaction des populations nomades du nord, par un cycle de violences et de représailles quasiment continu et par un affaiblissement progressif des

	structures de l'État malien. Le retour de Libye des mercenaires […] (et de leur arsenal d'armement) a en quelque sorte servi d'étincelle à un cocktail explosif dont tous les éléments étaient déjà réunis : irrédentisme, corruption des structures centrales, impact déstabilisateur du narcotrafic sur les mécanismes de redistribution traditionnels…
49.	Cela peut paraître loin la Syrie du Mali ou le Mali de la Syrie. Mais, on s'aperçoit qu'aujourd'hui dans une forme internationale du terrorisme, il y a des groupes, des individus qui vont d'un pays à l'autre […] et qui vivent du chaos, de l'instabilité. Pourquoi il y a eu du terrorisme au Nord Mali ? Parce que c'était le chaos, parce qu'il n'y avait plus d'Etat, parce que l'armée n'y était plus présente.
50.	Un État qui ne contrôle plus ses frontières et son territoire peut devenir un sanctuaire pour des groupes criminels, un espace de transit des trafics, ou une base arrière de groupes terroristes permettant à ceux-ci de développer leur action à grande échelle. Alimentant la criminalité et les mouvements rebelles dans les zones où elles se développent, ces activités peuvent être à l'origine de conflits interétatiques. L'ordre international requiert de chaque État qu'il assure la garde du territoire sur lequel il exerce sa souveraineté non seulement pour le compte de son peuple, mais aussi pour celui de la communauté internationale. La première décennie du XXIe siècle aura montré que la défaillance de nombre d'États à exercer les fonctions essentielles de la souveraineté est un phénomène durable et répandu. Cette défaillance concerne des États de niveau de développement et de taille diverse, sur la totalité ou sur une partie de leur territoire. Elle affecte par exemple des zones éloignées de la capitale échappant au contrôle du pouvoir central, comme au Sahel, au Yémen, au Pakistan et en Afghanistan. Quand ces bouleversements frappent des pays à l'unité fragile, où les frontières issues de la décolonisation recouvrent une grande diversité ethnique, linguistique ou religieuse, sans qu'un projet national fort ait pris le relais de la lutte contre le colonisateur, la probabilité que survienne une guerre civile augmente encore.
51.	Les frontières interétatiques dans la bande sahélo-saharienne et en Afrique sub-saharienne présentent la particularité d'être unanimement décrites comme « poreuses » […]. On relèvera à titre d'exemple que, selon les services de l'ambassade de France au Burkina Faso, une ligne de 500 kilomètres de la frontière malienno-burkinabée est dépourvue de tout poste frontière, et que les postes existants ne disposent pas de plus d'un litre d'essence par jour. De même, le chef d'état-major de la MINUSMA a reconnu dès le mois de mars 2014 que la zone du Mali frontalière de l'Algérie constituait une « zone grise » du point de vue sécuritaire, car aucune force ne s'y projette. Pour lui, les raisons en sont diverses : manque de moyens adaptés aux distances en question, « manque d'envie », autres priorités, etc. Il reconnaissait néanmoins qu'une action le long de la frontière algérienne, était indispensable pour « couper les liens du « château fort » du Tigharghar avec le Nord ». Cette porosité est mise à profit par les groupes armés djihadistes, terroristes ou rebelles. Au Niger, par exemple, les rapporteurs ont pu constater que les autorités locales étaient particulièrement préoccupées par l'implantation au Sud du pays des bases arrières de Boko Haram.
52.	Il y a toujours trois aspects quand on parle du Mali. Il y a l'aspect sécuritaire, l'aspect politique, et puis l'aspect économique.
53.	Au Mali, il y a trois actions en permanence : il y a l'action de sécurité – s'il n'y a pas de sécurité, rien n'est pas possible, c'est l'aspect militaire ; il y a l'action démocratique – le dialogue démocratique, la préparation des élections – et puis il y a l'action économique pour le développement.
54.	Au-delà du Mali, le rapport décrit les chocs multiples qui déstabilisent le Sahel (pauvreté, explosion démographique, montée de l'islamisme radical, trafics, terrorisme, piraterie...). Ces chocs appellent à une réponse globale, au niveau européen, articulant sécurisation militaire,

	réforme de la gouvernance politique et promotion d'un développement économique et social à l'échelle régionale.
55.	Sans sécurité, rien n'est possible. Mercredi ou jeudi prochain, des votes à l'ONU doivent intervenir. Nous avons ferme espoir de voir votée à l'unanimité, par le Conseil de sécurité, notre résolution qui définit les conditions dans lesquelles la MISMA se transforme en MINUSMA et les conditions dans lesquelles les troupes doivent intervenir dans ce pays pour assurer la stabilité et le retour de la démocratie.
56.	C'est que tous les pays d'Afrique ont compris qu'aucun développement ne serait possible pour ce continent d'avenir si les questions de terrorisme et de narcoterrorisme n'étaient pas maîtrisées.
57.	Des terroristes d'AQMI se trouvent en effet encore certainement dans le Nord du pays. S'il leur est demandé d'organiser le scrutin, il est peu probable qu'ils consentent à le faire ! Mais il ne faut pas que, le Mali étant dans la situation que l'on connaît, l'on ajoute à cette difficulté intrinsèque tellement de conditions que la tenue des élections en deviendrait impossible. Il faut donc tout à la fois que la sécurisation soit réalisée - les troupes font leur travail d, une manière remarquable -, que le dialogue soit engagé, et que tous les éléments techniques soient rassemblés afin que les élections puissent se tenir à la date prévue, en présence d'observateurs internationaux.
58.	-
59.	La fin de notre mission doit coïncider avec la solution politique au Mali. Elle passe par deux éléments incontournables. Organiser au plus vite une élection présidentielle, en juillet […]. Ce calendrier est incontournable, car la future autorité politique du Mali a besoin d'une légitimité nationale et internationale. Le deuxième est l'organisation de la commission de dialogue et de réconciliation conformément à la feuille de route. Il faut qu'elle fonctionne le plus vite possible.
60.	Le renforcement des capacités locales et l'inclusion d'élus locaux issus des légitimités traditionnelles permettront d'appuyer les institutions et de relégitimer, puisque c'est nécessaire, un État qui a été, évidemment, très fragilisé. L'objectif des autorités maliennes […] est de réinstaller l'État sur l'ensemble de son territoire.
61.	[…] la deuxième phase de la réconciliation malienne, la plus importante, soit abordée par le nouveau Président et le gouvernement qui sortiront des urnes en août. Cette deuxième phase pourrait porter sur : le partage des ressources budgétaires et d'aide au développement, la décentralisation et la création d'une assemblée législative représentant les collectivités territoriales, l'intégration politique et sociale des minorités, le développement des infrastructures et des services à la population au Nord du pays.
62.	C. L'ÉTAT MALIEN DOIT RESTAURER SES CAPACITÉS D'ADMINISTRATION ET DE SÉCURISATION Les forces de sécurité intérieure sont à reconstruire. Vos rapporteurs ont rencontré à Bamako le ministre de la sécurité intérieure et de la protection civile et les principaux responsables du ministère. Leur description de l'état des forces de sécurité malienne a été très franche et sans ambiguïté […] : manquant d'équipement, de logistique, désorganisées, faisant parfois montre d'une loyauté douteuse envers les institutions et sans grande motivation. Des situations de discipline bafouée, de non-respect des règles hiérarchiques, ont notamment été décrites par le Secrétaire général du ministère […]. Certains experts mettent en cause non seulement leur capacité à faire face à une menace terroriste mais aussi à gérer un trouble à l'ordre public de moyenne ou haute intensité. D'autres estiment même que certaines unités constitueraient même

	clairement un danger pour la stabilité politique du pays, parce que susceptibles de « basculer », en particulier au sein de la Police nationale.
63.	Vos rapporteurs estiment qu'un audit approfondi des forces de sécurité intérieures, en vue de la mise en place d'une mission de consolidation, est une priorité […]. Il devient urgent d'agir sur la question du renforcement des forces de sécurité intérieure.
64.	Le développement et la sécurité à l'échelle la région sont les solutions de long terme : une approche globale serait nécessaire.
65.	Pour transformer un succès militaire en succès politique, une approche globale s'impose pour la reconstruction du pays. Il n'y a pas de sécurité sans développement, ni de développement sans sécurité.
66.	Le développement économique, la construction des structures de l'état (l'administration, de la justice), sont les plus sûrs moyens de prévenir les crises. La consolidation d'États fragiles ou le rétablissement de leur stabilité requièrent la mise en œuvre d'un ensemble d'actions complémentaires et cohérentes dans tous les domaines.
67.	Recommandation 4 - Les facteurs de fragilité qui ont conduit à l'effondrement du Mali sont partagés par plusieurs États de la région. La réflexion pour lutter contre les défis de long terme doit engager l'Union européenne, englober l'ensemble du Sahel et s'attaquer aux causes structurelles (sous-développement économique, explosion de la démographie, trafics en tous genre, notamment cocaïne, problèmes de gouvernance…). Faute de quoi les forces de décomposition reprendront le dessus.
68.	Notre intervention au Mali est légitime. Elle répond d'abord à la demande du Président de ce pays. Elle s'appuie sur les résolutions du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unis et donc la France agit conformément au droit international. La France n'est pas seule. D'abord parce qu'elle est appuyée par les pays européens qui nous apportent de l'aide sous toutes ses formes. Ensuite, parce que nous travaillons avec les pays africains qui eux-mêmes, vont former l'essentiel de la force internationale dont la mission sera de permettre au Mali de recouvrer son intégrité territoriale.
69.	Il ne s'agit pas d'une ingérence qui aurait violé la souveraineté d'un pays indépendant. Au contraire, il s'agit d'une assistance apportée à un pays ami en grand danger, dont l'intégrité territoriale avait été violée par des groupes terroristes entendant imposer leur loi - et quelle loi ! – et dont non seulement la souveraineté mais la survie même eussent été compromises, si les éléments islamistes armés avaient pu continuer leur raid vers le Sud. L'intervention de la France s'est faite en vertu de l'article 51 de la Charte des Nations unies et a donné lieu à une réunion du Conseil de Sécurité, qui a confirmé la légitimité et la légalité de l'intervention française.
70.	[…] qui aurait dit il y a un an que le Mali aurait recouvré sa souveraineté, sa liberté, la confiance en lui-même, et sa fierté ? Qui aurait dit que le Mali aurait pu afficher une démocratie retrouvée, alors qu'il y a un an – rappelez-vous, cela passe vite – le djihadisme dominait, on coupait des mains à Gao et à Tombouctou et on s'interrogeait sur les délais qu'il restait avant que le terrorisme ne s'empare de Bamako. Nous ne l'avons pas voulu, le président de la République a décidé, à l'appel des autorités maliennes et en accord avec les Nations Unies, d'y porter un coup d'arrêt.
71.	Le Nord-Mali était alors occupé par des mouvements terroristes islamistes qui y imposent leur terrible loi : AQMI et le MUJAO, rejoints par Ansar Dine, mouvement touareg islamiste

	opposé au MNLA. De très nombreuses violations des droits de l'homme y sont commises : amputations, viols, lapidations, recrutement d'enfants soldats…
72.	Une action militaire internationale était nécessaire pour éviter l'installation d'un État terroriste. Les djihadistes du Nord-Mali et leurs affidés d'Al-Qaïda n'ont qu'un but : imposer à l'échelle de la planète des régimes despotiques, sanguinaires et moyenâgeux. Leur fondamentalisme constitue une forme nouvelle de fascisme.
73.	Monsieur le Président, cher Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, je sais que votre grand-père a donné sa vie pour la France et que votre père a lui-même connu la guerre. Je pense aux nombreuses familles maliennes dont l'histoire est liée à la France. C'était notre devoir, à notre tour, de venir en soutien du Mali ! Le Mali et la France, cher Ibrahim Boubacar, sont unis l'un à l'autre. Nous avons donné avec les Africains, avec les Européens la plus belle leçon de solidarité entre les peuples pour la sécurité du Mali, du Sahel mais aussi de l'Europe, quand il s'agit de lutter contre le terrorisme.
74.	Mais ce fut aussi un acte de réparation car je n'oublie rien, je l'avais dit à Bamako, du sacrifice de ces soldats d'origine malienne dans les deux guerres du dernier siècle. Il était donc légitime que le peuple français, que les soldats français viennent aussi libérer le Mali. Merci pour cet honneur, merci pour ta présence une nouvelle fois à Paris et sachez bien que le peuple malien et le peuple français par cette distinction, par la récompense et l'effort de nos soldats, sont indissolublement liés. Vive la France, Vive le Mali, Vive l'amitié entre la France et le Mali !
75.	Le Mali n'est pas l'affaire de la France, mais, en tant qu'ancienne puissance coloniale, nous avons une responsabilité.
76.	La France était le seul pays qui était en situation d'intervenir puisque nous avions des troupes qui n'étaient pas loin. Donc nous sommes intervenus. Pourquoi ? Pour stopper l'attaque des terroristes, pour arriver petit à petit à reprendre des villes et pour faire en sorte que la communauté internationale puisse dire : « voilà comment il faut agir ». Nous l'avons fait et tout le monde reconnaît que l'intervention de l'armée française et les armées africaines, les deux en même temps, a été extrêmement efficace.
77.	Cet acte fut, en effet, celui de l'amitié, fut aussi celui de la responsabilité, ne pas laisser un espace aux terroristes, fut aussi celui de la solidarité à l'égard d'un peuple, celui du Mali, à l'égard de l'Afrique de l'Ouest où la France doit assurer le développement de ce continent africain.
78.	En intervenant au Mali, la France a joué son rôle, tenu son rang, comme elle continuera de le faire en maintenant son effort de défense.
79.	Certains commentateurs ont tenté de présenter l'intervention française au Mali comme une résurgence de la « Françafrique » où l'ancien colonisateur se poserait en gendarme dans son ancienne colonie, au mépris de sa souveraineté et au nom d'un prétendu agenda caché. Cette affirmation ne résiste pas à l'analyse, tant il est manifeste que les intérêts européens et français en jeu se sont combinés avec l'appel au secours d'un pays central en Afrique de l'Ouest, dans le cadre de la légalité internationale, pour justifier pleinement l'intervention française.
80.	Il n'est pas pour nous que conquérir un territoire, de vouloir accroître notre influence ou de chercher je ne sais quel intérêt commercial ou économique. Ce temps-là est fini. En revanche, notre pays, parce que c'est la France, doit venir en aide à un pays ami.
81.	Nous, Français, nous n'avons pas à interférer dans le dialogue politique qui appartient aux Maliens. Nous ne sommes pas dans une logique néocoloniale : c'est à eux de trouver les

compromis entre eux. On peut accompagner, on peut faciliter mais c'est d'abord la responsabilité des Maliens que de trouver ce compromis dans d'autres États. Je pense au Niger voisin où ce compromis a été trouvé donc c'est possible. C'est possible au Mali ; maintenant c'est de leur responsabilité […].

Annex 4: Overview of original quotes (Chapter 6)

Ref nr.	Original Quote
1.	Nouvelle escapade africaine pour le président français. Jacques Chirac entame, aujourd'hui, une visite de quatre jours au Niger et au Mali, deux pays du Sahel qui comptent parmi les plus pauvres.
2.	Ces deux pays sont également considérés comme un véritable laboratoire d'expérimentation pour deux objectifs clefs de Paris : la lutte contre la pauvreté, surtout la question de l'eau, et la gouvernance économique et politique.
3.	En visitant le Mali et le Niger, le président français veut pousser ses propositions lancées à Évian pour encourager le développement de l'Afrique.
4.	[…] fait craindre une reprise de la rébellion touarègue.
5.	Le ministre de l'intérieur français arrive aujourd'hui à Bamako avec un dossier « chaud » : les conditions du retour des émigrés maliens dans leur pays.
6.	-
7.	-
8.	Le mystère qui entourait le rapt, il y a cinq mois, dans le Sahara algérien, d'une trentaine de touristes européens commence à se dissiper […]. La disparition de 31 touristes européens (15 Allemands, 10 Autrichiens, quatre Suisses, un Néerlandais et un Suédois) dans le Sahara algérien est une angoissante énigme qui s'épaissit de jour en jour.
9.	S'agit-il d'un groupe islamiste armé du GSPC, comme l'affirme Alger, d'une de ces nombreuses bandes de contrebandiers qui sillonnent le Sahara, ou des deux à la fois ? Une source proche des médiateurs affirmait hier que l'une des conditions posées par les ravisseurs pour la libération des otages était de rester au Mali. Selon le témoignage, recueilli hier par Le Monde, d'un des otages libérés en mai, l'argent semble avoir été dès le début la motivation des ravisseurs. Le GSPC, […] n'a jamais revendiqué publiquement ces enlèvements et ne s'était jamais manifesté jusqu'ici dans le Grand Sud. En revanche, le groupe autonome de Mokhtar Belmokhtar, idéologiquement proche du GSPC, pourrait avoir le profil des ravisseurs […]. Belmokhtar opère depuis 1997 dans une vaste zone allant de Laghouat à Tamanrasset et doit sa notoriété davantage à divers trafics […] qu'à ses faits d'armes d'islamiste pur et dur…
10.	[…] la présence de bandes armées en mouvement à proximité du tracé.
11.	Le principe de précaution avait également poussé ASO à arrêter l'épreuve durant cinq jours en 2000, après l'annonce d'une menace terroriste au Niger. Un pont aérien avait alors été mis sur pied pour survoler entièrement le pays. Cette fois, le mot terrorisme n'a pas été prononcé. Il s'agirait de brigandage. L'itinéraire n'en a pas moins été modifié pour éviter la zone concernée.
12.	[…] afin de lutter contre les bandits, les contrebandiers et les terroristes qui se servent des zones frontalières à leurs dépens.
13.	Un officier français qui connaît bien la région rappelle que « les Sahraouis, les Touaregs, les Toubous ont plutôt l'âme contrebandière… et non islamiste ». Certains font du pur banditisme. Le temps n'étant plus aux « razzias », ils vendent leurs services pendant un temps au plus offrant, et pourquoi pas aux islamistes, histoire de se faire de l'argent […].

14.	« qaïdisation »
15.	Les grands leaders du mouvement se sont même opposés, à diverses reprises, sur la stratégie à déployer : djihad défensif dans la terre de l'islam (dar al-islam), sur le sol afghan par exemple, ou djihad offensif dans la terre du conflit (dar al-harb), en portant le fer dans les contrées peuplées d'infidèles […]. Aujourd'hui, elle entend clairement mener le combat sur les deux fronts, mais avec un récent recentrage sur les pays musulmans « apostats ». Si l'Irak et l'Afghanistan restent les fronts principaux, plusieurs discours d'Ayman al-Zawahiri, le n°2 et idéologue de l'organisation terroriste, fixent comme cible prioritaire les intérêts des pays occidentaux qui soutiennent des États arabes « félons » […]. Le carnage d'Alger du 11 décembre comme le quadruple meurtre de Mauritanie semblent montrer que le message a été bien reçu, au Maghreb et dans toute la bande subsaharienne.
16.	En septembre, le numéro deux du mouvement djihadiste Al-Qaida, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, avait exhorté les musulmans d'Afrique du Nord à « nettoyer » leurs territoires des présences française et espagnole.
17.	[…] elle illustre l'instabilité qui règne dans la région.
18.	L'annulation du Dakar révèle une insécurité croissante au Sahel […] ce no man's land de dunes de sable et de rocailles est devenu le refuge et la base arrière des groupes islamistes.
19.	L'assassinat, le 24 décembre 2007, de quatre touristes français dans une région isolée de la Mauritanie, suivi, quelques jours plus tard, de la mort de trois militaires, constitue le dernier épisode de cette guerre larvée que livrent les groupes armés islamistes.
20.	Les menaces sont prises au sérieux. D'autant qu'elles surviennent après l'exécution, le 24 décembre, par un groupe salafiste lié à Al-Qaida, de quatre touristes français qui circulaient en Mauritanie. Cet attentat, suivi de menaces explicites contre des intérêts français en Afrique du Nord, avait poussé le ministère des affaires étrangères à demander, pour la première fois depuis sa création il y a trente ans, l'annulation du Rallye Paris-Dakar, qui devait emprunter des pistes dans le désert mauritanien.
21.	D'abord algérien, sous le nom de Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat, Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique a été adoubé en 2007. Depuis, il tente d'internationaliser son combat.
22.	Les pays du Sahel […] semblent devenus le terrain de prédilection d'al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique (Aqmi). Implanté à l'origine en Kabylie, le mouvement, issu du Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat (GSPC), y multiplie depuis quelques années ses opérations […]. Si l'on en croit l'organigramme qu'il a rendu public sur des sites islamistes, Aqmi disposerait d'une structure pyramidale, avec un « conseil exécutif » dirigé – depuis l'Algérie – par l'émir Abdelmalek Droukdel, ingénieur à l'état civil et ancien d'Afghanistan. Droukdel aurait réussi à fédérer l'ensemble des groupuscules agissant dans la région, mélange d'islamistes purs et durs, de bandits de grand chemin, et de milices ethniques, notamment touaregs.
23.	-
24.	Affrontements mortels entre Al-Qaida et l'armée au Mali.
25.	Depuis deux ans, le Sahel est devenu l'un des principaux théâtres d'opération pour la nébuleuse d'Oussama ben Laden.
26.	[…] touché par la « menace globale » d'Al-Qaida […] cette réalité s'étend désormais au Mali.

27.	Aussi inquiétantes soient-elles, ces nouvelles prises d'otages ne doivent pas faire illusion. Al-Qaida est une organisation aux abois. Laminée en Irak, elle a tenté à partir de 2006 de s'implanter au Maghreb en fusionnant avec l'ex-Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat (GSPC) rebaptisé al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique. Elle s'est heurtée à une armée algérienne aguerrie, à l'hostilité de la population et à la coordination renforcée des États maghrébins en matière de lutte antiterrorisme. Le déclin d'AQMI au Maghreb a poussé les groupuscules islamistes vers le grand sud, où, explique Mathieu Guidère, « le phénomène al-Qaida demeure attractif, les populations des pays du Sahel ignorant les horreurs qui ont discrédité les islamistes armés en Algérie ».
28.	Les groupes islamistes sont de plus en plus actifs au Sahara. Ils opèrent dans une immense zone grise du Sahara qui part de l'est de la Mauritanie et englobe le nord du Mali et du Niger ainsi qu'une portion du Sahara algérien. Même si les effectifs de l'AQMI ne dépassent pas quelques centaines d'hommes, selon les services de renseignements occidentaux, ils agissent en toute impunité.
29.	Les forces armées locales de ces pays pauvres ne disposent pas des moyens humains et matériels à même de les combattre avec efficacité. Et ce malgré le soutien de l'Algérie, la puissance militaire régionale. Faute de pouvoir intervenir en territoire malien, l'armée algérienne fournit depuis des années à son voisin des équipements militaires ainsi que du carburant. Jusqu'à présent, cette aide n'a pas donné de résultats probants dans la lutte contre les groupes islamistes.
30.	L'assassinat de l'otage Michel Germaneau par les terroristes d'al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique confirme que le Sahara est devenu une région extrêmement dangereuse, où il faut consacrer des moyens importants pour rétablir la sécurité.
31.	L'Union européenne ne peut également tourner le dos à une marge qui requiert plus que des relations bilatérales. […] ce type de coopération, bilatéral et réactif, doit être, sinon dépassé, du moins inclus dans une coopération permanente, multidimensionnelle et régionale qui engage dans une ambition commune – parce que les risques sont communs – les pays sahéliens, les pays maghrébins et l'Europe.
32.	Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique assume toutes ses horreurs. […] ce mouvement est, aujourd'hui, celui qui fait peser la plus lourde menace sur la France. […] Mais, à plus long terme, c'est bien la fin de cette nébuleuse qui est l'impératif. Le parcours d'Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique ne laisse en effet pas d'autres solutions.
33.	[…] appel au « djihad global » […].
34.	[…] mouvements terroristes islamistes […].
35.	Les deux présidents ont évoqué l'Afghanistan, où leurs hommes sont engagés côte à côte, mais également l'arc du terrorisme dans la région sahélienne (Niger, Mauritanie, Mali), devenu un sujet central.
36.	Hier, il s'agissait notamment pour MAM de dissuader les Français qui seraient tentés de s'aventurer dans une zone où l'Aqmi est comme un poisson dans l'eau.
37.	[…] dans les zones les plus dangereuses au monde. La France déconseille à ses ressortissants de se rendre notamment dans le Sahel, où une branche d'Al-Qaida retient en otage quatre Français enlevés.

38.	Ses troupes, évaluées au maximum à 500 hommes dispersés, mêlent des islamistes radicaux qui continuent de rêver à renverser les pouvoirs algérien, malien ou mauritanien et des criminels de droit commun qui songent d'abord à faire fructifier leurs affaires, du trafic de cigarettes aux rapts.
39.	La frontière entre le terrorisme se revendiquant de la mouvance islamique et le banditisme est poreuse. Certains groupes terroristes externalisent une partie de leur activité à des criminels et d'autres, comme celui détenant les otages espagnols enlevés en Mauritanie et emmenés au Mali, sont davantage animés par des motivations financières que politiques.
40.	Aqmi est rapidement devenu un cauchemar pour les pays de la région, gagnant en hommes, en technicité et en moyens logistiques à chaque enlèvement, et construisant des alliances opportunistes avec les bandes de trafiquants opérant dans la bande sahélienne.
41.	-
42.	[…] si l'on en croit certains responsables de l'Otan, qui craignent que ces armes se retrouvent dans de mauvaises mains au Sahel.
43.	Selon des sources bien informées, Aqmi se serait d'ores et déjà procuré plusieurs missiles et chercherait à acquérir le savoir-faire pour les utiliser. Dans les services de renseignements français, on redoute que les stocks de munitions et d'explosifs servent à fomenter de nouveaux attentats contre des intérêts français au Maghreb ou sur le territoire français. En juillet, un djihadiste équipé de 20 kg d'explosifs a été arrêté à Tunis alors qu'il préparait une attaque contre l'ambassade de France en Tunisie ou au Qatar. Plus récemment, l'armée tunisienne a dû utiliser de gros moyens militaires, notamment des hélicoptères, pour arrêter un groupe de combattants d'Aqmi qui tentait de pénétrer sur son territoire. Plusieurs interceptions « délicates » ont été menées ces derniers mois par des forces françaises à la frontière du Niger. Mais les trafics démantelés ne sont que la face émergée d'un iceberg qui pourrait porter la contagion dans toute la région.
44.	[…] le Sahara s'est transformé, ces dernières années, en poudrière. Prises d'otages occidentaux contre rançons, contrôle du trafic de drogue, alliance avec les contrebandiers : Aqmi s'est constitué un butin de plusieurs dizaines de millions d'euros pour acheter des armes et des complicités locales dans la population ou dans les rangs des officiels […]. Dans les services de renseignements français, on redoute que les stocks de munitions et d'explosifs servent à fomenter de nouveaux attentats contre des intérêts français au Maghreb ou sur le territoire français.
45.	Le nord du pays est devenu une véritable poudrière qui pourrait échapper à toute forme de contrôle. Une zone de non-droit où l'on croise des narcotrafiquants, les déçus de la rébellion touarègue, des bandits de grand chemin, d'anciens soldats de Kadhafi surarmés et les combattants d'Aqmi.
46.	Des affrontements ont éclaté, hier, dans le nord du Mali entre l'armée et des touaregs, les premiers depuis le retour de centaines de ces ex-rebelles armés, accueillis par Kadhafi et qui avaient combattu à ses côtés avant sa chute. Ces combats illustrent l'insécurité grandissante dans l'immense territoire qu'est le nord malien, où opère aussi Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique (Aqmi).
47.	Les autorités maliennes semblent décidées à rivaliser avec la puissance de feu des insurgés, qui sont pour la plupart des anciens combattants touaregs de Libye. Ces soldats aguerris sont rentrés chez eux en juillet avec, à l'arrière de leurs pick-up et de leurs véhicules 4 × 4, des stocks d'armes lourdes récupérées dans les arsenaux de l'ancien régime. Leur leader, le colonel

	Mohammed Ag Najim, un ex-chef de bataillon des commandos de Mouammar Kadhafi, s'était rapproché des opposants au dictateur libyen avant la chute du régime.
48.	« affrontements » ; « combats » ; « guerre » ; « conflit »
49.	« éclaté »
50.	Trafics d'armes, rébellion touarègue, coup d'Etat... la chute de Kadhafi a bouleversé une région déjà déstabilisée par le djihadisme […]. Dès l'effondrement du régime Kadhafi, il était évident que sa chute aurait des répercussions dans toute la bande saharienne, où il n'est pas une rébellion ou un pouvoir qu'il n'ait, à un moment ou un autre, financé, armé, combattu ou parrainé durant les quatre dernières décennies. L'onde de choc n'a pas pris six mois pour atteindre le nord du Mali […]. Actuellement, le Mali est le concentré explosif des maux d'une zone aussi immense que grise, qui va de l'Atlantique à l'océan Indien et où les trafics alimentent aussi bien les extrémistes islamistes d'Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique (AQMI), que les mouvements de guérilla touareg et l'état-major d'une armée gangrenée par la corruption.
51.	« l'absence de l'État »
52.	[…] le manque de présence de l'État dans ces provinces désertiques ajoute au malaise. Bamako a laissé pourrir la situation et, comme la nature a horreur du vide, Aqmi a peu à peu occupé l'espace au détriment des Touaregs. Les djihadistes ont pu installer en toute impunité des bases fixes. Résultat : aujourd'hui plus personne ne maîtrise quoi que ce soit.
53.	Mais la rébellion ne s'est pas bornée à instaurer un rapport de forces militaires : elle a révélé le pourrissement d'un régime.
54.	La région est en proie à une instabilité multiple. La plus évidente est liée à la rébellion touarègue qui a été le déclencheur du coup d'Etat. Les militaires qui ont renversé le régime malien reprochaient au pouvoir en place son « incompétence » et le manque de moyens pour combattre la rébellion au nord, incarnée par le Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad (MLNA).
55.	L'absence d'État en Libye, la violence continue des tribus libyennes sur la longue durée et l'énorme arsenal sans contrôle, après le conflit, menacent tout le Sahel. Et ce avec la dissémination des milliers de missiles dans la « zone grise » sahélienne au profit, entre autres, des mouvements islamistes, l'armement des indépendantistes touaregs implicitement encouragés à retourner au Mali avec armes et bagages et le « lâchage » discret du président Toumani Touré […]. Le coup d'État à Bamako en est la conséquence.
56.	Côté touareg, un ex-chef des rébellions de 1990 et 2006, Iyad Ag Ghali, a pris un virage islamiste.
57.	Les confins désertiques sont peu accessibles aux médias en raison notamment de la présence des katiba d'al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique (Aqmi) traquant les Occidentaux pour alimenter le business des otages. Selon les autorités de Bamako, Aqmi apporterait son assistance aux rebelles touaregs. Des membres d'al-Qaida auraient participé à des attaques à Tessalit et à Menaka et des éléments islamistes seraient impliqués dans le massacre de plusieurs dizaines de soldats maliens à Aguelhok. Si des passerelles existent, il n'y aurait pas de véritable alliance politique entre les islamistes armés et la rébellion touarègue traditionnelle, mais les deux parties ont des intérêts en commun.
58.	Le Mali s'enfonce dans une crise sans nom et plus personne ne le nie. Dimanche, le capitaine Amadou Haya Sanogo, chef de la junte au pouvoir depuis le 22 mars, date du putsch contre le

	président Amadou Toumani Touré, l'a reconnu en ordonnant le rétablissement sans délai de la Constitution et des institutions.
59.	Le Mali est confronté à une double crise de souveraineté : une crise institutionnelle, au lendemain du putsch de la junte militaire du capitaine Sanogo, et une crise territoriale depuis la proclamation de l'indépendance de l'Azawad par le Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) et l'immixtion de terroristes au nord, pour certains alliés au mouvement « islamo-touareg » Ansar Dine. Cette seconde crise n'avait aucune chance d'être solutionnée sans un règlement de la première.
60.	Nouvelle prise d'otage, risques de famine dans une région en proie à la sécheresse, combattants islamistes de la secte nigériane Boko Haram paradant dans les rues de Gao : le nord du Mali s'enfonce dans un inextricable chaos.
61.	La Communauté économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (Cédéao) va envoyer des troupes dans les deux États malades de la région, le Mali et la Guinée-Bissau, tous deux victimes récemment de putschs militaires.
62.	-
63.	-
64.	-
65.	-
66.	Le Premier ministre malien de transition cheick Modibo Diarra, a rencontré hier le médiateur burkinabé Blaise Compaoré, après avoir promis d'accélérer le pas pour former un gouvernement d'union nationale, exigé par l'Afrique de l'Ouest d'ici au 31 juillet sous peine de sanctions. L'objectif est d'unir toutes les forces du pays pour la reconquête du nord du Mali, occupé par des groupes islamistes armés depuis fin mars.
67.	-
68.	-
69.	[…] car Mujao et Al-Qaida se comportent en barbares.
70.	Gao s'est habitué à la charia. Dans la cité du fleuve du nord malien, aux mains des islamistes du Mouvement unicité et jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (Mujao) depuis des semaines, plus une femme ne circule sans son voile. « Même les petites filles doivent être couvertes, les infirmières aussi sinon il y des remontrances », affirme Ousmane Daba, l'un des chefs du Conseil régional des jeunes de Gao. Les bars ont tous été fermés, comme les dancings. Les plus célèbres ont fini en flammes. Les autres en mosquée […]. Dans le quartier Njawa, un camp d'entraînement a déjà transformé des dizaines de « petits » en néoislamistes. On y enseigne l'islam le plus strict et les méthodes les plus expéditives. Les gamins, la tête gonflée, retrouvent ensuite leur rue d'origine, une trique et, parfois, une kalachnikov à la main. L'humeur, dans Gao, a changé.
71.	La question d'une intervention militaire pour libérer le nord du Mali du joug islamiste ne se pose plus.
72.	[…] en butte à la tyrannie islamiste.
73.	Le porte-parole du groupe islamiste Ansar Dine, Sanda Ould Boumama, a déclaré samedi 30 juin au matin que son mouvement allait « détruire aujourd'hui tous les mausolées de la ville. Tous les mausolées sans exception » avant d'ajouter : « Dieu, il est unique. Tout ça, c'est 'haram' (interdit en islam). Nous, nous sommes musulmans. L'Unesco, c'est quoi ça ? », en rappelant le sort qui avait été réservé aux Bouddhas de Bamiyan en Afghanistan détruits en mars 2001 par les talibans et leurs alliés d'Al-Qaida […]. Ils ont instantanément mis leurs menaces à exécution. Les islamistes d'Ansar Dine se sont tout d'abord attaqués au sanctuaire

	de Sidi Mahmoud, dans le nord de la ville, qui avait déjà été profané début mai par des membres d'Al-Qaida au Maghreb islamique (Aqmi), un allié d'Ansar Dine. « Ils ont cassé (et) fait tomber le mur » de clôture du site, « c'est très grave », a déclaré en pleurant un des témoins. Puis en quelques heures les islamistes ont détruit les mausolées de Sidi Moctar et d'Alpha Moya dans cette ville mythique. « Ils ont violé aujourd'hui Tombouctou. C'est un crime », s'est indigné un autre témoin […].
74.	« effondrement »
75.	« Il faut aussi que les « pays du champ », comme la Mauritanie, l'Algérie, la Libye voire le Tchad soient parties prenantes pour éviter que cette zone devienne un Afghanistan sahélien », expliquait le chef d'État béninois.
76.	Alors que les responsables politiques s'inquiètent de l'émergence d'un « Sahelistan », d'après l'expression de Laurent Fabius, le président ivoirien Alassane Ouattara a indiqué que la Cédéao déposerait « prochainement » une nouvelle demande de résolution auprès du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, en vue d'une intervention qu'il estime « inévitable ».
77.	« les nouvelles terres du djihad »
78.	-
79.	François Hollande souhaitait rencontrer l'Afrique à petits pas. Mais un dossier, la crise malienne, s'est imposé et a exigé d'accélérer le rythme. Les derniers événements n'ont fait que le prouver. Samedi, alors que le président français terminait à Kinshasa sa première tournée africaine, les islamistes qui occupent le nord du Mali ont menacé la vie des six otages français retenus dans la région […]. Cette sortie n'a rien d'une coïncidence. Durant toute sa visite africaine, François Hollande n'a cessé de battre le rappel pour une plus grande mobilisation autour du problème malien. […] Dans ce cadre, les déclarations des islamistes n'ont pas étonné les diplomates. « C'est une réaction prévisible », explique l'un d'eux, en affirmant qu'elle ne changera rien à la politique française.
80.	Le sort des six otages français retenus au Sahel par des groupes liés à al-Qaida est également largement pris en compte. Mardi, François Hollande a reçu les familles des deux ingénieurs capturés en novembre dernier. « Nous sommes sortis de cette entrevue convaincus que le président prenait le dossier à bras-le-corps, mais nous sommes très angoissés à cause des tensions actuelles et de la possibilité d'une intervention militaire », a affirmé Jean-Pierre Verdon, le père de l'un d'eux otages, qui regrette que « les négociations piétinent ». Accueillis à l'Élysée en septembre, les proches des quatre autres prisonniers, enlevés il y a deux ans au Niger, s'avouaient eux aussi très soucieux. « On a du mal à comprendre ce qui se trame. Quel est l'objectif d'une mission militaire au nord du Mali ? A-t-on l'intention d'éliminer les chefs d'al-Qaida ? Et dans ce cas, le gouvernement a-t-il prévu une mission simultanée pour sauver les otages ? », demande Pascal Lupart, président du comité de soutien. À Dakar, François Hollande a assuré que la détermination française à intervenir au plus vite au Mali ne nuirait pas aux prisonniers.
81.	[…] une zone où la communauté internationale veut arrêter la progression des djihadistes.
82.	[…] pour éradiquer al-Qaida de la région […]. C'est-à-dire, concrètement, d'empêcher la reconstitution d'un sanctuaire terroriste dans la région.
83.	[...] ils représentent une menace non seulement pour la région mais aussi pour les pays européens. Or, la France pourrait se retrouver en première ligne dans ce conflit […]. La rébellion, qui comprendrait de 4 000 à 6 000 combattants mais qui continuerait à être renforcée par l'arrivée de jihadistes, pourrait en outre s'étendre aux autres pays de la région avec le risque

	de créer en plein Sahel une base arrière du terrorisme international, comme ce fut le cas en Afghanistan sous le régime des talibans ou encore en Somalie.
84.	Pour l'Europe de la défense, le Sahel est un test. Serpent de mer brandi par tous les ministres de la Défense français depuis les accords de Saint-Malo avec la Grande-Bretagne en 1998, la défense européenne tient-elle enfin sa revanche grâce aux islamistes qui depuis six mois ont pris le contrôle du nord du Mali, menaçant ainsi la sécurité du Vieux Continent ?
285.	L'Algérie et la Tunisie vont coopérer dans le domaine de la sécurité pour faire face à la situation au Mali, pays dont le nord est occupé par des islamistes armés, a déclaré, hier à Alger, le ministre tunisien des Affaires étrangères. Hier soir, Al-Qaida (Aqmi) a appelé les dirigeants africains à se désolidariser de la « politique va-t-en guerre de la France », menaçant la vie des otages et les intérêts français au Sahel.