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Comparing U.S. and French Approaches to  
Counterterrorism in Africa

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty and the Honors Program  
Of the University of San Diego

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By  
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International Relations & French  
2018

## Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i> .....	4
<i>Background Information</i> .....	5
<b>Terrorism in Africa</b> .....	5
<b>The United States and Africa</b> .....	7
<b>France and Africa</b> .....	10
<i>Al-Shabab</i> .....	12
<b>Fighting Al-Shabab</b> .....	13
AMISOM .....	14
The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa .....	15
Humanitarian Concerns .....	17
<b>The Current State of Al-Shabab</b> .....	18
<i>Boko Haram</i> .....	19
<b>Fighting Boko Haram</b> .....	22
Training and Support for Local Governments .....	25
Diplomatic Relationships .....	28
Humanitarian Aid .....	29
<b>The Current State of Boko Haram</b> .....	30
<i>Al Qaeda and the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)</i> .....	30
<b>Fighting AQIM</b> .....	32
Operation Barkhane .....	32
U.S. Operations Against AQIM .....	39
<b>The Current State of AQIM</b> .....	41

*Conclusion* ..... 42

*Works Cited*..... 44

## Introduction

Both France and the United States have been victims of deadly attacks perpetrated by Islamist terrorists. The September 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S. and the November 2015 attacks in France alike received worldwide attention, making counterterrorism a high priority for the two countries. Despite its importance for both the U.S. and France, there is a large disparity in spending between the two states. The U.S. will spend \$602.8 billion dollars on defense in 2018, while France's 2018 defense budget is \$48.6 billion dollars, a mere 8% of the United States budget (Chapter Two: Comparative defence statistics). In spite of its limited budget, France is seen as the primary counterterrorism force in Africa and has seen much greater success than the U.S. The question of how France has been able to achieve greater success than the United States with fewer resources drives this paper.

This paper will analyze the approaches to counterterrorism in Africa by the United States and France, in order to explain why France has been much more effective in using its limited budget to fight terrorism in Africa. Together, these two countries have been effective in killing many terrorists but haven't remedied the conditions that initially led to such extremism. The United States, fueled by the desire to fight terrorism and the aversion to committing resources to Africa, has failed to define a cohesive strategy and therefore has been scattered and ambiguous in the region. Meanwhile, the French have seen counterterrorism as an important responsibility in Africa, and therefore have used their more limited resources to create a more focused strategy in the Sahel.

Differences in American and French approaches to counterterrorism can be seen partly through the news media. Newspapers play a critical role in shaping public opinion, especially that of the elites. As Jerome Slater argued, news organizations like *The New York Times* shape

how the public perceives an issue and its importance through its decisions about article placement, what to include in the article, and what to omit from the article (88). Throughout this paper, news articles from the front pages of *The New York Times* and French newspaper *Le Monde* from January 1, 2018 – April 20, 2018 will be used to demonstrate aspects of the American and French perspectives on Africa.

This paper specifically focuses on three African terrorist groups: Al-Shabab, Boko Haram, and AQIM. If one were to draw a line across Africa directly below the Sahara, the line would go through the territory of each of these three groups. The U.S. and France have varying levels of commitment to fighting each of these groups. The U.S. tends to focus more on Al-Shabab in Somalia, but is also fairly involved in the fight against Boko Haram and AQIM. France, on the other hand, has put the majority of its focus on AQIM, with significant efforts against Boko Haram as well, but has largely ignored Al-Shabab.

## Background Information

### **Terrorism in Africa**

Africa has experienced many local conflicts and crises leading to the growth of terrorism on the continent. This is especially true for the region that runs across the center of Africa just below the Sahara, from Mali in the West to Somalia in the East, which is the focus of this study. Many terrorist groups thrive in this region, but it's not because of their ideological appeal. Instead, they often gain success due to the way they exploit these local conflicts and crises (Lebovich). Food shortages, poor governance, and local conflicts all create opportunities for terrorist groups to take advantage and gain more power in the region.

Food shortages have been a recurrent issue for people in Africa. Food shortages lead to weak, angry populations that can turn to violence when they feel disadvantaged. An African

government official noticed this when he said, “When someone is hungry, he is no longer dangerous” (Taub). Terrorist groups in Africa often take advantage of these situations, capitalizing on the weakness of the population and offering to provide for the people better than the government does.

Poor governance is a constant problem for many African states. When the government fails to provide for its people, the people have no reason to remain loyal to the state. Many of the governments in the region are accused not only of neglecting their people, but of acting violently towards their people (Taub). This leads to the people turning to extremists who offer to protect them from this violence and who promise a better style of governance.

Terrorist groups frequently take advantage of local conflicts in order to advance their own agendas. These groups will promise to help a group that sees itself as marginalized by the government and the broader population. These people will then see the terrorist groups as beneficial and will work with them and support them. Al Qaeda and its affiliates are known for using this tactic of taking advantage of local conflicts in order to gain support (Chivvis 61).

Any one of these factors is corrosive enough to lead to the development of terrorism, but a combination of them leads to even greater likelihood of extremism. Additionally, instability in one state frequently spills across borders and impacts neighboring states. Occurrences such as famine and ethnic conflicts rarely are confined within borders, and the existence of these problems in Africa has made entire regions unstable. Niger is a prime example of this. While the state of Niger itself is relatively stable, it is surrounded by instability and conflict (Keane). Along Niger’s borders are militants fighting for AQIM, Boko Haram, and the Islamic State, and these terrorists have begun flowing across the border into Niger (Blinder et al.).

Officials in both the American and French governments, along with others around the world, recognize these factors in Africa and acknowledge the possibility for safe havens for terrorists to develop. Even when funding and programming haven't matched it, the West has had significant concern for this region for years (Chivvis 46).

This lack of demonstrated concern is understandable, however, when one considers the threat these groups pose to the West. While they frequently prescribe to a violent, anti-Western agenda, terrorist groups in this region of Africa more often choose local or regional targets for their attacks (Chivvis 4). These groups sometimes will attack Western interests in the region, such as embassies or businesses, but rarely stretch outside of Africa (Lebovich). Local Africans are at a much higher risk of being hurt by extremists in the region than are residents of France or the United States (Lebovich). In the past, it was believed that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram, and Al-Shabab were forming an alliance with the intention of targeting Western interests in coordination with each other, and there is still concern that alliances could form in order to attack the West. However, discussions of such an alliance ended when Al-Shabab officially allied itself with Al Qaeda in 2011, and no other alliances are currently suspected (Kelley 36).

### **The United States and Africa**

As many African states gained independence during the Cold War era, much of the United States' policy for Africa was initially created through the Cold War lens. This resulted in the United States viewing Africa as a place to make geopolitical gains against the Soviet Union. The U.S. spent little in Africa and thought little of Africa, allowing European states to take a larger role on the continent. During this time period, the main concern for the U.S. in Africa was stability, so it often supported existing regimes that were relatively undesirable in order to



maintain stability and avoid revolutions (Dunn and Englebert 346). During the course of the Cold War, the focus of U.S. bilateral aid to Africa shifted, from being designated primarily for development in 1973 to the majority being for political purposes in 1985 (Dunn and Englebert 281). After the Cold War, the U.S. lost troops in Somalia in the 1990s, and since this perceived tragedy, the U.S. has attempted to avoid committing American troops to Africa (Dunn and Englebert 348).

In the late 1990s, two American embassies were simultaneously attacked in East Africa. These twin attacks not only killed 200 and wounded 5,000, but they brought terrorism in Africa to the forefront in the U.S. government and put Osama bin Laden on the F.B.I.'s Most Wanted list (Blinder et al.). After 9/11, terrorism became a prevalent concern in American foreign policy, and counterterrorism measures in Africa increased. The U.S. began training state militaries around Africa, hoping to strengthen them in order to prevent the creation of terrorist havens in Africa (Lebovich).

In the post-9/11 era, the Bush and the Obama administrations had three main objectives in Sub-Saharan Africa: securing access to oil and natural resources, preventing terrorism, and implementing market reforms (Dunn and Englebert 348). American goals in the region today remain relatively similar to these; strengthening local governments and institutions, promoting democracy, and facilitating development are often seen as the current goals in the region, with the hope that accomplishing these goals will also lead to the defeat of terrorism on the continent (Taub). The Trump administration has proclaimed fighting terrorism as one of its primary objectives (Foroohar and Viscusi). Senator Lindsey Graham, a senior member of the Senate Armed Service Committee, said in October 2017, "You're going to see more actions in Africa, not less; you're going to see more aggression by the United States toward our enemies, not less"

(Demirjian). However, American policy in Africa is often split between those who view the continent through a democracy promotion lens and those who focus more strictly on counterterrorism issues (Chivvis 82).

Today, the U.S. military is very active on the continent. In 2008, the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) was created, signaling the military's increased commitment to the continent (Dunn and Englebert 350). The only permanent American military base in Africa, Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, began operation in 2003, primarily as a base for military operations in the Horn of Africa ("Camp Lemonnier"). Of the 6,000 American troops currently stationed in Africa, about 4,000 are at Camp Lemonnier. Additionally, American Special Operations Forces are deployed around the continent, including in Nigeria, Niger, Somalia, Chad, Mali, and Mauritania (Cooper, Gibbons-Neff and Schmitt, 9 February 2018).

Around the world, there has been a shifting trend towards regional intervention instead of intervention by stronger Western powers. The United States, along with other powers, assumes that regional interventions are more effective because they are smaller and therefore quicker to respond; they have a shared cultural background and therefore better understand the conflict; and they are more likely to suffer from armed conflict in their region and therefore have a greater interest in maintaining security (Dunn and Englebert 301-302). This focus on regional intervention guides American counterterrorism operations in Africa.

Even though government policy has begun to focus more on counterterrorism in Africa, many Americans still view the continent through the lens of humanitarian crises. Dunn and Englebert argue that Africa is typically portrayed in the media as "a helpless, collapsing continent in need of saving but, at the same time, seemingly beyond comprehension and salvation" (313). Blinder et al. describe Africa as "a place where most Americans are

accustomed to expending dollars, not lives.” This has made it difficult for Americans to accept military action in Africa, preferring to give money to starving children rather than to send members of the U.S. military to die in a battle they know little to nothing about. This perception isn’t exclusive to the public but has influenced policymakers as well. These policymakers then struggle to create a policy that effectively fights terrorism without putting American soldiers at risk.

The fact that the American public tends to focus on humanitarian aid in Africa might lead one to believe that the U.S. government focuses on humanitarian aid as the most important part of its Africa policy. While the U.S. military is very active in Africa, the Department of State is the primary actor on the continent and holds the final say (Gulliksen). The Department of State plays a key role in building relationships with other states, developing strategies alongside the Department of Defense and the partner state, and monitoring who from the U.S. Government can enter the partner state (Gulliksen). The U.S. is only able to perform counterterrorism operations in states that invite American assistance, so building and maintaining strong relationships with the states the U.S. desires to work in is very important (Gulliksen). However, the Department of State has often been pushed aside by the military when immediate security concerns are involved, implying that the U.S. takes military operations as primary to humanitarian or diplomatic operations.

### **France and Africa**

Contrary to the United States, France has a long history of close relationships with states in Africa. France colonized a large part of Africa, including the majority of the northwestern section of the continent. France was much more involved with its colonies than other European powers, cultivating relationships through cultural, economic, and political ties (Dunn and

Englebert 335). As the desire for independence began growing in the colonies in the late 1950s, France offered autonomy to its colonies in one of two ways. It allowed colonies to choose to become entirely separated from France, a choice that would leave a colony without access to any French resources or support. If a colony desired to continue to receive French support, it could choose to join the French Community, in which former colonies would have the ability to self-rule but would remain closely bound to France. Guinea was the only colony to sever all ties with France; all of the other colonies chose to join the French Community and maintain their close ties with France. These relationships have remained strong due to extensive diplomacy, close economic ties, and military bases throughout the continent (Dunn and Englebert 336). France has not only maintained close relationships with its own former colonies but has built strong relationships with other states in Africa as well. Both francophone and non-francophone African states have pursued relationships with France, and today France is the leading Western arms seller on the continent (Dunn and Englebert 337).

France's close connections with its former colonies and other states in Africa have garnered accusations of neocolonialism, often dubbed "françafrique." Former French President François Hollande and other French officials have declared their departure from this system and have actively attempted to demonstrate that they are pursuing more equal relationships with African states (Chivvis 75). However, longstanding relationships with African states built around colonialism and then neocolonialism created today's military structures, developed today's political leaders, and shaped today's public opinion, making it incredibly difficult for France to move away from this perspective (Chivvis 172). Additionally, West Africa supplies substantial amounts of oil and uranium to France's energy industry, creating further incentive for the French government to involve itself in the region (Chafer 129).

Fighting terrorism is just as much of a priority for the French government as it is for the American government. The first in a long series of terrorist attacks in France that began in 2012 was committed by a Muslim of North African origin, sparking a debate about whether other attacks would be committed by members of France's large population of African descendants (Chivvis 51).

France's military in Africa operates out of bases in Senegal, Gabon, and Djibouti (Zachary). It has also worked with American counterterrorism efforts around the world since 9/11, sharing critical intelligence with American counterterrorism forces (Chivvis 41).

## Al-Shabab

Al-Shabab developed in the midst of civil war in Somalia. The civil war, which began in 1991, created a lasting state of anarchy. Amidst the lack of law and order, sharia courts were established and organized themselves into the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). The ICU created a military branch that removed warlords from power, which would later become known as Al-Shabab. As a part of the ICU, Al-Shabab began to focus on removing the Ethiopian military from Somalia, and eventually separated itself from the ICU as it continued to fight the Ethiopian military after the ICU stopped. Eventually, Al-Shabab shifted its focus from the Ethiopian military and to the transnational terrorism it pursues today (Kelley 32-35).

As a result of the civil war and other factors, Somalis are constantly faced with the threat of food shortage. According to the United Nations, 2.7 million people in Somalia face "severe food insecurity." Across Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya, at least 12 million people rely on food aid. Herders in the region regularly fight over livestock and land, sometimes even killing one another for access to enough land (Sengupta, 2018). This has created a population that is more susceptible to extremist ideology, and more desperate for assistance.

Although Al-Shabab has claimed to be affiliated with Al Qaeda since 2007, it wasn't recognized by Al Qaeda as an affiliate until 2012 (Kelley 35). This affiliation means that Al-Shabab now has access to the training, materials, and funds that are available to affiliates through the central Al Qaeda organization (Kelley 39). Since this affiliation was formalized, there has been a visible shift in Al-Shabab's tactics to be more similar to those used by Al Qaeda. For Al Shabab, this has included the use of suicide bombers, attracting fighters from around the world, and calling for global jihad, while focusing on liberating Somalia from outside influences (Kelley 35). Some factions of Al-Shabab tend to stick more strictly to this focus, while others are more interested in participating in Al Qaeda's global war (Savage and Schmitt, "Trump Eases Combat Rules in Somalia"). However, there have been several recruitment videos produced by Al Shabab that, citing racism and anti-Muslim sentiment, call for attacks on American and European targets (Blanchard). The most well-known attack by Al-Shabab, at least for a Western audience, is its 2013 attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, in which 60 people died and more than 175 were wounded (Savage and Schmitt, "Trump Eases Combat Rules in Somalia").

Al-Shabab gained new leadership in 2015, resulting in somewhat of a resurgence of the group when they launched a high-profile attack, as well as many smaller attacks on areas proclaimed to have been liberated in Somalia (Blanchard). The organization is stable as it is well-funded from taxation and extortion, international jihadists and businesses, allied groups and affiliates, and state sponsorship (Kelley 36). Al-Shabab is also suspected to profit from the illicit sugar trade into Kenya and possibly heroin trafficking (Blanchard).

### **Fighting Al-Shabab**

Somalia is seen as more of a priority for the United States than for France. Somalia wasn't colonized by France, and although it does have a relationship with France today, this

relationship isn't nearly as strong as France's relationships with its former colonies. The U.S., by contrast, has historically focused its counterterrorism efforts on the Middle East, and Somalia's close proximity to the Middle East makes instability in Somalia a concern for U.S. interests in the Middle East. In 2016, the Obama Administration decided finally to designate Al Shabab as an Al Qaeda "associated force," confirming the ability of the U.S. to fight it under the counterterrorism acts enacted to fight the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks (Savage and Schmitt, "Trump Eases Combat Rules in Somalia").

The stronger interest of the United States in Somalia can be seen through the representation of Somalia on the front page of *The New York Times* as compared to its representation on the front page of *Le Monde*. From January 1<sup>st</sup> through April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Somalia was featured in two front-page articles in *The New York Times*, but was not featured in a single front-page article in *Le Monde* in the same time period.

U.S. and French approaches to Al-Shabab are focused primarily through the African Union Mission to Somalia, AMISOM, the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, and humanitarian efforts.

### *AMISOM*

The African Union Mission to Somalia, AMISOM, is an UN-backed force fighting Al-Shabab in Somalia (Blanchard). Both the U.S. and France pay the United Nations to support this mission, and France also gives money to the European Mission that supports this operation ("France and Somalia"). The United States does give significantly more to the UN's peacekeeping budget than France, at 29% compared to France's 6.3%, but this difference is due to many other factors (Feroz and Viscusi). Donations to the UN and the EU in support of this

force are the primary ways that France assists with counterterrorism in Somalia (“France and Somalia”).

In addition to donating through the UN, the U.S. has also invested in AMISOM directly. The U.S. has invested more than \$1.5 billion to develop AMISOM and Somali national forces, a commitment that is large enough to attract congressional interest (Blanchard). U.S. AFRICOM has stated that one of its goals for Somalia is to transition from the AMISOM mission to a Somali-led security force within the country. However, the Somali military is not yet capable of ensuring security within the state, as its current forces are fragmented, under-resourced, and simply too new to be capable of stabilizing the state (Blanchard). In addition to AMISOM, the U.S. also assists the Ethiopian military, which is involved in counterterrorism and stability-building in Somalia (Dunn and Englebert 349).

#### *The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa*

The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) was created by the United States Military in 2002 as a part of the increase in U.S. military engagement in Africa after 9/11 (Dunn and Englebert 349). When it was created, CJTF-HOA was the first U.S. military deployment to Africa since 1993, when American soldiers died in the Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia (Harbeson and Rothchild 276). CJTF-HOA is based at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, where approximately 4,000 American troops work with CJTF-HOA as well as other operations in the region (Cooper, Gibbons-Neff and Schmitt, 9 February 2018). Additionally, hundreds of soldiers rotate through provisional bases around Somalia (Savage and Schmitt, “Trump Eases Combat Rules in Somalia”).

The soldiers of CJTF-HOA are primarily working to train and advise African Union and Somali forces, but some of these soldiers do see direct combat (Savage and Schmitt, 30 March



2017). In 2016, the U.S. military conducted 13 ground raids and air strikes in Somalia, which killed about 200 people suspected of being terrorists and 25 citizens (Savage and Schmitt, 30 March 2017). In early 2017, American Special Operations forces were carrying out about six raids a month with local military forces (Savage and Schmitt, 30 March 2017).

The military personnel at CJTF-HOA have gained new freedom to act under the Trump administration, which has declared parts of Somalia to be zones of “active hostilities,” allowing the military in the region to follow rules for war zones, rather than the stricter rules for fighting outside war zones. The relaxation of this rule allows targets to be pursued more quickly as commanders in AFRICOM are given more authority to launch attacks in Somalia. It allows strikes to be carried out against targets thought to be a part of Al-Shabab, without requiring proof that they are a specific threat to Americans. This change also allows a higher risk for civilian deaths in American missions (Savage and Schmitt, 30 March 2017). However, Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser, the head of AFRICOM, has said that he doesn’t plan to change the requirement that there be “near certainty” that no civilians would die in a strike (Savage and Schmitt, 21 September 2017). This change was framed by the U.S. government in terms of American self-interest. A Pentagon spokesperson said, “The additional support provided by this authority will help deny Al Shabab safe havens from which it would attack U.S. citizens or U.S. interests in the region” (Savage and Schmitt, 30 March 2017).

Drone strikes are often commonly used by the U.S. military in Somalia. Although there have been less strikes in Somalia than in Pakistan or Yemen, Obama and now Trump have been increasing the number of drone strikes (Blanchard). Trump loosened restrictions on drones in the same way as he loosened restrictions on other forms of strikes, giving AFRICOM more freedom to pursue suspected militants with drone strikes (Blinder et al.).

### *Humanitarian Concerns*

Both of the front-page articles about Somalia in *The New York Times* during early 2018 focus on humanitarian concerns about the region. One article discusses the health concern of increasing obesity rates in Africa, in the context of a continent with high rates of malnutrition. While this article discusses the issue impacting the entire continent, it focuses its discussion on conditions in the Horn of Africa. This article describes rising obesity rates in Africa as “catching Africa, and the world, by surprise” (Gettleman). To the author of this article, along with the average American citizen, Africa is still seen as a continent of famine and food shortages, and the author reinforces that idea in this article. This obesity problem is also very relatable for the American audience. Americans are accustomed to hearing the story about people who “have just enough money to buy processed foods like potato chips... (but) they often do not have enough to join a gym or buy fish or fresh vegetables” (Gettleman). While this article does make concerns in Africa seem more relatable to the American reader, it continues to highlight the traditional narrative of malnutrition in Africa. The author wrote, “Even as the obesity problem worsens, Africa’s older problem of malnutrition has hardly vanished. While millions of Africans are eating unhealthy foods or overeating, millions of Africans are still starving or near to it” (Gettleman).

The other article about Somalia discusses the impacts of global warming on food security in the Horn of Africa. From the title, “Hotter, Drier, Hungrier: How Global Warming Punishes the World’s Poorest,” the article is framed around poverty in Africa. This article goes on to give staggering numbers about the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa. It discusses the 650,000 children age five and under across the Horn who are malnourished; the 260,000 Somalis who

died of hunger during the 2011 drought, and the violence between herders amidst such poor conditions (Sengupta, 2018).

Of course, the numbers given by *The New York Times* are legitimate, and the problems it discusses are real concerns for the people they affect. However, with this much discussion about the humanitarian concerns in the region, along with the knowledge that extremists flourish in crisis environments, it would seem only natural to follow that the U.S. would put significant resources into humanitarian effort. However, that isn't the case. The U.S. government gives the majority of its bilateral aid to the region for political and strategic purposes, rather than development (Dunn and Englebert 281).

### **The Current State of Al-Shabab**

Al-Shabab continues to have a considerable influence in the region, but it has been hurt by military operations. Al-Shabab has been hurt by counterterrorism operations, and it's possible that Trump's broader attacks will lead to even more damage to the organization. Additionally, Al-Shabab has many factions that frequently fight, which hurt its ability to act cohesively and to attack larger targets (Blanchard).

However, it would be naïve to believe that terrorism can be expelled without solving the problems that led to the development of terrorism in the first place. Although Kenya has been strengthening its security, Al-Shabab continues to launch attacks and recruit within Kenya (Blanchard). Somalia suffers from political infighting, clan competition, and corruption that will make it much more difficult for the state military to create stability in Somalia (Blanchard). As long as humanitarian concerns remain, the likelihood that Islamism would disappear from Somalia is very low. Humanitarian aid has arrived quickly in times of extreme hunger, and this

aid has helped Somalia avoid facing full-blown famines (Gettleman). However, large numbers of Somalis still face high food insecurity and malnutrition, so the problem is not yet solved.

## Boko Haram

Jihadism has been a recurrent concern in Nigeria for hundreds of years (Taub). Boko Haram was created in 2001 in northern Nigeria with the desire to form an Islamic state (Kelley 36). At the time, Nigeria was still suffering from the devastating legacy colonialism had left in the country. Corruption in the government left many feeling disadvantaged and neglected, and the large numbers of unemployed youth were easily attracted to the idea of creating a caliphate (Taub). For the first eight years, Boko Haram avoided violent tactics, but in 2009 it became a violent threat to the region (Taub).

Nigeria faces many problems that can drive its citizens to turn to extremism. The wealth gap in the country is incredibly high, and corruption continues to be a problem. The educational system is also extremely poor, preventing young people from accessing new opportunities (O'Grady). Many Nigerians have left the country, making the long and dangerous trek through Libya in an attempt to reach the opportunity and promise of Europe. This journey puts the migrant at incredibly high risk, with many being kidnapped, sold, extorted, sold into prostitution, or forced into unpaid labor. In detention centers in Libya, many migrants report being abused and denied food and medicine (O'Grady). However, the situation in Nigeria is so destitute that many of those who have been captured and returned to Nigeria feel “robbed of the possibility for a better life” (O'Grady). The people who have been returned are frustrated and desperate, which could mean disaster for Nigeria (O'Grady).

In addition to Nigeria, Boko Haram is active in parts of neighboring states, including Niger and Chad. Niger is facing significant problems as a result of food and land shortages.

Herders and farmers have begun killing each other in order to gain access to dwindling arable land. There have been almost fifteen thousand people killed in these conflicts, similar to the number killed in conflicts with Boko Haram (Taub). Niger also suffers from historical local conflicts and anger with the government's approach to development in rural parts of the country (Lebovich).

Chad suffers from political conflict due to the fact that Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi frequently supported overthrowing Chadian rulers, while France and the United States propped up the existing government to counter these actions (Taub). These conflicts have led to an incredibly ineffective state, propped up by an overly strong military that is known for its violent treatment of both combatants and civilians. One observer described Chad as "a pirate ship, and the captain is always drunk" (Taub).

Lake Chad is located on the border between Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, and is a primary water source for much of the Sahel region. However, the lake has been drying up since the 1970s, and the fish the nearby villagers ate have been disappearing (Taub). According to the UN, eleven million people in the region are in need of assistance, and twenty thousand have died as a result of problems in Lake Chad since 2009 (Caramel and Tilouine). Additionally, when the states surrounding the lake became independent, borders were drawn without consideration to the residents of the lake and cut off many villages from important resources, such as the market. Locals began to be governed by rival villages with whom they had historical conflicts (Taub).

Boko Haram has taken advantage of the problems in Lake Chad. It has spread its influence throughout the lake region with relatively little resistance, as an island with a couple of hundred residents and very basic weapons is often incapable of fighting back against Boko

Haram's assault rifles and grenades. This has allowed Boko Haram to kidnap entire villages to use as soldiers, wives, and fishermen (Taub). When it wasn't using these very violent tactics, Boko Haram has been able to gain support from the population by promising basic services and Islamic education, something that the government has failed to provide for those who need it (Taub).

The governments of the states surrounding Lake Chad often do more harm than good in the region. The Chadian military swept through Lake Chad in an attempt to get Boko Haram out of the region, and their operation displaced more than one hundred and ten thousand people (Taub). There have been reports of police officers running away from Boko Haram, who they saw as a violent, impenetrable threat. The governments in the region are working to restore water to the lake, however, they have had difficulty coordinating and finding funds (Caramel and Tilouine).

Boko Haram is known for very brutal tactics. It has burned villages, kidnapped children to use as fighters, raped women and girls, and forced teenagers into suicide bombings. Boko Haram has also targeted security forces through attacks on military convoys, a camp for displaced workers, and policewomen (Akinwotu, Gopep and Searcey). Boko Haram gives the fighters it gains, both through recruiting and through kidnapping, drugs. The most common one is tramadol, an addictive opioid painkiller that makes fighters fearless (Taub).

Boko Haram is perhaps best known for kidnapping schoolgirls. In 2014, nearly 300 girls were kidnapped from a school in Chibok, Nigeria, by Boko Haram. While many of these girls have been released or have escaped, Boko Haram continues to hold about 100 of them (Akinwotu and Searcey, 21 March 2018). This attack attracted the attention of celebrities around the world, and the phrase "bring back our girls" brought attention to Boko Haram on social

media (Allen et al.). In February 2018, once again Boko Haram kidnapped a group of girls from a school in northern Nigeria. Girls from a school in Dapchi, Nigeria were rushed into trucks one evening and taken away by Boko Haram. The majority of the 110 girls who were kidnapped were returned a month after they were taken, with a stern warning to never return to school (Akinwotu and Searcey, 21 March 2018). Boko Haram translates loosely as “Western education is forbidden,” may have been trying to send a message against Western education, especially for girls. When the insurgents returned the girls that had been kidnapped, they told the locals that the girls should be married off and should not return to school. They even threatened to return if the girls do return to school (Akinwotu and Searcey, 21 March 2018).

Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS, and this pledge was initially accepted by ISIS leaders. For a short time, Boko Haram was considered an affiliate to ISIS (Byman). However, ISIS leaders soon decided that the tactics used by Boko Haram were too violent, and they disowned the group (Taub). Boko Haram has split into factions due to intense infighting, and some individual factions have gained backing from ISIS, including the faction that was responsible for the February 2018 schoolgirl kidnapping (Akinwotu and Searcey, 21 March 2018).

### **Fighting Boko Haram**

Both the United States and France take part in counterterrorism efforts against Boko Haram. The French are involved in the region already, and the threat from Boko Haram is concerning to their interests. This organization is operating in three former French colonies (Niger, Chad, and Cameroon), and is very close to French counterterrorism operations against Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) across the Sahel. The threat of Boko Haram allying itself

with AQIM and strengthening both organizations is a large risk, so it is in France's best interest to fight Boko Haram alongside its fight against AQIM.

The French also seek to maintain their influence in the region by acting as a protector. While historically, the elites in former French colonies such as Cameroon have learned French, many are now turning to English. These people want the opportunity to access the anglophone economic world, which they see as more pragmatic and open, and less biased against immigrants, than the francophone world (Zachary). This desire is concerning for the French, who want to maintain their place as the most important power in the Sahel.

The United States similarly is fighting Boko Haram to prevent it from allying with other terrorist groups and becoming even stronger. Nigeria requested intelligence support from the U.S. in order to find the missing schoolgirls that Boko Haram kidnapped (Akinwotu, Gopep and Searcey). The Lake Chad region, along with most of Africa, is frequently depicted as a violent, chaotic place in the U.S. For *The New York Times* articles such as "U.S. Kept Silent About Its Role in Another Firefight in Niger" and "In Nigeria, Another Mass Kidnapping Stirs Painful Memories and Anger," both front-page headlines about Boko Haram attacks, the word "another" leaves the impression of Africa as a place of regular violence (Gibbons-Neff, Savage and Schmitt; Gopep and Searcey). Descriptions of Boko Haram also emphasize its violence. For example, one article states, "Villages have been burned, children have been kidnapped and conscripted into fighting, women and girls have been raped, and teenagers have been forcibly strapped with explosives to carry out suicide bombings" (Akinwotu, Gopep and Searcey). This violent imagery is effective in capturing the indiscriminate violence perpetrated by Boko Haram, but it is also very effective in creating an image for the American public of a place too violent and dangerous to send American servicemen.



Additionally, public calls of “bring back our girls” led to the American public becoming much more aware of and concerned about Boko Haram (Allen et al.). The most recent kidnapping was on the front page of *The New York Times* three times between when it occurred in February, 2018 and April 20, 2018 (Akinwotu and Searcey, 21 March 2018; Akinwotu, Gopep and Searcey; Gopep and Searcey). Additionally, in April, a large spread was published highlighting the girls who were kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2014 (Allen et al.). One of these articles points out that “thousands of Nigerians have been abducted or killed by Boko Haram in episodes that have gotten little or no attention from the authorities or the news media” (Gopep and Searcey). These articles depict Boko Haram as incredibly violent, calling it a “band of extremists known for beating, raping, and enslaving its captives” (Allen et al.). They also call attention to Boko Haram by humanizing its victims. The front-page, headline spread about the girls who were kidnapped in 2014 features portraits taken of the now-women victims, and lists many of their names. It also describes the school they attend and the difficulties they continue to face, giving them each a story (Allen et al.). Although the immense publicity given to the schoolgirls has brought the world’s attention on Boko Haram, “the vast majority of Boko Haram’s victims will remain anonymous and unaccounted for, their names never broadcast across the globe” (Allen et al.). This publicity has brought the world’s attention on the Lake Chad region, but it will likely disappear when the spectacle of the schoolgirls kidnapping dies down.

Both the United States and France want to maintain their power in the region over states such as China. China has been increasing its influence abroad, especially in Africa. For example, a Chinese business has given a proposal for a project that would redirect water into Lake Chad (Caramel and Tilouine). The former American Ambassador to the African Union said,

“Obviously we have been competing with the Chinese for engagement and influence in Africa” (Chan and de Greef). The threat of a strong Chinese in Africa encourages both France and the United States to stay active in the region.

French and U.S. counterterrorism against Boko Haram typically involves training and support for local governments, as well as limited humanitarian aid.

#### *Training and Support for Local Governments*

Both the United States and France support local militaries in the region. This occurs through support of the regional Multinational Joint Task Force (M.N.J.T.F.), through supplying local governments with technology and weapons, and through conducting training and joint exercises.

The M.N.J.T.F., a key aspect of counterterrorism against Boko Haram, is supported by the West primarily through intelligence assistance. This force is comprised of a couple of thousand soldiers from each country bordering the lake; however, the militaries of the different states don't work well together. They have deep, historically-rooted mistrust for one another, especially between anglophone Nigeria and the other three francophone states. There are no cross-border operations in the M.N.J.T.F., and the only time militants cross borders is in active pursuit of Boko Haram (Taub). However, Boko Haram doesn't restrict itself to state borders, and therefore will be able to avoid M.N.J.T.F. forces by simply crossing borders frequently. When it kidnapped the group of schoolgirls in February, Boko Haram frequently moved the girls and crossed borders, at one point telling the girls that they were in Niger, to avoid detection (Akinwotu and Searcey, 21 March 2018).

Despite its challenges, the M.N.J.T.F. has had significant success against Boko Haram. It has taken back substantial amounts of land from the terrorist group, which has led to defections

by militants. At the end of 2016, there had been about three hundred men and seven hundred women and children who left Boko Haram (Taub).

Both the U.S. and France have sold military planes and provided other forms of support to the Chadian military. These planes would later be used to transport political prisoners, while being maintained by French and American technicians (Taub). Both the U.S. and the French have a history of ignoring serious human rights abuses by strategic allies, and their work with Chad is an example of this. When the U.S. Congress passed a law in 2008 preventing the U.S. military from supporting governments that use child soldiers, President Obama ensured that Chad would be an exception, so the U.S. continued to support the Chadian military despite knowing that Chad uses child soldiers (Taub).

The U.S. has also sold fighter jets and weapons to Nigeria's military, an action condemned by Amnesty International due to human rights abuses by the Nigerian army (Akinwotu and Searcey, 20 March 2018). The Nigerian army has been heavily criticized in American media. *The New York Times* makes reference to "embarrassing setbacks" experienced by the Nigerian government and discusses how "a fringe element has even accused the president of orchestrating the kidnappings so that he could emerge heroic by negotiating the girls' release" (Akinwotu, Gopep and Searcey). It can be assumed *The New York Times* doesn't reference every conspiracy proposed by fringe groups, which leaves one to ask why this theory was included in this article. By making the Nigerian government look less trustworthy, this theory adds to the picture of the Nigerian government as an untrustworthy, lawless partner for the U.S.

In order to train local troops, the U.S. military often performs joint counterterrorism missions with these troops. These missions are combat missions, and they are seen as crucial parts of training. The U.S. military currently participates in such missions in Niger and

Cameroon (Cooper, Gibbons-Neff and Schmitt, 9 February 2018). In March 2018, the U.S. government acknowledged that in December 2017 a mission comprised of U.S. Green Berets and local African troops engaged in a firefight with Boko Haram fighters linked to ISIS, killing 11 of the militants. Although no American soldiers were injured in this battle, *The New York Times* referred to it as “another firefight in Niger,” comparing it to the conflict that resulted in the deaths of four American soldiers in Niger in October 2017 (Gibbons-Neff, Savage and Schmitt). These two conflicts were different, as one was with Boko Haram and one was with AQIM and they had different levels of success, yet *The New York Times* equates them in order to show that the U.S. military is engaged in dangerous, secretive conflicts across Africa. This article also cites the statistic, “Between 2015 and 2017, there were about 10 instances of American troops and local training partners being attacked in Niger and elsewhere in West Africa,” which further enforces this narrative (Gibbons-Neff, Savage and Schmitt).

When American counterterrorism in the Sahel is primarily focused through working with local militaries, it is necessary that the United States maintain at least a minimally functional relationship with the local governments. Comments made by U.S. President Donald Trump in which he referred to African states as “shithole countries” has angered many African leaders, including leaders in Nigeria, who called the comments “deeply hurtful, offensive and unacceptable.” Trump also has said Nigerians allowed into the United States would not “go back to their huts” in Africa (Chan and de Greef). These comments have potential to hurt the trust between the U.S. and African states and to hurt the ability of the U.S. to conduct counterterrorism operations in these states.

Political drama, such as this comment by President Trump, often dominates what the American media has to say about Africa. One front-page headline in *The New York Times*

read, “Trump Comments, Infuriating Africans, May Set Back U.S. Interests.” This article does list U.S. interests on the continent: fighting Boko Haram and Al-Shabab, improving governance, and advancing economic goals. However, these interests aren’t described in much detail, and simply seem to be an aside thrown in to add dynamic to an article about political drama (Chan and de Greef).

### *Diplomatic Relationships*

France has a long history of maintaining its relationships with many of the states in which Boko Haram operates. The majority of elites in France’s former colonies of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger speak French, and many of them attended university or military training in France at the cost of the French government (Zachary). This practice is intended to create a sense of loyalty to France among the elites of France’s former colonies. In the past, it often has, and even if many businesspeople in these countries are now turning to English, there is still a history and comfort for the French government in maintaining normal relationships with these countries. The United States is building relationships for the first time with many of the states in this region and is therefore building the relationship through the lens of counterterrorism. However, France has had relationships with these states since they became states, and therefore is much more equipped diplomatically to pursue policy outside of military counterterrorism policy.

The fact that France’s relationships with the region are so normalized can be seen in French news coverage. The only front-page article in *Le Monde* during the time studied that discussed the region was about plans to redirect water flows into Lake Chad (Caramel and Tilouine). The fact that French actions in Africa aren’t front-page news likely means that the French don’t see this action as spectacular or news-worthy, indicating that these relationships are normal for the French.

### *Humanitarian Aid*

Humanitarian aid has been necessary in helping to reintegrate defectors from Boko Haram. When they defect, former militants are kept in detention sites, then released to UN responsibility. Local governments have found it to be fairly easy to reintegrate former militants back into everyday life. These people had come to realize that Boko Haram fighters had lied about their ability to provide food and money, and when they returned they were given food and blankets (Taub). This humanitarian assistance has led to further defections. A Nigerian official said, “Those who had left to join Boko Haram learned that the humanitarian community is here, giving people food to eat, giving people money... That’s why people started coming back” (Taub).

This humanitarian aid plays a key role in counterterrorism; however, it isn’t seen as a priority for the U.S. or France, who prioritize military action. This is true even though humanitarian concerns are often seen as primary concerns for American and French citizens. Both *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* featured front-page articles about humanitarian concerns in the Lake Chad region during the beginning of 2018 (O’Grady; Caramel and Tilouine). However, France and the U.S. tend to rely mostly on nongovernmental organizations to provide humanitarian aid to the region.

France has initiated programs to ease migration concerns in the region. Many people make the long journey to Libya in order to attempt to migrate into Europe. Many of these people are unable to successfully migrate and are returned to their home countries angrier than before. In an attempt to mitigate this problem, France has sent a mission to Niger to screen asylum seekers. Those who are approved are booked on a flight to France, and therefore don’t have to risk travelling across northern Africa. However, not many people are approved, sending a

message to the locals that travelling to Europe wouldn't be worth it. This program is extremely small, and therefore is likely not making any significant impact on migration through the Sahara (Nossiter).

### **The Current State of Boko Haram**

While there have been significant defections as a result of M.N.J.T.F. operations, the grievances that drove people to extremism in the first place remain. The climate in the Sahel continues to worsen, leaving more and more people hungry. Many people purchased weapons in order to protect their livestock, and now an abundance of weapons is allowing herders to more easily shift to jihad. It is pretty well agreed-upon that ideology isn't the principle driving factor for most Boko Haram militants, but that they have been driven to jihad in response to a variety of difficulties they face (Taub). This will not end as long as state governments in the Lake Chad region continue to engage in corruption and discrimination and fail to provide for their citizens.

### **Al Qaeda and the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)**

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, is a regional criminal-terrorist network, designated by the U.S. government as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (Arieff 1). The name AQIM refers to a loose affiliation of actors, which may or may not use similar tactics or have similar motives, and whose relationship with core Al Qaeda leaders is weak (Arieff 8). AQIM developed during Algeria's civil conflict in the 1990s, and since has spread across the Sahel region, including into Mali and Niger.

AQIM's influence has grown significantly since 2012 when it took advantage of local conflict in Mali to gain significant amounts of power. The Tuareg are an ethnic group in northern Mali. They have been seeking self-governance from the central government of Mali since France drew the borders of the modern state of Mali upon Malian independence (Chafer 123). By the

spring of 2012, Mali was incredibly unstable due to drug trafficking, military fragmentation, increasing tension with Tuareg rebel groups, high-level government corruption, and flows of arms and combatants from Libya (Arieff 6). This instability created high levels of distrust with the government, resulting in a military coup in March of 2012 (Chafer 123). Captain Amadou Sanogo, who had received American military training, led the coup (Chivvis 68). Taking advantage of the power vacuum in the south of the country, Tuareg rebel groups allied themselves with terrorist groups in northern Mali, including AQIM, and took control of the region (Chafer 123).

Although small in number, the terrorist groups were stronger than the Tuareg rebel groups, in large part due to an influx of fighters and weapons from Libya after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, and the terrorist groups were able to take control of the movement in northern Mali (Chafer 124). Analysts have observed that AQIM seems to be the leader of the alliance among terrorist groups in northern Mali (Arieff 1-2).

Although 90% of Mali's population is Muslim, its government is secular, and the majority of citizens ascribe to moderate sects of Islam (Arieff 7). When terrorist groups gained control of a city, they imposed a strict, conservative interpretation of sharia law, which involved behavior and dress codes as well as amputations and executions (Arieff 1). The citizens of the cities often didn't agree with these rules and were even known to stage protests against the laws (Chivvis 72).

AQIM has continued to hold relevance in Mali and throughout the region. As the wealthiest division of Al Qaeda (Kelley 36), AQIM has targeted both local and Western interests within its region of influence. It has conducted kidnappings of Europeans, and there are some



high-level American officials who believe that AQIM had ties to the groups that conducted the attacks on U.S. Government officials in Benghazi, Libya in 2012 (Arieff 8).

AQIM has developed relationships with many other extremist groups in the region. It is known to work with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO, for its French acronym) and Ansar Dine. MUJAO was named a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist” by the U.S. in 2012. U.S. officials don’t see Ansar Dine as such a threat, and in fact have encouraged negotiations with them. However, an Ansar Dine leader shouted, “America and France are the cause of suffering in the world today. They came to dominate us, and leave the path of Allah,” when he marched into Timbuktu (Chivvis 71). These three groups worked together to subjugate northern Mali during the Tuareg rebellion, and it’s possible that they share resources. This makes them all more dangerous. It is believed that, all together, there are 3,000-6,000 members of extremist groups in northern Mali (Arieff 8).

### **Fighting AQIM**

France, as the former colonial power in the Sahel, has had a long history of relationships with the states threatened by AQIM. The relationships the U.S. has in the region began to really develop in the early 2000s, making them much newer relationships. The majority of American and French action against AQIM takes place through French Operation Barkhane. The U.S. has a few other military initiatives in the region, as well.

#### *Operation Barkhane*

In the immediate aftermath of the 2012 coup in Mali, the French government was very public in saying that it would not get involved in the conflict. The phrase “no boots on the ground” was frequently used, and then-President François Hollande had framed much of his campaign around transitioning away from “françafrique” (Chivvis 8-9). The French government

worked hard to convince other groups to take action in Mali. It tried to gain UN authorization for an African force to be deployed in Mali and succeeded. However, it was soon announced that the African troops wouldn't be ready to deploy until September of 2013 (Chafer 120-124). France attempted to encourage the EU, as well as African groups such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, to take action, but none of these groups decided to act (Chafer 125). Many other states, especially many European states, refused to act because they expected France to. The United States wasn't expected to intervene, due to its subdued role in Libya and focus on Asia (Chivvis 172). Eventually, France realized it was the only state likely to intervene.

French intervention was not only based on the lack of other candidates for intervention. France's connections to Africa were perhaps strongest in the countries threatened by AQIM. So many Malians have moved to France that the Parisian suburb of Montreal is home to the largest population of Malians aside from Bamako, the capital of Mali (Chivvis 51). The two countries are geographically very close, resulting in daily direct flights between Paris and Bamako (Chivvis 77).

This close proximity led the French to be genuinely worried about terrorist attacks on France emanating from Mali. AQIM had historically proclaimed France as an important enemy, and Al Qaeda listed France as its number one enemy in Africa. French citizens in Africa had regularly been kidnapped by AQIM, and these hostage takings were regularly broadcast on the French news (Chivvis 173). These factors all combined to make the threat very prevalent for French citizens, which is demonstrated in the way approval ratings for President Hollande rose after Operation Serval was launched (Chivvis 105) French policymakers were also concerned

about the threat, demonstrated in the fact that the French government prioritized Mali because it believed that AQIM posed a real, direct threat to French interests (Arieff 11).

The French also desired to assert their military relevance in the Sahel. With other global powers fighting terrorism in the Middle East, France saw the conflict in Mali as an opportunity to take part in the global “war on terror” in a part of the world that it knows best. The Sahel is possibly the only region of the world that still sees France as the leading Western power, and the French government knew that it understood the region better than anyone else (Chafer 129; Chivvis 42). By intervening in the name of counterterrorism in the Sahel, France would be able to justify its seat on the UN Security Council.

In January 2013, French intelligence services began to see a threat on Bamako materializing (Chafer 124). They were determining that the extremists were planning an attack on the capital of Mali. If the jihadists were able to take control of the capital, they may be able to transform the state of Mali into a haven for terrorists and drug traffickers (Chafer 120). This threat was direct and dangerous enough that it legitimized the French intervention in the international system (Chivvis 93)

As a result of these considerations, on January 11, 2013, France decided to launch Operation Serval. This would become the largest French unilateral military operation since the Algerian war, which lasted from 1954 to 1962 (Chivvis 4). Upon intervening, the French government clarified that Operation Serval was meant to be a short-term mission, with the goals of securing Bamako, stopping terrorist aggression, and helping Mali to regain its territorial integrity (Chivvis 109). The French military was well-prepared for this operation, due to the fact that French military officials had drafted detailed plans for intervention before a decision had been made (Chafer 126). Additionally, France had provided some troops to assist the U.S. in

Afghanistan, giving the military more experience for when the operation in Mali began (Chivvis 40). The French also had troops stationed in Africa before Operation Serval, and therefore had troops who could get to Mali from their station in Burkina Faso within an hour (Chivvis 2).

France's initial intervention in Mali was unilateral, and saw immediate success. All three of France's initial goals had been met: Bamako remained in the hands of the central government, the jihadis were pushed back, and Mali regained territorial control over the areas it had lost (Chivvis 159). French forces killed between a third and a half of the fighters for AQIM and its allies, and the number of attacks by these groups fell after French intervention (Chivvis 143, 161). Overall, the French had ensured that Mali would not become a safe haven for terrorism.

Many of the Tuareg rejoiced at their liberation by the French. Most Tuaregs didn't adhere to the extreme views of AQIM and its allies, and therefore were pleased to be freed from their strict interpretation of sharia law (Chivvis 72). Many of the Tuareg rebel groups also pledged allegiance to France, hoping they could help the Tuaregs in negotiations with the Malian government (Chivvis 131). Several of the Tuareg rebel groups fought alongside the French against the extremists, but the French military focused on avoiding relationships with these groups in order to maintain its relationship with the Malian government (Chivvis 132, 147). The primary focus of the French government in regards to the Tuareg rebels was, and continues to be, to encourage dialogue between the rebels and the Malian government (Chivvis 128).

France had planned to withdraw its forces shortly after beginning Operation Serval, and allow the UN force and the Malian military, trained by EU troops, to oversee the long process of state building (Chivvis 139). However, it soon became clear that this plan wouldn't be possible, and France's troops were needed to stay in order to maintain stability in Mali. In August 2014, France shifted its focus and transitioned Operation Serval into Operation Barkhane, a

counterterrorism operation that spans the Sahel (Chafer 127). Three thousand troops would spread across Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso to pursue counterterrorism. When this operation began, France became the largest non-African military force in Africa (Chivvis 154).

Throughout Operation Barkhane, France as focused on the key pillars of *Africanization* and *Europeanization*. These two models were designed as a part of France's rejection of *françafrique*. They both seek to help France avoid accusations of neocolonialism and encourage burden-sharing. The idea of Africanization is that African troops will lead military operations in Africa. Currently, most African states don't have militaries capable of doing so, but France pursues more involvement and coordination with local militaries and trains these militaries so that they will be able to lead in the future (Chafer 128). Working with African states has led to some problems for the French military. It was criticized in an Amnesty International report for providing the Chadian military with trucks, fuel, communication systems, and more that was used in torture and executions. Additionally, French troops who witnessed human rights abuses by the Chadian military didn't speak out against them (Taub).

France's European neighbors have less interest in African conflicts than African states do, but France is attempting to increase their involvement. EU member states all share the responsibility to protect, and eventually evacuate, European citizens at risk in Africa (Chafer 128). Many of these states also feel a loyalty to France. Although none of them would lead an intervention in Mali, fifteen European states eventually came to support French operations in the Sahel, with several offering assistance quickly after French troops first deployed (Chafer 117, 122). Relief from other European states would allow France to provide more assistance to local militaries and UN- or NATO-led operations (Chafer 128).

France continues to recognize the importance of other factors, including political and economic factors, in this conflict. It is a leader in encouraging reconciliation between the Tuareg rebels and the Malian government, and has never wavered on the need to hold elections (Chivvis 169). However, the French have focused primarily on military counterterrorism, seeing it as their primary role to fight the jihadis (Chafer 128).

Today, although France is still involved in Operation Barkhane, it is no longer front-page news. While there are regularly many articles written for *Le Monde* about Operation Barkhane, only two of these articles were on the front page of the newspaper between January first and April twentieth, 2018 (Ayad et al; Le Cam). The fact that these operations are no longer seen to constitute front-page news indicates that they are seen as normal to the French. While American news outlets are ready to criticize any action taken by the U.S. military in Africa, the French outlets simply allow the government to operate. When it does discuss military operations, *Le Monde* often does so in a way that justifies French actions.

*Le Monde* gives real depictions of the violence that is occurring in Africa, and these depictions can often be concerning to the French readers. One article discusses a terrorist attack in Burkina Faso targeting a meeting of the G5 Sahel, the name given to the five Sahel states working with the French as part of Operation Barkhane. In this article, the author refers to an attack that occurred in 2016 in Burkina Faso, in which Canadians and Europeans were killed ("Burkina Faso : plusieurs morts dans des attaques terroristes à Ouagadougou"). This reference shows the reader the danger that terrorists in Africa can pose for the French, and it also hints that the French are a target of these terrorists. In an interview with *Le Monde*, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK) said, "Le but, le cap des djihadistes, c'est vous," "The goal, the

direction of the jihadists, it's you" (Ayad et al.). IBK is claiming that France is the true target of jihadists in Mali.

Unlike in *The New York Times*, fear in *Le Monde* is used to justify French military operations in Africa. After the attack on the G5 Sahel meeting in Burkina Faso, leaders of most of the states involved, including France, expressed their recommitment, which was documented in an article about the attack in *Le Monde* ("Burkina Faso : plusieurs morts dans des attaques terroristes à Ouagadougou"). A military general explains, "La montée en puissance du G5 Sahel perturbe les terroristes (...). Cette attaque correspond à des représailles de la part des groupes armés à la suite des pertes qu'ils ont subies sur le front," "The G5 Sahel's climb in power troubles the terrorists... This attack is equivalent to the retaliation by armed groups following losses that they have suffered in battle" (Le Cam). This quote shows the French leader that French military operations are working, and therefore that they should continue. *Le Monde* writes about the benefit French soldiers have been to the Sahel. In his interview with *Le Monde*, IBK expressed gratitude for French assistance. He said, "Chaque soldat qui tombe meurt pour le Mali, mais aussi pour la France. Car nous ne sommes qu'un terrain de passage," "Each soldier who falls dies for Mali, but also for France. Because we are only a field of passage" (Ayad et al.).

The United States has provided significant assistance to French troops in the Sahel. When he launched Operation Serval, French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian called the United States immediately. Although Le Drian wasn't seeking help, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta promised his full support to the French (Chivvis 118). What this would mean in practice was less clear, but the U.S. soon decided to provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support to the French operation. These operations had already been going on

before Operation Serval began, so American officials thought they wouldn't require notifying Congress. While the U.S. didn't have to operate what was at the time a unilateral French operation, it saw fit to support the fight against terror in another part of the world (Chivvis 118-119). Coordination between France and the U.S. wasn't always smooth, as the U.S. is not accustomed to playing a supporting role in another state's ongoing operation, and had to learn how to do so in order to successfully help France (Chivvis 121).

### *U.S. Operations Against AQIM*

In addition to the assistance it gives to Operation Barkhane, the U.S. has a few operations that it runs in the Sahel to fight AQIM. The Sahel is a secondary to the U.S., which focuses the majority of its counterterrorism missions in the Middle East. This has led to the U.S. being unwilling to fully commit to the Sahel and has created conflicting threat assessments of AQIM in Washington (Arieff 14). These missions are commonly described by the government as necessary in order to prevent attacks on U.S. soil. Senator Lindsey Graham said of U.S. troops in the Sahel, "They were there to defend America. They were there to help allies. They were there to prevent another platform to attack America and our allies" (Lebovich). However, this is highly misleading. It seems unlikely that an attack on Europe would be launched from the Sahel, and it would be hard to find an analyst who would see any threat from the Sahel to the U.S. homeland (Lebovich). AQIM and other terrorists in the region do pose a threat to American citizens and American interests in the Sahel, and if left unchecked, there is a possibility AQIM could collaborate with other terrorist groups to grow stronger and eventually be able to attack outside of the region (Arieff 13).

One of the programs the U.S. has in the Sahel is the Trans Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP). This is an inter-agency program with a focus on security assistance,



development, and governance-strengthening. This policy has been heavily criticized as being too militarized, making military assistance much more of a priority than other forms of assistance (Arieff 16). Additionally, the program has seen some failures. Three TSCTP focus countries, which each received significant amounts of aid from the U.S., have undergone a coup: Mali, Niger, and Mauritania. This has led to some critics questioning the effectiveness of TSCTP across the Sahel (Arieff 16). This program was harshly criticized when it was discovered that the leader of the coup in Mali, Captain Amadou Sanogo, had been trained by the U.S. military in intelligence and infantry settings (Chivvis 68).

Operation Juniper Shield accompanies TSCTP in the Sahel. This operation involves U.S. military forces working with local forces in many states across the Sahel and North Africa to improve the capabilities of the local militaries in intelligence, coordination, logistics, border control, and targeting (Arieff 16).

Through these two operations, the U.S. has many special forces operations that train local militaries. Special counterterrorism training missions take place in Cameroon, Niger, and Tunisia, in which about twelve American Special Forces work with a group of 100 to 120 local troops for two years. The former commander of U.S. Special Operations in Africa, Brig. Gen. Donald C. Bolduc said that accompanying local forces on live counterterrorism missions is a key aspect of this program (Cooper, Gibbons-Neff and Schmitt, 9 February 2018). As previously mentioned, many of the Special Forces in Cameroon and Niger are focused on fighting Boko Haram, however, Niger is home to a strong insurgency of AQIM militants as well, especially in the north and near the border with Mali. In fact, the American soldiers that were killed in October 2017 in Niger were fighting AQIM and its allies (Lebovich).

The American media has been extremely critical of American military operations in Africa since the deaths of U.S. soldiers in October. Headlines such as “Soldier in Bloody Niger Mission Had Warned of Gaps, Defense Officials Say,” “‘An Endless War’: Why 4 U.S. Soldiers Died in a Remote African Desert,” and “Inquiry of Soldiers’ Deaths Urges Curtailing West Africa Missions” don’t exude confidence in American operations (Cooper, Gibbons-Neff and Schmitt, 19 March 2018; Blinder, et al.; Cooper, Gibbons-Neff and Schmitt, 19 April 2018). These and other articles depict the Sahel as a violent, dangerous place and show that the government is irresponsible for sending American troops there. One article states that the ambush that resulted in the deaths of U.S. soldiers was “not an isolated episode” (Gibbons-Neff, Savage and Schmitt).

In the aftermath of this tragedy, *The New York Times* began discussing U.S. military action as being kept secret from the American public. One article reports, “The ambush has exposed holes in the argument that the Pentagon has made under three different administrations: that in many far-flung places, American troops are not actually engaged in combat, but just there to train, advise and assist local troops” (Blinder et al.) Another says that in October, U.S. soldiers were “killed in a conflict that few Americans knew anything about, not just the public, but also their families and even some senior American lawmakers” (Blinder et al.). *The New York Times* expresses significant concern and anger over the fact that American citizens are being deployed to fight in a war against a very violent, aggressive enemy, which is made worse by the fact that the American public has been overwhelmingly unaware of this conflict.

### **The Current State of AQIM**

U.S. and French operations in the Sahel have prevented the development of safe havens, in which jihadist groups would be able to grow and operate without restraint (Obama and

Hollande). However, AQIM continues to have a strong presence in the region. Attacks continue in countries across the Sahel, such as recent attacks in Burkina Faso and Niger (Le Cam; Blinder et al.) The Malian army suffers from internal conflicts and political uncertainty and remains unorganized and ineffective (Arieff 6).

Perhaps most importantly, the grievances that drove people to terrorism in the first place remain relevant for many in the Sahel. The Tuareg in Mali continue to be dissatisfied with the way the central Malian government treats them (Arieff 2). By training and strengthening autocrats in power across Africa, the U.S. and France are allowing them to continue to abuse their power, which is one of the original causes of many of the grievances that initially led to extremism (Taub). Until the people's concerns are addressed, they will continue to turn to extremism. The ideology of AQIM, similarly to that of Boko Haram and Al-Shabab, is for many simply an outlet through which to express grievances that have existed in the region for many years.

## Conclusion

Despite the United States having a significantly higher budget, France has been much more effective at fighting terrorism in the Sahel. France's scope is much more limited than that of the United States, with France focusing heavily on AQIM and essentially ignoring Al-Shabab, which has allowed France to be more effective at the smaller goals it has pursued. Additionally, the French see counterterrorism in the Sahel as their responsibility, and therefore are fully committed. On the contrary, even though the U.S. has placed a stronger focus on fighting Al-Shabab, it has continued to engage itself across Africa. The U.S.'s desire to fight terrorism, while also trying to avoid too much involvement, has led to partial commitments to many different operations, and limited success in all of them.

The United States must establish reasonable, clear, and pursuable goals for Africa, and restrain itself to pursue these goals. This strategy, similar to that of France, would allow the United States to focus its resources on specific projects and do each project well, rather than operating many projects that are more poorly run.

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