

A CASE FOR CONSTRUCTIVISM: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF FRENCH POLICY IN AFRICA, 2013-2014

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Between 2013 and 2014, French President Francois Hollande ordered military interventions in two of France's former African colonies: Mali (Operation Serval, in January 2013) and the Central African Republic (Operation Sangaris, in December 2013). This study examines these two interventions in the light of two competing theories of international relations—Hans Morgenthau's 'political realist' paradigm and the constructivist school of thought—and their predictions regarding the causes of military interventions. Morgenthau's paradigm argues that all military interventions are driven by a desire to maintain or increase state power. By contrast, constructivist theorists emphasize the role of state actors' ideology and the self-identification of states in military interventions. I find that constructivism offers a more satisfying explanation for each French intervention than does political realism. While France likely has few tangible interests in Mali or the Central African Republic, several of President Hollande's public statements and actions imply that his interventions are largely driven by historical French ideas about France's role towards its former colonies. In making this argument, I hope to prepare the way for other scholars to develop a more definitive understanding of the motivations behind Hollande's African policy, which in turn will enable us to predict or understand future French policy in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Between 2013 and 2014, French President Francois Hollande ordered military interventions in two of France's former African colonies, Mali (Operation Serval, in January 2013) and the Central African Republic (Operation Sangaris, in December 2013). This study examines these two interventions in the light of two competing theories of international relations—Hans Morgenthau's 'political realist' paradigm and the newer constructivist school of thought—and their predictions regarding the causes of military interventions. Morgenthau's paradigm argues that all military interventions are driven by a desire to maintain or increase state power. By contrast, constructivist theorists emphasize the role of state actors' ideology and the self-identification of states in military interventions. For each 2013 French intervention, although a less established school of thought than realism, a broad model of constructivism offers a more satisfying explanation over political realism. While France has few tangible interests in Mali or the Central African Republic (CAR), several of President Hollande's public statements and actions imply that these interventions are largely driven by historical French ideas about France's role

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in the well-being of its former colonies. In making this argument, I hope to pave the way for other scholars to develop a more definitive understanding of the motivations behind Hollande's African policy, which in turn will enable us to predict and understand future French policy in Africa.

In January 2013, in a military operation code-named "Operation Serval," French troops surged into Mali, fighting a loose alliance of Islamist militias, which had overrun much of Northern Mali. Later that year, France launched a peacekeeping division into the internally-divided Central African Republic. Through an examination of these two interventions, this paper prepares the way for a definitive understanding of the motives behind Hollande's military operations in Africa. Because of the sheer variety of international-relations paradigms (realism, neorealism, liberalism) and sub-theories therein, an examination of all the possible motives behind Serval and Sangaris would be beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I lay the foundation for such an argument by weighing the predictions of two theories of international relations—Hans Morgenthau's 'political realist' paradigm and the 'constructivist' school of thought—regarding the causes of military interventions.

Morgenthau suggests three possible causes for military interventions: desire to maintain state power, desire to increase state power, or a desire to prepare for the first two policies by increasing national prestige. However, France's security and economic interests in Mali and the CAR are not a sufficient justification for their military interventions in the area, and neither intervention seems calculated to increase national prestige. By contrast, constructivist theorists emphasize the role of ideology in driving military interventions: ideology leads state actors to conceive of themselves as having a particular role on the world stage, and this "self-identification" inspires state actions such as military interventions. This latter model of military intervention is more likely to explain Serval and Sangaris. Hollande's actions prior to Serval strongly suggest that he is greatly invested in some form of the "cooperation" doctrine, a postcolonial French ideology in which France considered itself responsible for the integrity of African republics like Mali, and his public statements during Serval and Sangaris suggest that this ideology was driving his interventions in Africa. In short, this paper finds that constructivism is more likely to explain Hollande's French policy in Africa than is political realism.

I. A LITERATURE SUMMARY

Morgenthau's political-realist paradigm holds that self-interested and power-hungry states, in an anarchic world, carry out military interventions in order to maintain their power (status-quo policies) or to extend it (imperialism). Morgenthau first assumes that that man is by nature a power-seeking animal, with power defined as the ability to affect the minds and actions of oth-

ers.¹ Such power-hungry state actors operate in an international system that is uncontrolled by any higher authority. For example, many political realists have argued that forms of “global governance” such as the U.N. are only reflections of the interests of powerful states.^{2,3} In this anarchic arena, state actions such as military interventions are motivated primarily by the desire to increase national power. Consequently, for Morgenthau, military interventions are always explainable as rational, self-interested plays for power in one of several forms: the preservation of a nation’s relative power in the form of a current distribution of power (“status-quo politics”) or an attempt to increase a nation’s power relative to other states (“imperialistic politics”). Note that there are two subgroups of status-quo action: preventative action, to ensure that a particular power does not rise in future (e.g. Austria’s opposition to Russia in World War I); or attempts to prevent an encroaching power threaten state security (e.g. England and its allies facing Japan and its allies in the Second World War.) Alternatively, a military intervention can be part of an imperialistic action: that is, it might make the state the preponderant power in a given region.⁴ Note also that within both status-quo and imperialistic politics, a policy of increasing national prestige can be used as a “soft power” method to accomplish status-quo or imperialist goals. Specifically, by taking actions that increase the reputed power of the nation, such as either partial or full military mobilization, a nation can either make a potential rival reluctant to alter the status quo or prevent other nations from offering resistance to imperialism. For instance, Morgenthau gives the status-quo example of the United States demonstrating its power in Latin America to consolidate its power in the Western Hemisphere and the imperialist example of 1930s Germany broadcasting films of the *blitzkrieg* to intimidate audiences of Polish and French military elites. Note, however, that policies of prestige in Morgenthau’s paradigm involve full mobilization at most, not actual use of force.⁵ In short, Morgenthau predicts that all military actions are an attempt at preserving an advantageous status quo or increasing one’s relative power.

By contrast, rather than viewing state interests as fixed products of human nature, constructivist theorists emphasize the influence of ideas and ideology on military interventions and other state actions. Specifically, although constructivist theorists do not present a single paradigm, they share the core view that that ideas and discourse reflect and shape the “self-identity” of state actors, or how these actors see themselves and their roles vis-à-vis other states. These self-identifications cause state actors to perceive their interests in a particular light. That is, unlike in political realism, the state does not necessarily seek only or primarily to maintain its power. In turn, the perceived interests of state actors influences said actors to take particular actions, including military interventions. For example (although this is not an example of a military intervention), some constructivists explain the end of the Cold War and the

revision of Soviet policy as being driven by Gorbachev's embrace of ideas such as "common security."⁶ That is, Gorbachev's embrace of "common security" caused him to conceive Russia as having particular interests (other than the preservation of the Soviet Union); and these perceived interests were what drove his policy changes. Thus, for a constructivist, any military action would be motivated by a state's perception of its ideology regarding its role pertaining to other states.

II. OPERATION SERVAL AND THE FAILURE OF POLITICAL REALISM

In this theoretical context, political realism does not adequately explain Operation Serval. It is firstly unlikely that Operation Serval was motivated by considerations of current French security interests: that is, the first subset of status-quo explanations does not account for Serval. Admittedly, French officials have consistently claimed that Operation Serval is aimed at combating a current threat to France and French citizens. For example, at a press briefing in January 2013, French officials stated that the "blatant aggression" of Malian Islamists was an "*immediate* threat to peace and regional *and international* security."⁷ In a similar vein, President Hollande has also argued that the invasion is necessary to protect the French civilians currently residing in Mali.⁸ However, a closer examination of France's actions in Mali and of the capabilities of the three dominant Malian Islamist militias—Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Ansar al Dine—suggests that these public statements are inaccurate as statements of France's motives. First, the actions of the most powerful of these militias, AQIM, suggest that France's intervention was not motivated primarily by any current Islamist threat. Historically, AQIM's organization in the Sahara, where AQIM is primarily based, has avoided launching domestic attacks within European nations, although they have attacked European targets within Africa.^{9,10} While AQIM-linked cells have been discovered within France and Spain as early as 2007,¹¹ these cells appear to have been focused entirely on providing logistical and material support to fighters in Africa, suggesting, again, that AQIM and its sister groups are fearful of attacking Western nations. In turn, when we consider AQIM's deep roots in a specifically anti-French form of Islamism, it is likely that this history of avoiding domestic European targets indicates a lack of ability rather than a lack of interest in such targets. Prior to a 2006 declaration of allegiance to the global al-Qaeda network, AQIM was originally an offshoot of a larger militia known as the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA), a strongly anti-French Islamist group which engineered a string of bombings in France. The current leader of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel, served as a fighter in the GIA and is reportedly fixated upon AQIM's adversarial relationship with France.¹² It is likely, then, that AQIM's history of avoiding attacks on French targets indicates AQIM's military weakness vis-à-vis France.

In turn, if AQIM, the most powerful of the known Islamist militias in Mali, is currently unable to threaten French interests, it is likely that MUJAO and Ansar al Dine are unable to as well. This is especially likely given that these three groups are known to share fighters and to coordinate their movements;¹³ if AQIM's military capabilities are insufficient to breach European targets even with aid from MUJAO and Ansar al Dine, it is unlikely that any of the groups currently poses a serious threat to France as a nation. Second, while AQIM has a history of attacking French civilians staying in Mali¹⁴ and therefore *does* pose a threat to unprotected French expatriates, it is unlikely that this motivated France's intervention. President Hollande's original timetable called for a quick pullout of troops, regardless of the continued Islamist presence in Mali.¹⁵ Thus, the first subset of status-quo explanations does not adequately explain the French presence in Mali.

A comparison between French intervention and Spanish nonintervention in Mali also suggests that the second subset of status-quo realist explanations—in which Operation Serval is an attempt to preempt any *future* threat presented by Malian Islamists—is also flawed. This version of status-quo claim has also met with support from the French government. In November 2013, for example, French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian stated: "In Mali, it is our own security that is at stake [...] because if we don't move a terrorist entity will take shape which could hit [France or Europe]."¹⁶ While any growing AQIM presence in Mali would pose a considerable threat to Spain and France, the Spanish government has avoided intervention in Mali, suggesting that the likelihood of AQIM's becoming a threat to Europe was not significant enough to motivate a military intervention. The ideology and rhetoric of AQIM treats Spain, as another former colonial power with roots in the area, as an enemy of an importance similar or equal to France.¹⁷ As in the case of France, AQIM has also shown itself willing to act on these threats by striking against "soft," (non-governmental) Spanish targets: the group, for example, took several Spanish aid workers hostage in 2009.¹⁸ Furthermore, unlike many other countries who have an interest in AQIM's fall and yet have not intervened (say, the United States, which has been threatened by AQIM but appears to defer to France on the grounds that Africa is largely a French "sphere of influence"),¹⁹ Spain has a recent history of deploying its military to defend its own interests in Africa. For example, Spain currently maintains two autonomous cities, Ceuta and Melilla, inside Morocco, as well as a number of islands off the coast of Morocco. Spanish and Moroccan troops clashed (bloodlessly) over one of these islands in 2002, and Spain continues to maintain garrisons in several other islands.²⁰ Nevertheless, in spite of this history of intervention and in spite of several "impressive" military capabilities,²¹ Spain's military contributions to the intervention in Mali have been limited: along with twenty-one other E.U. member states, Spain contributed to a 500-man, non-

combat EU force intended primarily to train the Malian military.²² Accordingly, assuming (as in Morgenthau's realism) that Spain's foreign policy is proceeding rationally enough to attempt to intervene against a potential terrorist threat, Spain's nonintervention in Mali suggests that, at the time Operation Serval was launched, there was limited risk of AQIM becoming a threat to any European nations. In response, realist scholar Christopher Griffin²³ has suggested that the Spanish government's avoidance of the conflict in Mali is due to a fear of Islamist reprisals such as al-Qaeda's 2004 bombing of Madrid, which the Spanish public saw as a response to Spanish military involvement in Iraq. However, the Spanish government has continued to pursue other military conflicts with Islamists even after the Madrid bombing—specifically, maintaining significant troop levels in Afghanistan as of 2011—and even in spite of the al-Qaeda presence in Afghanistan.^{24,25} Accordingly, it is unlikely that, at least within the framework presented by political realism, France's intervention was motivated by purely security needs.

In a final variation of the second subset of status-quo realism, Brookings Institute Fellow Mwangi Kimenyi argues that Operation Serval is an attempt to prevent Malian Islamists from threatening the *economic* status quo. Specifically, Kimenyi points out that French economic interests in the area, such as French oil interests in neighboring Niger, would likely be threatened by a growing Islamist presence.²⁶ The timing and length of Operation Serval, however, suggests that this was not the motive for the French intervention. AQIM has been threatening France's economic interests in the area for a long time prior to Serval (and prior to Hollande's election in May 2012). In September 2010, AQIM attacked a French oil interest in Niger,²⁷ and reportedly has given significant material support to Boko Haram, an Islamist group based in neighboring Nigeria, since at least February 2011.²⁸ Even in Mali itself, AQIM was active in Northern Mali for almost a year prior to Serval.²⁹ Accordingly, had Hollande been interested primarily in securing France's economic interests, he would presumably have intervened prior to January 2013. Hollande only moved to attack AQIM when they attacked the Malian capital and thus threatened the existence of the Malian state. Furthermore, French troop dispersal during Serval implies that Hollande does not prioritize protecting France's economic interests in the course of Serval. For example, when local ethnic separatists (not explicitly Islamist or anti-French) clashed with the Malian army in late May 2014, France redirected 3,000 Mali-based troops, which it had been planning to redeploy to deal with Islamists operating near Niger, even though Niger is an area of considerable economic importance for France.³⁰ (20% of the uranium in France's power plants is imported from Niger,³¹ and much of France's energy comes from these nuclear reactors).³² It is therefore unlikely that France is intervening chiefly to protect its existing economic interests.

Additionally, the French intervention in Mali to the delayed and (initially) limited French intervention in the CAR suggests that Operation Serval does not fall under the imperialist category of realist explanations for military intervention. Theoretically, the imperialist explanation possesses some credence: in the long run, it would benefit France to gain control of Mali's reserves of gold and uranium, given that much of France's energy comes from nuclear reactors.³³ However, France's delayed intervention in the Central African Republic implies that this was not a motivating factor. The Central African Republic possesses reserves of many of the same natural resources as does Mali, including uranium and oil.³⁴ Yet in December 2012, when CAR President (now ex-President) Francois Bozize requested French help against Seleka, a local collective of antigovernment rebels, Hollande refused to intervene. By comparison, French troops responded to the Malian government's request for help on January 23, 2013—less than a month after Bozize's request had been rejected.³⁵ This pattern of behavior seems inconsistent with Morgenthau's vision of imperialism. Had the Hollande administration been interested primarily in taking control of Mali's natural resources, it would presumably have intervened in the similarly wealthy CAR around the same time it intervened in Mali. It's unlikely that Hollande refrained from so interfering out of a desire not to overburden the French military. After all, France is now maintaining troops in both regions. Furthermore, when Hollande *did* intervene in the CAR in December 2013, French actions did not suggest any interest in the natural resources of the Central African Republic. Operation Sangaris appears to have been initially planned to be as limited as possible, suggesting that an extractive (i.e. imperialist) interest in the Central African Republic was not motivating the French intervention. For example, in December 2013, Hollande openly committed himself to a brief intervention, stating: "This intervention will be fast, it is not meant to last."³⁶ Note, too, that Hollande repeatedly called upon other European nations to send troops to the CAR.³⁷ Thus, it is unlikely that France's interest in Mali is primarily imperialist.

Furthermore, France's lack of tangible interests in Mali, its late intervention in the CAR, and the recent downsizing of the French military suggest that the French intervention in Mali was not primarily intended as a soft-power policy of prestige. While Morgenthau does not treat military *conflict* as a form of display, it is arguable that, given the significant disproportion in strength between France and the Malian Islamists, a realist could explain Operation Serval as a display of France's military power rather than as any sort of serious military conflict. However, France's lack of interests in Mali suggests that the prestige-politics model does not compellingly explain Serval. According to the prestige model, Operation Serval would be aimed at increasing other nations' estimate of French power and thus altering their foreign policy towards France. However, Mali (Islamist or otherwise) is not a rising power vis-

à-vis France, nor has France evinced significant extractive interest in the area as discussed earlier. Consequently, France has no need to impress its power upon the Malians, nor does it need to prevent other European nations from taking an interest in Mali. Furthermore, President Hollande has historically been uninterested in increasing France's external prestige with interventions in Africa. If Hollande had wanted to demonstrate French power by defeating a relatively weak opponent, it is not clear why he didn't also intervene in the CAR earlier in 2013: the CAR's Seleka rebels numbered about 3,000 by a generous estimate—about as much as the total forces of the Malian Islamists.^{38,39} Finally, Hollande has recently called for decreased military spending and for cuts in troop levels, which hardly seems consistent with any attempt to *display* French military power, either for international or domestic prestige.⁴⁰ Simply stated, a prestige-policy realist model does not explain the French intervention in Mali, considering the downgrade in military spending, delayed action in the CAR, and a lack of motivation in intervening in Mali.

III. OPERATION SERVAL AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

In the absence of a convincing realist explanation, Francois Hollande's policymaking in Mali has followed a distinctly constructivist pattern. Specifically, Hollande's justifications for intervention are strongly reminiscent of France's post-colonial policy after 1960, in which French leaders considered themselves responsible for the democratization of their ex-colonies. Prior to 1945, colonial French ideologists and politicians such as Prime Minister Jules Ferry frequently conceived of France as having a "civilizing mission" (*mission civilisatrice*) to remake its African colonies along French cultural and political lines, and to use military force to preserve the security of the states in which this civilizing mission was taking place.⁴¹ For example, the French policy of undermining the "aristocracy" of hereditary chiefs was partly driven by a desire to impose French republican ideals upon their African colonies.⁴² Similarly, as early as 1794, French leaders sought to "assimilate" France's colonies into a republican "Greater France," declaring: "all men, without distinction as to color, who are residents of the colonies, are French citizens."⁴³ Such declarations of the "civilizing mission" had broad support up to the Second World War, although actual conditions on the ground were frequently much less egalitarian.⁴⁴ In the wake of the Second World War, as decolonization increasingly forced the French government to loosen its explicit political ties with its colonies, successive French administrations adapted the core of the *mission civilisatrice* into a policy of "cooperation" with African ex-colonies. Under the cooperation doctrine, France and the African ex-colonies were conceived of as a Franco-African "family," in which France, while accepting the separateness and sovereignty of its ex-colonies and engaging in a certain degree of partnership with them, would leverage foreign aid and military interventions

to help build states on the French republican model.⁴⁵ Note that I am not arguing that cooperation was a continuous policy choice on the part of recent French presidents, merely that President Hollande has adopted such a policy.

This view of France as the head of a Franco-African “family,” and the corresponding perspective that France is, to some extent, responsible for the republicanism of its ex-colonies, appears to be motivating Hollande’s intervention in Mali. First, Hollande’s actions and statements prior to Serval suggest that he is personally invested in the core ideology of the “cooperation” doctrine: i.e. that France has a special relationship with Africa and is accordingly responsible for supporting the integrity of African republics, while still respecting their sovereignty. In spite of the fact that Hollande was elected on a platform wholly related to domestic issues,⁴⁶ which implies that his constituency was not particularly interested in African affairs, Hollande appears to have approached the presidency with a particularly strong interest in France’s relationship with Africa, especially in the realm of development, commissioning policy briefings on Africa and development.⁴⁷ Although it might be argued that Africa is an area of policy concern for many French heads of state (given that Africa has historically been a French sphere of influence),⁴⁸ Hollande appears to conceive of this “special relationship” as a partnership in which he must preserve African republicanism while still respecting these nations’ sovereignty and independence.^{49,50} For example, in a 2012 speech to the National Assembly of Senegal, Hollande both argued that France and Senegal shared a democratic political culture and emphasized his respect for Senegal’s sovereignty and independence:

The history we share is proud, turbulent and cruel. It’s a history that has left us a common language, but also a common political culture: democracy...I haven’t come here to Dakar to set an example, impose a model or teach a lesson ... Change will come first and foremost from the people. Africans have taken control of their destiny, and this movement won’t stop.⁵¹

Similarly, at a summit in 2012, Hollande publicly snubbed Congolese leader Joseph Kabila due to Kabila’s questionable record on democracy and human rights, but did not take further action. And democratic African nations such as Senegal have received more aid from Hollande than other nations.⁵² It is unlikely that this history of pro-democratic action is merely intended to make Hollande look good politically; Hollande’s French audience has generally not evinced much interest in African policies that do not impinge directly on French interests, perhaps as a result of France’s deepening economic crisis.⁵³ Note, for example, that French voters initially responded positively to the intervention in Mali,⁵⁴ which was billed heavily as a response to security issues, but voter response was far more negative for Operation Sangaris, which was declared a purely humanitarian intervention.⁵⁵ Thus, Hollande appears to genuinely believe in the ideology of “cooperation.” In turn, this ideology is reflected

in Hollande's public statements regarding the cause of Operation Serval. For example, in a television appearance in late March 2013 in which he attempted to defend his record to voters, Hollande justified the intervention partially on the grounds that "today, that France that was regarded as a colonizer is regarded as a liberator."⁵⁶ Finally, several of France's actions in the course of Serval also imply that Hollande is interested primarily in rebuilding the Malian state as a democracy (as opposed to pursuing Islamists or protecting its economic interests). For example, as described earlier, Hollande recently redirected French troops from a planned operation in Niger (which is economically important to France) to fight Malian ethnic separatists, who pose no threat to French security but who threaten the integrity of the Malian state.⁵⁷ Thus, the French policy towards Mali as composed by President Hollande appears to be influenced by the self-identity of post-colonial French relations with Africa.

IV. OPERATION SANGARIS AND REALISM

To a political realist, Hollande's initial reluctance to intervene in the Central African Republic seems to undercut a constructivist interpretation of Operation Serval. Historically, however, France and the CAR have had a relationship similar to that of France and Mali. The CAR is a former French colony, and both Mali and the Central African Republic were historically subjected to the "civilizing mission" in its various forms. For example, in the 1950s, as part of a short-lived Franco-African governing body known as the French Community, Mali and the CAR were frequently forced to defer to France on most matters of governance even after supposedly becoming autonomous regions.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the initial crises in Mali and the CAR are also remarkably similar in the threat they posed to an African pseudo-democracy. Both Interim Malian President Diounounda Traore and ex-President of the CAR Francois Bozize, it might be argued, had questionable but similarly pseudo-democratic credentials when they were threatened: Traore was handpicked as part of a power-sharing agreement with a military junta that came to power through a 2012 coup and has a low support base among Malians,⁵⁹ while Bozize has been accused of fraudulence in the elections which brought him to power.⁶⁰ And, like the Islamic rebels in Mali, the anti-Bozize Seleka movement was both antidemocratic and violent, seemingly the opposite of the government recommended by the "cooperation" doctrine. Seleka committed human rights violations and officially suspended elections for eighteen months, ostensibly to preserve the nation's stability.^{61,62} In short, a reasonable observer might ask in response to the claims of a constructivist: if Hollande were really motivated by a desire to maintain France's republican institutions in France's African ex-colonies, why would France move to support the arguably pseudo-democratic government of Dioncounda Traore but not that of Francois Bozize?

To respond to such a realist challenge, it is important to recognize that

the political-realist explanations for military interventions are even less likely to apply in the Central African Republic than in Mali. Unlike the conflict in Mali, which involved several cooperating groups with a shared history of espousing and undertaking attacks on French interests, most of the sides in the Central African Republic's conflict do not appear to be motivated by any ideological opposition to France—that is, groups which pose no direct threat to French security.⁶³ While French officials claim that Operation Sangaris was being continued in order to limit the growth of the Islamist group Boko Haram in the CAR,⁶⁴ President Hollande's public statements indicate otherwise. For instance, in a public statement just prior to the launch of Operation Sangaris, Hollande stated: “[Sangaris] is its [France's] duty...of assistance and solidarity towards a small country...France has no other objective than to save lives.”⁶⁵ It is unlikely that this particular statement was intended for political gain, given the aforementioned distaste of Hollande's constituency for purely humanitarian interventions in Africa. Accordingly, the fact that Hollande *did* justify this intervention on humanitarian grounds suggests that this statement was an accurate statement of his intentions, not mere rhetoric.

Second, an imperialist explanation does not satisfy. This is because, as previously discussed, Sangaris seems to have been planned to be as limited as possible. For example, French defense officials reportedly initially planned to minimize the number of troops committed to the intervention and the length of time the intervention would take up.⁶⁶ It is unlikely that France planned to take control of the CAR's resources in the course of such a transitory (and limited) operation. Finally, Sangaris was likely not intended to increase the prestige of the Hollande administration domestically or abroad. As mentioned in the previous section of this study, France has sought to increase the presence of troops from other African nations, which implies that the intervention is not meant as a display of French military power. For example, in May 2014, Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian met with Senegal's Macky Sall in the hope of convincing other African nations to contribute troops to the intervention in the CAR.⁶⁷ Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Hollande announced significant cuts to France's military budget in a 2013 white paper,⁶⁸ which certainly suggests that he is not trying (unlike in the typical case of prestige politics) to display French military might. Thus, political realism offers no better of an explanation for the intervention in the CAR than it does for the intervention in Mali.

V. CONSTRUCTIVISM IN THE CAR

A closer examination of the crisis in the Central African Republic and Hollande's eventual response suggests that Hollande's ideology – using the constructivist explanation – may also explain the timing of Operation Sangaris. Specifically, Hollande's decision to delay the intervention until December 2013

is consistent with the “cooperation” doctrine’s emphasis on republicanism: while the Malian government which France supported was in fact much more democratic than Bozize’s government, Hollande chose to intervene in the CAR only when Bozize was replaced by the more democratic government of Catherine Samba-Panza. First, contrary to the realist counterargument laid out in the previous section, the government of Mali which France supported was in fact considerably more democratic than the Bozize government that France abandoned. Although a democratically elected Malian government was overthrown by a military junta headed by Captain Amadou Sanogo in March 2012, the acting president of Mali in 2013, Diounounda Traore, appears to have been a genuinely democratic choice rather than Sanogo’s puppet. Traore has historically supported the democratically elected ex-President of Mali Amadou Toure, a rival of Sanogo’s, and has been attacked by supporters of Sanogo’s coup.⁶⁹ More importantly, Traore’s prime minister, Diango Sissoko, promised elections in July 2013 in accordance with French demands;⁷⁰ when the elections did occur, E.U. observers reportedly noticed few irregularities.⁷¹ By contrast, ex-President Bozize first came to power after leading a military coup, was mysteriously re-elected for ten consecutive years, and has reportedly engaged in human rights violations.⁷² Furthermore, when France finally intervened in the CAR, it intervened not to protect Bozize’s Francophile dictatorship, but to maintain the stability of the government of Catherine Samba-Panza, whose election has been supported by members of both sides in CAR’s current civil war.⁷³ The constructivist interpretation of France’s intervention is further supported by Hollande’s public statements on the event. When President Bozize requested French help, Hollande justified his lack of interference in the CAR on the grounds that “if we are present, it is not to protect a regime.”⁷⁴ His use of the phrase “a regime” to describe the Bozize government suggests that he (correctly) viewed the choice between Bozize and Djotodia as merely supporting one dictatorship or another. By contrast, after Bozize and Seleka were replaced by Samba-Panza, Hollande declared the intervention to be driven by a “duty” of “assistance and solidarity” towards the Central African Republic.

While some might question why – if this is so – Hollande did not attempt to depose Djotodia’s decidedly nondemocratic Seleka government, the cooperation doctrine’s emphasis on “partnership” provides some clarification. Recall that since 1945, France’s perception of the African colonies had incorporated an element of response to colonies’ desire for self-determination and sovereignty. This adaptation to the *mission civilisatrice* eventually found its way into cooperation’s assumption of a familial “partnership” between France and its African colonies,⁷⁵ and was expressed by Francois Hollande in his 2012 speech at Senegal. This recognition of the sovereignty of the ex-colonies may have led France to distance itself from the conflict in the CAR. Unlike the

Islamist groups of Mali, some of which are based in other African nations, the CAR's Seleka rebel coalition was, at least theoretically, supposed to be a coalition of local inhabitants of the CAR.⁷⁶ That is, France could fulfill its perceived role as a "familial" supporter of democracy by supporting Traore's government without directly infringing on Mali's independence as a nation.

By contrast, there were no "handholds" for democracy in Bozize's CAR: France could not have created an actual democracy without picking leaders and a structure of its own, which would conflict with its traditional policy approach. Intervention in Mali might be supporting democracy, but intervention in Bozize's CAR would not respect the partnership aspect of cooperation. And when France did intervene in the CAR's civil conflict, it was with the explicit invitation of Samba-Panza's government: Hollande made a point of noting publicly that the government of the CAR was "calling for help."⁷⁷ Ultimately, the constructivist account of President Hollande's reasons for intervening in Mali does not appear to be inconsistent with Hollande's initial nonintervention in the CAR.

VI. CONCLUSION

At the close of this paper, a disclaimer is in order. Although we have seen that constructivism serves as a highly convincing explanation for France's recent interventions in Africa, it is important to recall that this study only examines the interventions in Mali and the CAR in the light of two international relations paradigms: constructivism and political realism. Accordingly, this paper does *not* make the claim that constructivism is necessarily the only school of theory which can explain French actions in Africa. However, while this case for constructivism cannot definitively show that constructivism *necessarily* explains Hollande's African policy, the extreme consistency of constructivism with Hollande's statements and actions (and the fact that Morgenthau's realism does not sufficiently explain these interventions) underlines constructivism's considerable potential to explain Hollande's policy. Accordingly, while this paper does not present the only possible explanation for Serval and Sangaris, it offers this guidepost to future researchers: it would be extremely worthwhile to examine whether constructivism and its focus on ideology might serve as the definitive explanation of the African policy of Francois Hollande. Future research may well find that an alternative paradigm, such as neorealist or liberal theory, offers an even better explanation for Hollande's African policy.⁷⁸

NOTES

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