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*New parameters of world affairs as challenges to
military intervention and Foreign Policy making :
the case of France in Africa*

Six years after the end of the Cold War, nothing can be taken for granted about the actors of international relations, about the role of the State, the role of military intervention. On the contrary, it is no exaggeration to consider that the debate is more blurred than ever by a succession of new types of crises, conflicts, or civil wars. In an attempt to understand this situation, many political scientists have insisted for several years on global interdependence, complex linkage, in a so-called world society, whose main consequence was to weaken the efficiency of national Foreign policies and more generally the relevance of any military intervention.

The case of France in Africa is telling. As though it was a tradition inherited from the colonial era, France has led many military interventions - some say adventures - in Sub-Saharan Africa, since the independence of her former colonies after 1960. Almost thirty major commitments have been decided by French Presidents, from General de Gaulle to François Mitterrand, from African independences to 1995. We do not include here former French colonies in Arab North Africa - Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia -, that deserve another complete debate.¹ In spite of harsh criticism against "French conservative and colonial attitude towards Africa", some aspects of the problem have changed through the past years, especially since the fall of the Soviet Empire : if France still clings to Africa for many traditional reasons, new parameters have been arising, and new alibis for intervention are required. From Senegal in 1962 to Ruanda in 1994, a real shift can be observed in the nature of military intervention, whose lessons lead us to one conclusion and to one question : 1- If the State is indeed in decline as the major actor of world affairs, neither the United Nation system nor multilateral "New World Orders" can hitherto replace it. 2- Is military intervention the indication of political defeat ?

¹ See Rémy Leveau, *Le Sabre et le Turban*, Paris, 1993. Kacem Basfao and Jean-Robert Henry, *Le Maghreb, l'Europe, la France*, CNRS, Paris, 1992.

Our aim here is not to analyse the military means and tactics of French military intervention in Africa, in terms of quality and number of weapons, planes and guns, but to see how the concept of military intervention itself - its nature and implications - has been changing during the last years, and how the end of the Cold War has altered and weakened the classical grammar of power politics. Our purpose is not to explain how military intervention is possible, but why States keep on returning to it. At a time when the political scientists point out the complex turbulence of the world scene, France's attitude in her once termed "backyard" arena provides us with an interesting and concrete test case as to whether force and power politics are still suitable concepts to manage the manifold actors and parameters that shape today's international relations.

I- From international relations to world society : new actors and new parameters

The 1989 events in Europe put the study of international politics into great trouble, for none of the various theories that had been developed so far was able to give any account for what was occurring. Moreover, the European political upheavals were even totally opposed to most scholars' predictions : while theories of the Cold War era were still explaining why a major conflict between two super powers could not be avoided, the USSR collapsed from within.

The political study of international relations had then to consider those global changes as "theoretical challenges",² requiring new insights. What did the end of the Cold War mean ? It meant, first, that some of the criticisms raised against the Morgenthau or Aron-dated Power Politics may be right : 1- Realism and rational approach had failed and the world was now in state of global "turbulence", as Rosenau put it.³ 2- It was not easy, from then on, for States, to face this new deal with classical tools, i.e. essentially diplomacy and military intervention.

New Theoretical insights : from State system to multi-centred arena

In spite of what has been said and written in the wake of the Berlin revolution, we deeply think that what was in crisis was not the whole discipline of international relations, but more precisely one of its basic tenets : the search for power through military capacities. In the 70's already, Keohane and Nye had put the stress on the "complex interdependence", that

²James N. Rosenau et Ernst O. Czempiel, *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges : Approaches to World Politics for the 1990s*, Lexington Books, Lexington, 1989.

³James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics : A Theory of Change and Continuity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990.

hindered any State from using its military means in order to reach its political goals. This "end of hegemony", developed by Keohane, a few years later, made world affairs far more difficult to read and understand.⁴ A community of States, with clear and rational rules, had now to give way - in scholars minds - to an "anarchical society",⁵ where manifold actors were developing various individual or collective strategies. The issues intertwined, making it impossible to settle any account without disordering another one. It was now admitted that States were sensitive to the speed and scale of global change, and vulnerable to the neighbours' domestic troubles. No longer being the only actors of world affairs, States had to treat non-State, non governmental groups, as official interlocutors : humanitarian NGOs, religious groups or associations, firms, terrorists, migrants - i.e. simple citizens -, became potential agents of the international change. In an original attempt to depict this situation, John Burton evoked the "cobweb" pattern to replace the famous "billard ball" image of the world.⁶ A chaos had replaced the well ordered State system, and this was confirmed when the Berlin Wall collapsed.

In 1990, James Rosenau gave this chaos a name and order : turbulence. Turbulence is a situation where changing elements hit conservative forces, in a complex transition that has probably no end. This vision clearly states that we must not expect any definitive New World Order : ambiguity between change and continuity, between State system and the rise of skilful individuals or citizens, between inter-State relationship and transnational links, may persist, leading us to a global and puzzling stalemate. If we admit Rosenau's diagnostic, the political scientist has to cope with three main questions : a) what is the role of the State in this turbulent world, made of many interdependent actors ? b) What is the real power of non State actors, and is this power really new ? c) Are military intervention and diplomacy obsolete tools in this new world ? The State is not the sole actor anymore. Is it still the central one ? NGOs, terrorist or religious groups have been existing for a long time. Are they more powerful now ? Military power and intervention capacities have always been considered as basic capabilities. Are they becoming impediments for those who possess them ? Did the USSR fall because of its heavy and paralysed military bureaucracy, because of the cost of its military adventures

⁴ Robert O. Keohane et Joseph S. Nye, *Transnational Relations and World Politics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1972. Robert O. Keohane et Joseph S. Nye, *Power and interdependence : World Politics in Transition*, Little Brown, Boston, 1977. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony : Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), 1984.

⁵ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society : A Study of Order in World Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1977.

⁶ John Burton, *World Society*, Cambridge University Press, Londres, 1972.

abroad?⁷ Did the German unification demonstrate that commercial and economic strength had now overpowered security capacities?⁸ The controversy seemed to vanish after the Gulf crisis, when realist supporters pronounced the triumph of power politics. It bounced back when Somalia, then Bosnia, cast a new light on the relevance of the "New UN World Order" rhetoric. Could the world remain the same after the downfall of one of its two superpowers? Could the study of world politics ignore the disintegration of what had been its central object - the Cold War - for a half-century? The realist tenets had undergone a severe setback, without having really found any convincing new thought to replace them. After Rosenau and Czempiel's injunctions for new approaches of change in world affairs,⁹ after Fred Halliday's suggestion to "re-think international relations",¹⁰ after Badie and Smouts's assessment that the World now found itself head over heels,¹¹ what is left of international politics?

It would be a mistake to hold these questions for mere theoretical - and thus abstract - wrangles: if the task is uneasy for the scholar, so is it for the Foreign Policy decision maker. In a new world, new tools are required. Can the same agents use them?

From Foreign Policy to global diplomacy

How to deal with world society? The riddle is very concrete today at the Quai d'Orsay or Whitehall, to mention only two former European colonial powers. Is it necessary to replace the old patterns, the old practice of diplomacy, by a sort of catch-all decision process, involving new experts, new interlocutors, new methods and new goals? The problem was raised in 1993 by the British House of Commons, when the Foreign Affairs Committee urged for a new "preventive diplomacy" in co-operation with the United Nations, backed up by more effective mechanisms for the provision of information and analysis, adapted to the "changing nature of international conflicts". As a recommendation, the Committee proposed an enfranchisement of new relevant actors, including corporations, churches,

⁷ See Paul Kennedy's demonstrations (*The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*), and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Tout Empire Périra*.

⁸ See Suzan Strange, *States and Markets*, Pinter Publishers, London, 1988.

⁹ See James N. Rosenau et Ernst O. Czempiel, *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges: Approaches to World Politics for the 1990s*, op. cit.

¹⁰ Fred Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations*, Macmillan, London, 1994.

¹¹ Bertrand Badie et Marie-Claude Smouts, *Le Retournement du Monde: Sociologie de la Scène Internationale*, FNSP, Paris, 1992.

NGOs and individuals, that could be consulted through regular conferences.¹²

The idiom "new nature of international conflicts" is one of the key elements of today's dilemma, for what is at stake is precisely the function of war and peace in the world-wide arena. If war and peace mingle, as Simmel had hinted in his time, the role of diplomacy - in peace time - and the role of military intervention - in war time - pass out. Such whereabouts might account for the complex and harsh discussion concerning the nature of humanitarian action, especially since the Gulf war, when humanitarian NGOs intervened in Kurdistan, then when similar groups intervened in Somalia, Bosnia, Africa, protected by troops. The term "global diplomacy" has been used to refer to those circumstances, where civil help and military intervention, State sovereignty and non-governmental initiatives join in a strange confusion.¹³ Nevertheless, it is not clear how governments respond to global change, and "global diplomacy" refers to a good deal of hesitations rather than to a real guideline for the restructuring of Foreign Policy.¹⁴ If a global theory seems to be out of reach to scholar's eyes, an overall *praxis* of world affairs sounds more and more like a labyrinth to the decision makers. If we take the case of France and Britain, three essential steps - should we say three disruptions - have led to this quandary after the beginning of the Cold War. 1- The end of colonial era, with two major consequences : it gave an end to the "great power" dimension of both countries, and it created a global challenge to the western political order, supported by a global public opinion. 2- The end of the Cold War, that urged both diplomacies to re-order most of their political priorities, without having any clue about the future. 3- The rise of non-state actors, unveiled by the rise of NGOs after the Gulf war, that may be seen as the end of the monopolistic position of States on the world scene : both integration of humanitarian NGOs (ICRC and others) in the political management of the Kurdish question, and resolution 688 concerning the right of intervention in another State's affairs for humanitarian reasons, struck heavily the rule of Sovereignty that had prevailed since the Westphalian treaty.

As a result, the combination of these three steps made it far more arduous for States to use military intervention as a tool for achieving their political goals. Power politics became almost politically incorrect, while public opinion and domestic front - from firms to media and minorities -

¹² House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, 1993 report, Chapter IV, "Relations with international organizations, relations with non-participating States, role of non-governmental organizations".

¹³ On those matters, see *Cultures et Conflits*, n°11, 1993, "L'action humanitaire".

¹⁴ Jerel A. Rosati, Joe D. Hagan, Martin W. Simpson, *Foreign Policy Restructuring*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1994.

grew as compulsory parameters of any external action. In this prospect, the evolution of French military intervention in Africa comes as an interesting instance, for both the nature and the reasons of French commitments have been deeply changing in the last years, illustrating the global dilemmas of Foreign Policy making in a "turbulent" world.

II- France in Africa : global changes and national challenges

It is not rare to hear, in top French political spheres, that "the French-African link is a tradition", without entering into more details. Yet, this "historical" role of France in Sub-Saharan Africa has a cost, when it leads French decision makers to send troops, to face most of her Western allies discontent, some of her other African allies' uneasiness or mistrust, and to cope with a reluctant, even hostile domestic public opinion.¹⁵ But as long as the Cold War was unfolding, France could find many good reasons to cling to her role in the "forgotten continent". Her military presence, her military interventions had accurate alibis, if not always a logic.¹⁶

Goals and means : why France clings to Africa

Since 1960, when French Sub-Saharan African colonies became independent, French politics towards Africa has been characterised by an obvious continuity, expressed in the decision makers speeches : "To be great, France needs the feet of the African giant", De Gaulle (1958-69) used to say.¹⁷ According to President Georges Pompidou (1969-74), "France has to keep up her prominent role in Africa, by a certain influence, a certain political, military, cultural and moral presence".¹⁸ This point of view was shared by President Giscard d'Estaing (1974-81) in his 1975-82 military plan,¹⁹ while François Mitterrand (1981-95) assessed that "France's security is intensely linked to Africa's future".²⁰ The result of thirty five years of French African Policy is the presence of nearly 10.000 French agents or soldiers in Africa (five military bases - Ivory Coast, Central Africa, Djibouti - the most important one with 4.000 troops -, Gabon, Senegal), plus temporary interventions : since 1960, France intervened in Senegal (1962), Gabon (1964, 1990), Central Africa (1967-70, 1979), Chad

¹⁵ See S. Michailof, *La France et l'Afrique*, Karthala, Paris, 1993.

¹⁶ See Jacques Adda and Marie-Claude Smouts, *La France Face au Sud : Le Miroir Brisé*, Karthala, Paris, 1989.

¹⁷ E. Barnavi, *La Politique Etrangère du Général de Gaulle*, PUF, Paris, 1985.

¹⁸ Quoted in *Défense Nationale*, February 1973. See T. Diallo, *La Politique Etrangère de Georges Pompidou*, LGDJ, Paris, 1992.

¹⁹ Issued in 1976. See Samy Cohen, Marie-Claude Smouts, *La Politique Etrangère de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*, FNSP, Paris, 1985.

²⁰ François Mitterrand, Press Conference, Franco-African Summit, Brazzaville, 11-10-1982.

(1968-72, 1983-88, 1986-95), Zaire (1977-78, 1991-92), Comoros (1989), Ruanda (1990-93, 1994), Togo (1986, 1991), Benin (1991), Angola (1992), Somalia (1992, 1993). Eight African countries have signed Defence agreements with France, involving French intervention in case of - often undefined - troubles : Ivory Coast, Central Africa, Djibouti, Gabon, Senegal, Cameroon, Comoros, Togo. The concept of "Defence" is understood both in a domestic and external sense, meaning that the authorities of the concerned State can call on France for help in case of internal upheavals, as well as in case of foreign attack.²¹

France also sends direct support in military devices (essentially to Chad and Senegal), military agents (about 1.000 French advisers in 1995, with very high responsibilities in the local army, and orders from top French decision makers), and military training in France (2.000 African soldiers in France every year) or Africa (several centres in Ivory Coast, Togo, Zaire, Senegal). Let us add that Africa receives massive French support under the title of civil co-operation programs : French teachers, scientific or technical civil advisers, doctors, are sent by Paris.

The reasons of such a commitment are complex. French action in Sub-Saharan Africa remains obscure, in its goals as in its means. Beyond the official explanations, beyond the avowed amounts confessed by the ministries of Co-operation or Foreign Affairs, what are the purposes of the French tradition of intervention ? It is necessary to distinguish two different contexts, to answer this question. The first one is the Cold War era (1960-89), when French commitments could be seen as part of the East-West confrontation. The second one, from 1989 on, is far more puzzling, as will be observed in the third part of this paper.

In the first period, three main parameters seem to be prominent regarding the French behaviour in Africa. 1- A real will not to relinquish the last area in the world where France remains slightly more than a middle-rank power, thus a will to remain influential within the Western military order, with a world-wide mission. 2- Both an economic and strategic consideration, given that France is dependant on African raw materials such as uranium, iron, bauxite, copper... 3- A complex and somehow mighty African lobby in France, made of French private envoys, personal advisers or colonialist regretful fellow travellers. In these prospects, military intervention went along with a classical power politics, and constituted a perfect tool in order to claim international weight. The Second World War had torn down French and British ostentation to remain great powers. After a last attempt, the Suez crisis in 1956 confirmed the definitive character of this situation. While Great Britain favoured a "special relationship" with the

²¹ See Marc Mertillo, "Les armées françaises à l'étranger - Coopération militaire en Afrique", *Revue d'Administration Publique*, juin 1988. Pascal Chaigneau, *La Politique Militaire de la France en Afrique*, La Documentation Française, Paris, 1984.

United States, France clung to the "Dust of Empire", trying to replace former colonial supremacy with new "co-operation" links. In this quest for honour, Africa was the last continent where both first-rank political leaders and forgotten adventurers could shoulder the illusion of being able to change History with two hundred soldiers and twelve planes. "Conflicts" in Africa are indeed particular when one compares them to the meaning of the term in Europe : a) The African State is not a security community trusted by its citizens; b) Even though some African countries possess high-tech military devices and skilful troops, most of the conflicts involve limited means and low technology; c) Yet, those conflicts may be protracted by ethnic parameters, vested interests, individual functions (mercenaries...), while professional resources and nationalist feelings are rare, which enables restricted external forces (French, but also British, Belgian, Cuban or Soviet, as seen in the 70's) to wield a certain influence. d) In this context of ethnic or religious rivalry, the task is particularly strenuous for UN troops, as the UNAVEM mission in Angola, UNISOM mission in Somalia or ECOMOG in Liberia showed.

Not only had France an international role to play at a lower cost, but military intervention was also a mean to keep French-speaking countries under control, and even to play cheap power politics in wielding occasionally new influence in former Belgian, Portuguese or British colonies. Logically, the three official reasons for French interventions in Africa before 1989 were thus : a) to restore order, b) to enhance France's credibility as a world-wide god father, and c) to contain soviet influence.

Some characteristics of the past military interventions

Until the end of the Cold War, French military and political strategy in Africa could be termed a pure power Policy. Three cases show clearly France's determination to restore order, in order to maintain her rank : Zaire (1977-78), Central Africa (1979), and Togo (1986).

President Giscard d'Estaing's two interventions in Zaire in support of the Mobutu regime surprised most of the observers. In 1977, he sent advisers, arms and aircrafts to help a Moroccan force to repulse an incursion into the copper-rich Shaba Province by forces of the Front de Libération Nationale Congolaise (FLNC), from Angola. The second adventure - in 1978 - consisted in sending the 2nd Régiment Etranger Parachutiste that jumped onto Kolwezi, in conjunction with Belgian forces, in order to chase the same enemy back into Angola. As an independent country, France wanted to revive a long interest in Zaire, to respect a recent Defence agreement, signed in 1975 with President Mobutu, and probably to

supersede Belgian influence in her ex-colony.²² As part of the Western alliance, France contributed to restoring order in a tottering continent, just as the Soviet Union was trying to gain ground in its global competition with Washington. Angola, the base of FLNC, was precisely sensitive to Marxist mermaids after a wobbly Portuguese withdrawal. The FLNC invasion in Zaire was then termed a Soviet plot, in order to overthrow Mobutu's regime - favourable to the West -, and to grip copper and cobalt strategic resources. Giscard's resoluteness brought an end to the policy of military disengagement, which had lasted for nearly a decade. It is noteworthy that at the same time, in December 1977, France intervened against Polisario in Mauritania, and, few months later, provided Chad with logistical support and troops.

In 1979, another instance of French militarism in Africa came in for harsh and widespread criticism when France, by a sudden assault on the capital Bangui - "operation Barracuda" -, offered support for David Dacko in the Central African Republic, who deposed Emperor Bokassa. The reasons of intervention are not clear,²³ but we can find the same rational pillars. The rank of France : French activism was matched by active political involvement, more and more African States attended the annual Franc-African summit meetings during the late 70's. Giscard, rekindling the idea of an imperial French Presidency, claimed that France stood at the top of "Eurafricanism". The cold war : Emperor Bokassa was then paying a visit to pro-Soviet Libya's Khaddafi, and the recent example of Zaire gave French officials an alibi to keep USSR from taking advantage of the disengagement of minor European powers in Africa. Whatever the credibility of such arguments, the frame of the Cold War was suitably structuring any political move.²⁴

Another case is the French military intervention in Togo, initiated in 1986 by President Mitterrand, who was very active in Africa too, although he had strongly condemned most of Giscard's past interventions.²⁵ In September 1986, France sent 200 parachutists to Togo, from Gabon and Central Africa, in order to put down an internal uprising that the government of Lome claimed was inspired by opponents of the regime in Ghana. This use of force, called by General Eyadema shortly before a Franco-African Summit was to take place, showed that France was still

²² See C. Braeckman, *Le Dinosaur. Le Zaire de Mobutu*, Fayard, Paris, 1991.

²³ Giscard's personal links with the dictator were becoming very embarrassing, which had something to do with the intervention : he and the members of his family were accused of having profited from his previously friendly relations with Bokassa, and it was suggested that Barracuda was mounted to rid Giscard of a domestic storm in the public opinion.

²⁴ See P. Decraene, *L'Afrique Centrale*, CHEAM, Paris, 1993.

²⁵ See Jean-François Bayart, *La Politique Africaine de François Mitterrand*, Karthala, Paris, 1984.

concerned - and able - to help African leaders who were close to her.²⁶ In the context of a national consensus,²⁷ it was also asserted in France that Togo was threatened by three "progressist" border-States : Benin, Burkina and Ghana. Then again, the context of the Cold War provided France with an ideological justification to an operation whose aim was to help a firmly established pro-French regime, in order to secure other African friends, whatever the kind of regime and the room accorded to "Republican values" such as Human Rights.

The French interventions in Chad are probably the best examples of Power and containment politics. Until Mitterrand's presidency, French military action in Africa was essentially of two types : long-term peace keeping, and short-term firefighting action. But with the decision to intervene in Chad in 1983, the French government was forced to keep up an important military detachment, initially created to deter further Libyan action in the south of the country, then at the service of the government of N'djamena to preserve territorial integrity. This decision finally made France both a key element in the Western policy of containment against Soviet Allies, and the hostage of decisions taken in N'djamena. The permanence of the French presence in Chad contrasted sharply with the nature of past interventions, for it marked clearly the disadvantages of military action. Operation Manta was initiated in October 1983, to respond positively to a Chadian request for military assistance to repulse an incursion by Libyan troops. France succeeded in creating a military stalemate for Khaddafi, but new and uncomfortable parameters came in sight. Great pressure was exerted upon Mitterrand, simultaneously by his American ally and by African friends - Houphouët Boigny, Omar Bongo, Abou Diouf or General Mobutu. The African leaders pointed out to France that privileged relations involved reciprocal responsibilities. For the first time too, the enemy was strong enough to resist : President Mitterrand negotiated a withdrawal with the Libyan leader and defined a territorial red-line, but to Paris great embarrassment, Khaddafi got caught red-handed cheating, not withdrawing across the border as agreed, and hiding troops in Chad, while the French had withdrawn the bulk of their forces south to the Central African Republic. In terms of public opinion, the result was a disaster (let us add that the cost of the operation was about \$400.000 a day). In terms of military efficiency, the situation led Mitterrand to initiate a further - and more successful - campaign few months later (Operation Epervier). Since 1986, 900 French soldiers and advisers have been staying in Chad to prevent any aggression.

²⁶ President Mitterrand declared he acted "in the respect, honesty and loyalty" of the 1963 France-Togo agreement.

²⁷ Prime minister Jacques Chirac and his adviser for Africa - Jacques Foccart who was already General de Gaulle's adviser - supported the intervention.

Until 1989, the principal political justifications for intervention were based on geopolitical criteria, sometimes affected by symbolic considerations. They took place exclusively on French initiative, and almost without outside help. Without major exposure too : in fact, the USSR seemed to have accepted the spheres of influence in Africa, and Soviet leaders appeared to stop military support to the FLNC in Zaire as soon as French troops were deployed in the Shaba Province. Nevertheless, the East-West confrontation gave France an irreplaceable alibi for her African dream. But the Chadian adventure was the first herald of a new era. It was now clear that as long as France wanted to enjoy the advantages of a privileged relationship in her "African backyard", she had to be prepared to pay a price, higher than a mere symbolic military intervention. Moreover, military intervention itself ran the risk of sinking into remote quicksands, an attestation of impotence, rather than a demonstration of strength. For France, there seemed to be "only one Chad" in Africa, and in no other country could one have expected French troops to be deployed so often, for so long, in such numbers, on behalf of so many different leaders, and with so little ultimate effect on regional stability. But the complexity of a more and more interdependent world scene, with various actors in various zones, made the case a classical outcome of the new post-Cold War era.

III- Power after the end of the Cold War : how to wield influence ?

After the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union, the end of communism in Europe, German reunification and US unipolarity, France felt like a shabby genteel country left alone with an elapsed imperial "rêverie", with her "international power" confined to a forgotten continent, and overpowered by forgetful allies. Why restore order when the foe disappears, and when the French Order does not exist anymore ? Why use military intervention in a world where military power is out-of-date ? To answer this question, an analysis of the means, reasons and parameters of recent French military interventions in Africa is required. Since 1990, three types of action can be distinguished : a) humanitarian operations, b) protection and evacuation of French or Western nationals, c) peace making or peace keeping. Two paramount trends can be observed : 1- New means and new alibis were found, that have revealed the end of French military exception in Africa, 2- The presence of new actors and parameters that make military intervention an inappropriate tool for today's quest for power.

Crises after 1989 : new means and new alibis

It was becoming clearer and clearer for few years that something had to be changed in the means of military intervention. In the 1984-88

Military Programme Law, France introduced a major innovation with the creation of a new intervention tool, the FAR - Force d'Action Rapide -, whose aim was to maintain a world-wide - i.e. essentially African... - efficient and firm capacity, between the rank of hegemonic superpower and the one of mediocre province.²⁸ Beyond the contribution of such a feature, the creation of the FAR was the recognition that there were considerable limits to France's ability to act overseas, and maybe that any military initiative was bound to be quick and precise, if it were to remain a useful solution. But many years after decolonization, the increasing complexity of the world, of security problems, their almost definitional intractability, had made it difficult for any power to suggest effective compromises and possible changes.

Things have changed since 1990. The totalitarian States in Eastern Europe have vanished, the Gulf War has created the illusion of a "New World Order", and some African regimes have turned - sometimes temporarily - into democracies : Benin, Cap Verde, Congo, Mali, Sao Tome, Zambia. New hopes were emerging in South Africa, Madagascar, Angola, Niger, Togo, Zaire. Concessions were made in Burkina Fasso, Burundi, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Mauritania.²⁹ As soon as June 1990, President Mitterrand had anticipated this trend : during the summit of La Baule, he explicitly linked French aid to Africa to democratic reforms. At least officially, the 1989-90 events forced French officials to adapt their speech and to give up the old rhetoric of power politics. It is significant that General Henri Paris, in charge of the French Second Armoured Division, evokes military and political agreements in Africa as a side issue, as a subordinate priority after human rights, commercial interests, the security of French nationals abroad, etc.³⁰

From 1990 on, French military interventions in Africa were labelled with humanitarian purposes, and often initiated in co-operation with the United Nations. As though France - along with other Western powers - was trying to re-invent the concept of intervention... or was pleading guilty in regard to the past years. The 1992 intervention in Somalia - operation Restore Hope - is the first UN - US - French intervention in Africa, whose aim was to enable humanitarian help to reach the populations. After heavy uncertainty, France decided to be part of the UN involvement,³¹ among a total of 28.000 soldiers (1.200 from the U.S.)

²⁸ The FAR comprises five divisions and a logistic formation totalling approximately 47.000 men.

²⁹ The downfall of Ceaucescu in Romania deeply impressed a good deal of African leaders, puzzled by the crash of so strong a regime. See Jean-Louis Triaud, "Le mouvement de démocratisation en Afrique", *Relations Internationales et Stratégiques*, n°4, Winter 1991.

³⁰ General Henri Paris, "La stratégie militaire française en Afrique subsaharienne", *Relations Internationales et Stratégiques*, n°4, Winter 1991.

³¹ See resolution 794 of 3-12-1992, and the action of ONUSOM and ONUSOM II.

and 2.800 civilians, from thirty-two countries including six African States,³² with the collaboration of the Organisation of African Unity, the Arab League and the Islamic Conference.³³ The Somalian case is at the core of the redefinition of military intervention, for it occurs almost in the same context as the Gulf War : a) A vast coalition of States whose aim is to restore order, with the concern of international legitimacy; b) An exceptional operation that cannot be repeated; c) A failure to solve the real problems in spite of military supremacy : one would have retained that General Aideed and his rebels have humiliated the first military power in the world, few months after its claimed victory against Iraq, once presented as the "fourth army in the world". Even if Somalia had never been in the French sphere of influence, it may seem surprising that Paris took part in such an adventure with its allies and with the United Nations. For the French decision makers, two different - and opposed - lessons could be drawn from the nightmare of the operation "Restore Hope" : 1- It was necessary to admit that any military intervention was now a major risk, that might bring more problems than solutions, and more damage than dividends to whom initiated it; 2- France had nothing to gain from a joint-operation with the US and the UN, and would better off rehabilitating her traditional "free rider" African Policy. What occurred next in Ruanda seemed to indicate that French officials succumbed to the second temptation.

When Ruanda, a small former German then Belgian colony without any attractive resource,³⁴ first sank into both ethnic and political upheavals in October 1990, after the invasion of the north of the country by the FPR (Ruanda Patriotic Front) from Uganda, France sent a military assistance to Kigali until September 1993 ("operation Noroit"). Few months later, in April 1994, President Habyarimana died in a plane with his neighbour, President Ntaryamira of Burundi. In the following hours, governmental Hutu armed agents committed massacres against Tutsi populations, which provoked another invasion by the FPR in the north-east, once again from Uganda. The gravity of the ethnic mass murders, the impotence of the United Nations (unable to implement the Minuar II operation), convinced the French authorities to intervene almost alone,³⁵ for a temporary, humanitarian and neutral action defined by resolution 929. Four main factors characterise the military aspects of this intervention, called "Operation Turquoise" : a) the risk to run into a major conflict with

³² Morocco, Nigeria, Egypt, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Tunisia.

³³ See "La corne de l'Afrique", *Politique Africaine*, n°50, June 1993, Karthala, Paris. R. Marchal, "Somalie, autopsie d'une intervention", *Politiques Internationales*, n°61, October 1993, Paris.

³⁴ Rwanda's surface is 26.340 km², with 8 millions inhabitants, i.e. a density of 306. See F. Nahimana, *Le Rwanda : Emergence d'un Etat*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1993.

³⁵ 2.500 men, plus 500 from Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Chad, Mauritania, Egypt, Niger, Congo, 700 vehicles.

one of the two belligerents, i.e. the FPR and the FAR - Ruanda Armed Forces; b) the geographical situation of Ruanda, without any maritime coast and very far from France (8.000 km); c) the limited time scale fixed by the United Nations, from 22 June to 22 August; d) the humanitarian aspect, with the creation of a "Humanitarian Security Zone" to protect the refugees, which required strong military positions in order to keep the FAR or the FPR from reaching those areas. 3.500 people have been evacuated, and France provided the victims with important medical aid, and water supplies (6000 m³), owing to the EMMIR - Military Medical Element of Rapid Intervention -, supervised from Paris by a "Civil and Humanitarian Crisis Office".

This case is remarkable for many reasons. First of all, it is noteworthy that from 1990 to 1993, a twenty-eight month French military intervention could not bring a solution to the real problems of the country. Second, we are here at the core of the dilemmas of the so-called "New World Order" initiated by the Gulf War, and especially by resolution 688 concerning the duty of intervention in case of major human tragedy. Last but not least, the goals, means, nature and outcomes of military intervention appeared to be more unclear, ambiguous and deceptive than ever. Did France return to an old, patriarchal, colonial and geopolitical logic, trying to wield a new influence in the former colony of a European rival ? Let us note that Ruanda is not even a French-speaking country - with a national language, the Kinyaruanda -, and that in 1994, Uganda did not provide even the more stubborn analyst with the slightest excuse of communist subversive activity.³⁶ Did France want to give a new virginity to her Foreign Policy in Ruanda, after having been accused of supporting the dictatorial regime of the late President Habyarimana ? This did not require such an important intervention, from top political leaders who were not used to offering any *mea culpa* for former initiatives in their "private backyard". It seems indeed that the post Cold War era logic of military intervention finds here its most eloquent and meaningful limit : 1- French intervention in Ruanda was made unavoidable by the joint pressure of public opinion, humanitarian NGOs and private specialists of Africa, the ones eagerly castigated by Glaser and Smith in their essay Ces Messieurs Afrique.³⁷ 2- The intervention required humanitarian alibis, without any plausible gain in terms of power, in the classical sense of the word. Military intervention was thus at the service of a non-governmental cause - should we say a non-political cause -, hence the conclusion that, if we think in terms of classical, neorealist international thought, military intervention is

³⁶ But one may argue that Uganda is somehow culturally close to the United Kingdom, which may establish a true *casus belli* ...

³⁷ A. Glaser and Stan Smith, *Ces Messieurs Afrique*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1992.

not military intervention anymore. It was a tool in the prospect of a quest for power, and since the parameters of world politics have changed, it is of no use anymore.

New actors and new parameters

Who are the actors, and what are the parameters of the French-African relationship today ? Can a classical diplomacy, based upon Embassies, private envoys and military intervention, match those features ? As much as officials, decision makers or advisers, the main actors of any relationship between several territories are 1- transnational non state actors, and 2- individuals. The former can structure and adjust the relationship by autonomous initiatives, while the latter can put a pressure on governmental decision makers, with political, social, economic or moral demands.

The role of the "French Doctors" during several African crises is not to be neglected. With emergency interventions, long-term medical aid, medical personnel, nutritional organisation in refugee camps, Médecins Sans Frontières has been working increasingly through the past years in Zaire - with two independent operation centres in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi -, Angola,³⁸ Benin,³⁹ Djibouti, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Ruanda, Sudan, Uganda and Zambia. More political is the action of the CCFD - Catholic Committee against Famine and for Development -, with 150 initiatives in Africa every year, whose goals, according to General Secretary Bernard Holzer, are to fight against "Afro-pessimism" and to help new democracies.⁴⁰ Those movements restlessly point out that most of the problems in Africa cannot be solved by mere military intervention : refugees, disease - aids essentially -, demography (about 500 millions people in 1980, and probably one billion in 2020, with 45% of the population under the age of fifteen), urbanisation, religious and ethnic rivalries, a 20% literacy rate, 44 millions people in deep poverty, etc.

Other types of actors - firms, trade groups such as oil companies Elf Gabon or Elf Angola - insists on different issues : Africa is unattractive from a commercial point of view, her debt is higher than her total GNP, international aid is declining, World Bank is disengaging and everything disheartens and obstructs investments. In January 1994, France proceeded a 50% devaluation of the "Franc CFA" in the fourteen countries of the Franc

³⁸ Twelve expatriated in Marvinga and Benguela Provinces.

³⁹ Three agents in Togolese refugee camps.

⁴⁰ Bernard Holzer, "Soutenir la société civile : l'exemple du CCFD", *Relations Internationales et Stratégiques*, n°4, Winter 1991.

monetary zone,⁴¹ for France could no longer afford artificially sustaining and financing the African economy.⁴² Among new kinds of relations, let us mention the local Foreign Policies of French regions and cities, that develop direct relationship and agreements with Africa, for an approximate amount of 60 millions, including technical or educational co-operation. Religious groups also feel very concerned with what occurs in Africa, from Christian Aid to Union des Organisations Islamiques de France. Those actors emphasise that France has no strategy for efficient development and that, although she has a tradition of military assistance, she can provide no real answer to Africa's security problems.

But the more powerful new actor and new parameter of the French-African relationship - and maybe of world politics in general - is the individual, the citizen. Human rights, elections are now at the core of the African issues. This urges France to find new ways of wielding influence, and this makes any military intervention a very sensitive tool. It is obvious that France tries to maintain her role in Africa by cultural channels such as television (Canal France International, TV5, French programmes for local TV's...), radio (Radio France International), in order to promote the French language and to reach African mass populations. As for the military intervention itself, it has now to be motivated by "estimable" goals, in order to be accepted by the "domestic front" and by the international public opinion. Since 1990, intervention in a context of African domestic troubles (Comoros, Gabon, Ruanda, Djibouti), African external threat (Djibouti), or even in order to evacuate French or other Western nationals (Gabon, Somalia, Ruanda, Zaire) can turn into a major setback and into heavy controversy for the French government.

The 1991 "Operation Verdier" in Togo, with 450 men deployed in Benin after a coup against Togo's Prime minister Joseph Kokou Koffigoh, passed for a pure hypocrisy when General Eyadema recovered power few days later, thanks to the French indifference, and notwithstanding Senegal's Abou Diouf's call to a French intervention to restore democracy in Togo.⁴³ In spite of huge anti-French demonstrations in the streets of Lome, and grave exactions by the regime in the following months against its own population - after riots -, then French Foreign minister Roland Dumas explained that "democracy cannot be installed by force", and Paris maintained its co-operation with Togo until 1993.⁴⁴ In the new context of

⁴¹ Benin, Burkina, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoro, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal.

⁴² See A. Delage and A. Massiera, *Le Franc CFA, Bilan et Perspectives*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1994; "Franc CFA, dossier spécial dévaluation", *Afrique Contemporaine*, n°169, La Documentation Française, Paris, January-March 1994.

⁴³ "Le Général Eyadema : l'ami retrouvé", *La Croix*, 13 September 1994.

⁴⁴ See C. Toulabor, "La bataille finale du Général Eyadema au Togo", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Paris, 1992.

the post Cold War era, the best tool to help a strong and stable regime is the absence of military intervention. But the alibi of protecting nationals or the humanitarian label can be used too : in Zaire, in September 1991, one thousand French and Belgian parachutists ("operation Baumier") jumped onto Kinshasa in order to evacuate Western populations, in a context of serious upheavals against the Mobutu regime. In Djibouti - spring 1991 -, "operation Godoria" was mounted under a humanitarian alibi, to offer assistance to 40.000 Ethiopian refugees, in an ethnic context that opposes Issa populations to Afar groups.⁴⁵ In the last two cases, the French and international public opinions were not blind enough to be fooled by the external appearance. Several associations - Paris Association Against Ethnic Cleansing, Frères des Hommes, Survie, Terre des Hommes... - accused France of supporting dictatorial regimes - Mobutu in Zaire, Hassan Gouled in Djibouti - by sending troops precisely at the moment where the regime was threatened by riots. The French press blamed the government for "rescuing Mobutu", and for hiding behind the humanitarian alibi to let Gouled assassinate thousands Afars, in the presence of 5.000 unresponsive top French soldiers.⁴⁶

Military intervention was once the right tool to implement power policies with a massive support from public opinions. It is now considered as an out-of-date hegemonic behaviour, unless the justice and rectitude of the cause can be guaranteed. In other words, military intervention has to apologise or find the right arguments to exist. After the debates about Togo, Djibouti and Zaire in 1991, it is remarkable that France shouldered two "virtuous" and "valuable" operations in the year 1992, as though it was necessary to prove her good will to work for a just and democratic "New World Order". Operation Simbleau, in May 1992 in Sierra Leone (300 men and a boat, in case French nationals need evacuation), occurred few days after Valentine Strasser seized power by a military coup, promising to establish democracy within three years. Operation Addax saw 50 French agents participate to the UNAVEM mission of the United Nations mission in Angola to administer free elections, in the context of harsh struggle between President Dos Santos's MPLA and Jonas Savimbi's UNITA.⁴⁷

Conclusion

It is no revelation to say that in these prospects, French military interventions under United Nations authority offer a double convenience.

⁴⁵ See M-C. Aubry, *Djibouti : Bibliographie Fondamentale*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1991. J. Markakis, *National and Class Conflicts in the Horn of Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.

⁴⁶ "De Kigali à Djibouti", *Maintenant*, 8 February 1995.

⁴⁷ See M. Cahen, *Angola : Bilan d'un Socialisme de Guerre*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1992.

First, Africa is rather a shaky area that might endanger the global stability, and French interventions can be seen as an element of order. Second, the UN banner, with its humanitarian connotation, gives back to French interventions greater legitimacy. Yet, such a comfortable comment would be oversimplifying a far more complex situation, regarding the nature of military intervention today. Is military intervention a counter-productive tool, leading to dangerous quagmires, as French intervention in Djibouti showed in 1991 ? Is it the recognition of a political failure ? The capacity of military intervention to end a conflict seems to be dubious in a complex world, with so many composite social, economic, religious or ethnic parameters. The case of France in Africa is just one illustration of the dilemma.

The implications for political science are manifold. Not only do States appear unable to master new international developments, not only did the UN New World Order fail since the Gulf War, but boundaries between peace and war, State and non State actions, military and civil initiatives are fading away. After having been a demonstration of power, military intervention tends to be a manifestation of an inability to act. After having been of great help, foreign military presence is becoming a complication for the target regime, and a maze for the source country. After having been a solution to political, social, and even economic crises, it is now admitted that "army is not the solution" to the countries in need of democracy and development.

In those conditions, Foreign Policies find themselves deprived of a once credible tool. The United Nations lost a device they thought they at last possessed since the end of the Cold War, but which no longer provides them with any utility. It is now urgent to conceive of military intervention as a possible hindrance to States that initiates it, and its very use as an evidence that classical power and logics of deterrence are in a stalemate.

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