

Operation Serval

Another Beau Geste of France in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Lt. Gen. Olivier Tramond, French Army, and

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Serval is the name of an African wild cat. *Beau Geste* is the title of a famous 1939 Hollywood movie about the French Foreign Legion in Africa, inspired by a British novel. The expression *beau geste* (beautiful gesture) suggests someone bravely doing the right thing to help another regardless of personal cost or benefit.

In December 2012, the democratic government of the Republic of Mali—a former French colony in West Africa—asked the French government to help it push back radical Islamist insurgents in the north. *Operation Serval* is the name of the subsequent French military operation in Mali from January 2013 through July 2014. As of November 2014, French troops remain in Africa's Sahel region to help Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger counter terrorists.

This article describes lessons learned from Operation Serval's force build-up and deployment in 2013. Among these, some lessons learned from Afghanistan yielded good results, and others were rediscovered—even with the very different conditions between Mali and Southwest Asia.¹

Starting 11 January 2013, French forces blocked, rolled back, and cornered jihadi armed groups in Mali. Only a few weeks before, they were getting ready to return to their bases after redeploying from Afghanistan. In fact, they were waiting for further force cuts expected to be described in a pending defense white paper on national security, under strict budgetary constraints.

Thanks to pre-positioned forces and a new readiness system, early in 2013 the French Army managed to deploy a whole brigade with its main combat and combat service support assets. These 4,500 troops prevailed in

the fight against a fanatic enemy in extremely demanding conditions caused by a harsh climate, long operational distances, and rugged terrain (see figure 1). In the first three months of the intervention, the following effects were achieved:

- ♦ **The terrain.** The main towns were liberated and the jihadist stronghold in the north was cleared.
- ♦ **The enemy.** The terrorists suffered heavy losses and their infrastructure was disrupted.
- ♦ **The population.** Foreign nationals were protected. The jihadist rule was abolished. Free elections occurred July 2013 (and again August 2014).
- ♦ **The international community.** France demonstrated its determination and paved the way for African and international troops to help stabilize Mali.

Five months after the beginning of the operation, French, Malian, and Chadian units had rolled across Mali among cheering crowds—visibly happy to be freed from the strict Sharia law (referring to an Islamic moral code, religious law, and court system) enforced by the jihadists. French troops cleared sanctuaries of the group known as al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the Ifoghas mountain range. They fended off attacks by another group known as the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in Western Africa (MOJWA) in Gao (a region of Mali). In May 2013, France's President François Hollande said—

We did not intervene instead of Africans, but with the Africans, thus allowing a peacekeeping operation to take place in the conditions of international legitimacy on the one hand, but also efficacy on the other hand. We are staying, there again, with this lighter troop

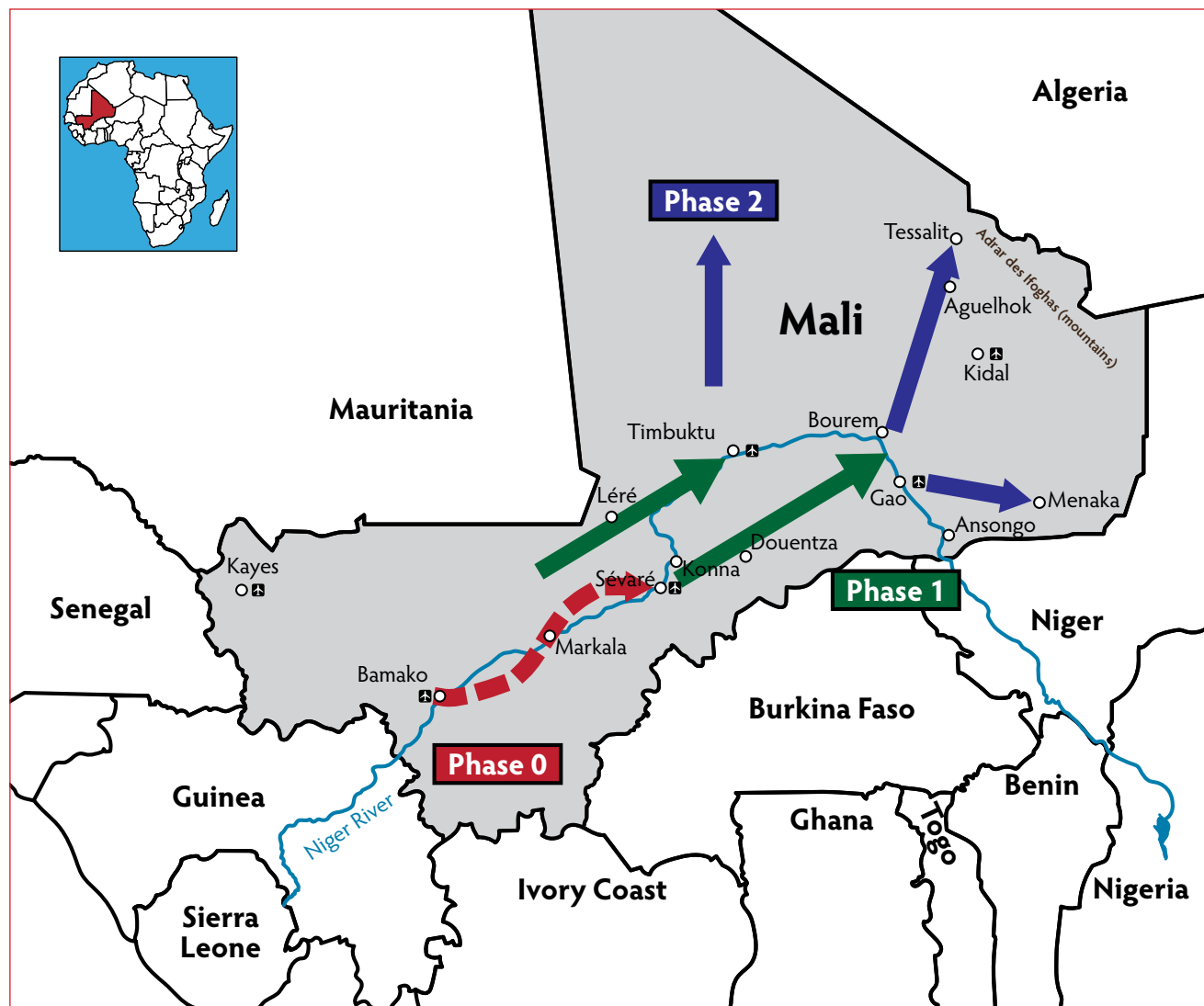


Figure 1. Map of Mali Showing Phases 0 Through 2 of Operation Serval

strength, in the following months but we will remain in Mali, and around Mali, because we are not done with terrorism yet.²

Mali: Tipping Toward Chaos (1963 to 2013)

Mali is a landlocked country with a butterfly-shaped border in Africa's northwestern Sahel (a transition zone between the Sahara Desert to the north and savanna grassland to the south). It spreads roughly 1,000 miles from north to south and from west to east, and it covers an area about twice the size of Texas (1.2 million square kilometers [km], about 480,000 square miles). It is a former French colony, and it has

retained French as its official language, as well as many aspects of French governance. However, the population of Mali, as in many African countries, does not belong to a single ethnic group. The main rift occurs along the bend of the Niger River, which separates the dark-skinned Songhai, Bambara, and Peul populations settled around and south of the Niger, from the fair-skinned Arab, Tuareg, and Berber nomads in the north (this description is simplified, as Mali's populations are very diverse).

Ethnic tensions have plagued Mali since long before its independence in 1960. Conflicts flared up in 1963 to 1964 and in June 1990 in the Adrar des Ifoghas region (*adrar* means mountain in Berber)—which triggered



French soldiers conduct a search for munitions in the Tigharghar Hills in Mali, March 2013.

(Photo courtesy of Defense Staff (État-major des armées), French Ministry of Defense).

a violent reaction of the government against the local population. A vicious cycle of terrorism and repression started, fueling ethnic hostility in the north, political dissent in the south, and criticism abroad, and culminating with the Tuareg uprising of 14 January 2012.

This last insurgency was led by two newly formed groups, the *Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad* (National Movement of the Azawad Liberation, known as MNLA) and its Islamic satellite named *Ansar Din* (meaning soldier of the faith). The insurgents rapidly took the northern towns of Menaka, Aguelhok, Tessalit, and Léré, causing the Malian Army to withdraw, under pressure, south of the Niger River. The insurgents deprived the government of control over half its territory (representing only ten percent of its population). This setback caused the *coup d'état* of March 2012, when army Capt. Amadou Sanogo overthrew then-president Ahmadou Toumani Touré.³

The rise of jihadists in the Sahel, which started about the same time in Algeria, was another destabilizing factor. The Algeria-based AQIM (originally called *Groupe Salafiste de Prédication et de Combat*—translated as Salafi Group for Preaching and Fighting) took advantage of traditional smuggling routes to fund its terrorist activities with drugs and arms trafficking. In addition, it captured foreign tourists or workers from well-to-do countries and demanded ransoms.⁴ In 2007, the

group changed its name and began to expand its ties with international jihadist organizations. AQIM tried to install an Islamic emirate across the Sahara and Sahel, between Mauritania and Chad.

The leaders of AQIM are, mainly, Algerian. Mokhtar Belmokhtar, for example, is a former jihadi fighter turned smuggler in Afghanistan. Abdelhamid Abu Zeid is a hard-line ideologist. Their link to the ethnic Tuareg population is the Ansar Din movement, led by Iyad Ag Ghali and his cousin Abdelkrim, both Tuaregs from Kidal.

The anarchy in Mali, in the wake of the Tuareg uprising, provided the opportunity for these jihadists to realize their ambition. In the first quarter of 2012, MNLA and Ansar Din took control of the northern half of Mali. Rapidly, they imposed a strict Sharia law on the population of the whole region, causing the first rifts between the secular MNLA and the fundamentalist Ansar Din, along with a flow of 300,000 to 400,000 displaced persons.

Ansar Din, with the support of AQIM and MOJWA—one of its splinter groups—managed to expel the MNLA from the major towns. A few Sufi shrines were destroyed in Timbuktu, a historic sacred city—an event reminiscent of the destruction of the Bamian Buddhas by the Afghan Taliban in March 2001. The interim Malian government of President Diounda Traoré and the international community watched helplessly.⁵ The United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2085, 20 December 2012, authorizing the deployment of what was named the “African-led International Support Mission to Mali.” The European Union validated, in December 2012, a plan for a “European Union Training Mission” to advise the Malian Army and planned to set up the mission in February 2013.⁶

However, the jihadists started to move south of the Niger bend on 8 January 2013. After they captured the town of Konna from the Malian Army and threatened

Mali's capital, Bamako, the time for action against them had come.

Phase 0, Initial Reaction and Force Buildup (11 to 15 January 2013)

The first reaction came from a French Special Forces aviation unit stationed in a neighboring country. The unit destroyed a jihadist pick-up column moving south on 11 January 2013. During this raid, a French pilot was fatally wounded in his Gazelle light-attack helicopter.⁷ At the same time, French units predeployed in Africa were scrambled to provide a blocking element, and the French Land Forces Command started to generate the follow-on force to drive back the jihadists. Meanwhile, air force and naval aviation assets started targeting jihadist facilities across northern Mali.

Four days later, Hollande was blunt about his overall intentions. In a press conference, he said—

Our aims are the following: first, to stop the terrorist aggression that wanted to take control of the entire country. Second, to secure Bamako, where, I remind you, we have many thousands of our citizens. The third aim is to enable Mali to recover its territorial integrity. This mission was given to an African force, which will have our full support and that will soon be deployed. You asked what we plan to do with the terrorists Destroy them. Capture them, if possible, and make sure that they can do no harm in the future.⁸

Reasons for the quick reaction. The quick French reaction was possible for three main reasons: a very short chain of command, a network of French bases in

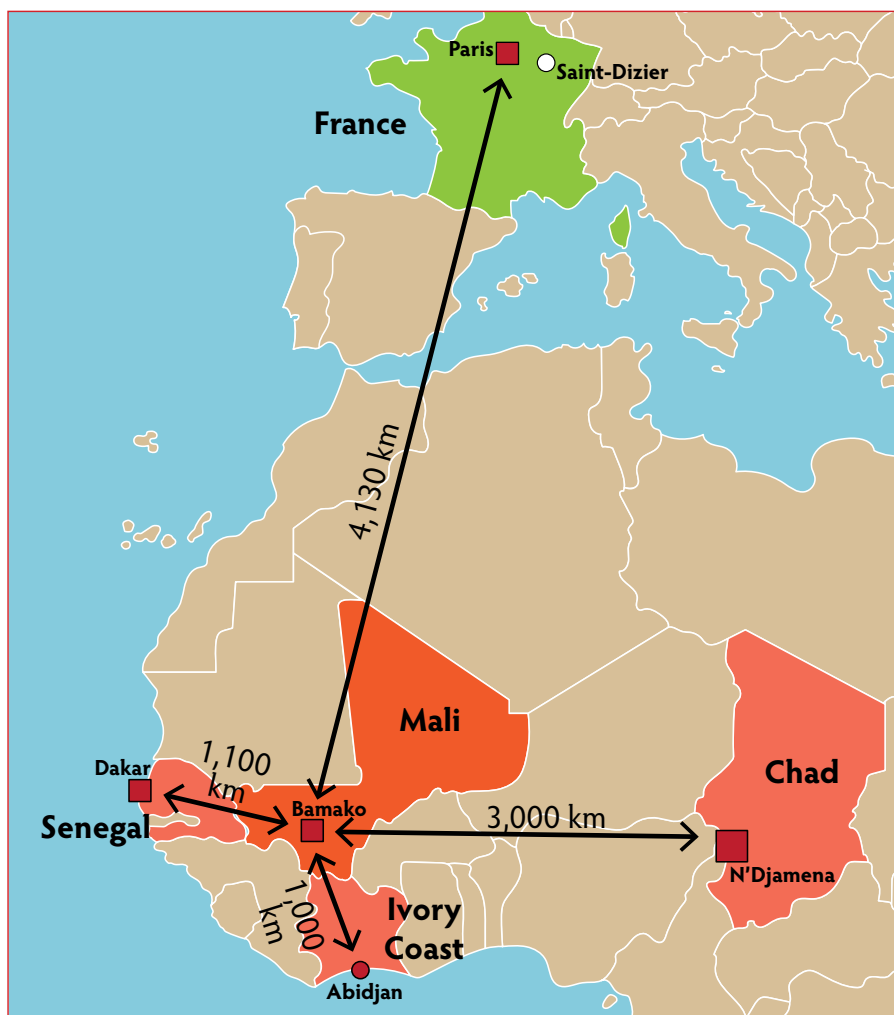


Figure 2. Map Showing Deployments to West Africa

Africa, and a rapid deployment high-readiness system called *Guépard* (cheetah).⁹

In France, the president is the commander in chief of the military. He can commit French forces abroad without parliamentary mandate for a period not exceeding four months. Therefore, when the situation started deteriorating, he was able to shift French forces deployed in Africa and to deploy assets based in France very quickly.

The first French ground unit that landed in Bamako was called *Groupeement Tactique Interarmes No. 1* (GTIA 1, or Battle Group 1, a reinforced battalion). It was composed of a headquarters and an infantry company from the 21st Marine Infantry Regiment and two platoons of light wheeled vehicles (known as the ERC 90, or *engine à roues, canon de 90 millimètres*) from

Maintaining legacy French bases in Africa provided—

- ➔ Security for French expatriates and others
- ➔ Training opportunities and an expeditionary mentality for French forces
- ➔ Enhanced joint cooperation among small units over large areas
- ➔ Knowledge of local cultures due to long-standing presence of French instructors
- ➔ Interoperability with local forces
- ➔ Understanding of the operational environment and interaction with local populations

Figure 3. Main Lessons Learned From the First Part of Phase 0

the First Foreign Legion Cavalry Regiment—which was finishing its four-month tour of duty in Chad and was airlifted with less than 24 hours' notice into Mali. The GTIA 1 was reinforced within 48 hours by another armored squadron of ERC 90s that drove more than 1,000 km from Abidjan (in Ivory Coast) to Bamako and another Marine infantry company on Guépard alert that was airlifted from France. A small headquarters element came from the French elements in Senegal to ensure coordination and communications at the operational level. (Figure 2 depicts the origins of the deployed units and the distances they had to travel.)

Lessons from phase 0 initial reaction and force build-up. The preliminary part of the operation demonstrated the value of maintaining legacy French bases in Africa. These bases not only provide a guarantee of security for French expatriates and many others, but also superior training opportunities and an expeditionary mentality for the troops deployed there. French forces had learned to leverage joint cooperation

of small units over large areas and had become used to moving quickly and lightly. The long-standing presence of French instructors across western Africa had developed a refined knowledge of the human terrain and a certain amount of interoperability with local forces. This, in turn, allowed better interaction with local leaders and populations, providing invaluable insight into the operational environment. Figure 3 summarizes the main lessons learned from the initial reaction and force buildup.

Concerning contributions of allies, Serval proved that it is easier nowadays to get planes than men. The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other NATO partners provided tactical and strategic airlift, air-to-air refueling, or intelligence assets.¹⁰ Belgium provided two medical evacuation helicopters. Other ground contributions were promised for the European Union Training Mission, but not for Operation Serval. Nonetheless, these contributions proved critical for the operation. Logistics assets moved 12,000 metric tons of equipment by train, ship, air, or flatbed trucks in one month—roughly the equivalent of what was repatriated to France from Afghanistan over a one-year period.



A French soldier meets with local residents, 11 February 2013, during Operation Serval in Mali.

(Photo courtesy of Defense Staff, French Ministry of Defense)

Phase 0, Blocking the Jihadists (11 to 21 January 2013)

Supported by French aircraft flying out of France or Chad, GTIA 1 secured the Bamako airport and moved north and east to block the jihadists' advance. Meanwhile, three more GTIAs, an aviation battle group (*groupe aéromobile*), and a brigade headquarters were deployed.

On 15 January, a company team was sent to seize the bridge over the Niger River at Markala, (250 km east of Bamako). On 18 January, Malian forces, with

A rapid reaction time for Army units traveling significant distances was possible because—

- ➔ The alert system (*Guépard*) enabled rapid deployment of French units despite challenges of establishing joint cooperation in the first few days of deployment
- ➔ The legacy fleet of aging vehicles held up over long distances and rugged terrain due to the skills of their designers, drivers, and crews

Figure 4. Main Lessons Learned From the Second Part of Phase 0

a French advising and liaison team, took back the city of Konna (700 km to the east). In addition, the first African contingents from Nigeria, Togo, and Benin landed in Bamako.

On 20 January, another company of GTIA 1 seized the airfield at Sévaré, after a 640 km road march from the aerial port of debarkation. The next day, Malian forces took Douentza (800 km from Bamako), while GTIA 2 finished boarding the landing ship *Dixmude* for its seaborne deployment to the seaport of debarkation in Dakar, Senegal.

Makeup of units. The brigade headquarters, as well as GTIAs 2 and 3, were generated by the 3rd Mechanized Brigade, on *Guépard* alert. They were deployed partly by sea and partly by military transport aircraft (Boeing C-17s) from allied forces or leased civilian Antonov aircraft. GTIA 2 is based in the 92nd Infantry Regiment, which had brand new eight-wheeled infantry fighting vehicles (*véhicules blindés de combat d'infanterie*, or VBCIs). GTIA 3 is an armored cavalry unit that was pulled from the 1st Marine Cavalry Regiment, equipped with light six-wheeled reconnaissance vehicles (AMX-10RCs) heavily armed with 105 mm guns.

The remaining GTIA 4 was formed by the 2nd Foreign Legion Airborne Regiment (*Régiment Étranger de Parachutistes*) reinforced by the 1st Airborne Regiment (*Régiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes*) and other assets from the 11th Airborne Brigade. Given the huge distances in theater, a logistics battalion and a signal unit were also committed.

For the next three days, GTIA 1 reinforced its positions on the line between Diabaly and Konna, while the rear echelon in Bamako consolidated the logistics and command and control of the operation.

Lessons from phase 0, blocking the jihadists.

This phase validated the *Guépard* alert system, with a whole brigade in France on alert and ready to provide forces within hours of notification. The reaction time was excellent for army units despite some early difficulties establishing coordination among joint agencies.

The legacy fleet of aging vehicles (four-wheeled armored personnel carriers called *véhicules de l'avant blindé* and light armored vehicles—the ERC 90s) proved their ruggedness in the grueling approach march, some vehicles driving more than 2,000 km in 10 days on African roads.

As some vehicles were older than their crews, it was a tribute to their skilled designers, drivers, and maintenance teams that they were able to carry out the mission. (Figure 4 summarizes the main lessons learned from the second part of phase 0, in which forces blocked the jihadists.)

Phase 1, Seizing the Niger Bend (21 January to 1 February 2013)

On 25 January, GTIA 1 moved north toward Timbuktu and Gao, relieved in place by the first African-led International Support Mission to Mali troops (a Togolese unit in Mopti and a Burkinabe unit in Markala). Avoiding contact but harassed by air assets, the jihadist armed groups (*groupes armés djihadistes*) withdrew to the north and east of Gao. French elements were airlifted to Gao Airport and secured it in spite of a stiff resistance by MOJWA elements.

On 27 January, GTIA 1 and Malian troops secured the town of Timbuktu without any resistance. A company from GTIA 4 was air-dropped north of the town to cut possible escape routes. GTIA 2 debarked at Dakar and started the 2,000-km journey to the east toward Gao.

The rapid advance of forces effectively disrupted the enemy due to—

- ➔ Rapid succession of air assaults and ground movements under constant air cover
- ➔ A three-tiered sequence of special operations forces and airborne units seizing airfields, followed by French and Malian ground troops, and then a handover to MINUSMA (United Nations Stabilization Mission for Mali) units

Figure 5. Main Lessons Learned from Phase 1

On 29 January, airborne engineers were dropped with runway-clearing equipment over Timbuktu airport and cleared it of obstacles left by the jihadists. Chadian and Nigerian forces moved from Nigerian territory toward the eastern Malian towns of Menaka, Ansongo, and Gao.

Expanded reach. In the last week of January, Gao became the center of the French deployment, with brigade headquarters and support units moving 1,000 km from the main aerial port of debarkation in Bamako. Upon arrival of the mechanized GTIA 2, French and Malian units began extending their reconnaissance missions along the Niger River and toward the cities of Bourem, Ansongo, and Menaka.

Lessons from phase 1, seizing the Niger bend. The rapid succession of air assaults and ground movements under constant air cover, including surveillance and reconnaissance by drones (Harfangs) and maritime patrol aircraft, greatly disrupted the enemy. The lessons learned in Libya on targeting fleeing enemy were put to good use. The aviation battle group carried out all possible missions from close-combat attack to reconnaissance and deep strike. They had a few helicopters hit by small arms and machine-gun fire, but threats from man-portable air defense systems did not materialize.

The rapid advance followed a three-tiered pattern: special operations forces and airborne units seized key airfields and then were joined by French and Malian ground troops, which were in turn relieved by units of the United Nations Stabilization Mission for Mali (*Mission des Nations Unies de Stabilisation au Mali*, known as MINUSMA) on their previous positions. Logistical support had to follow quickly over hundreds of kilometers, making secured airfields key objectives for air resupply. Communications and information systems were strained to their limits on these unusually large distances. Satellite communications were key,

but they were in short supply. Figure 5 summarizes the main lessons learned from phase 1.

Phase 2, Clearing the Gao Region and the Ifoghas Mountains (8 February to 1 May 2013)

While ground troops were seizing the main towns on the Niger River, fighter aircraft and helicopters struck logistics depots and training centers further north around Aguelhok and Tessalit. There, the Servat brigade maintained a high operational tempo in order to disrupt the enemy.

On 30 January, French special operations forces and airborne units made an assault landing on Kidal airfield, at the foot of the Adrar des Ifoghas range. Chadian forces moved from Menaka to join them.

February 2013. On 1 February, the first armored squadron of GTIA 3 was airlifted from France to Niamey, Niger, and immediately headed towards Gao, 400 km away.

The second week of February saw the first ground engagements of jihadist armed groups against French and Malian forces. On 8 February, a special operations forces element parachuted onto the Tessalit airfield (1,700 km from Bamako), cleared the runway for the arrival of an infantry company, and started patrolling the city with attack helicopter support. A squadron from GTIA 3 drove 500 km from Gao to reinforce them, along with Chadian units from Kidal, while the *groupe aéromobile* moved its helicopters and support elements from Sévaré to the Gao airfield.

On the same day, MOJWA elements in Gao carried out complex attacks with small arms and suicide vests against French and Malian units. However, the attackers were neutralized after hours of heavy urban fighting, with the support of French infantry fighting vehicles and attack helicopters.

The next 10 days were spent searching for enemy positions around the city of Gao and in the Adrar des Ifoghas range east of Aguelhok. The first improvised explosive devices encountered by French and Malian troops were either of crude design or were poorly emplaced, but some caches yielded better-quality components. Suicide vests were used by insurgents both in Gao and in the Adrar des Ifoghas.

GTIA 1 was relieved by GTIA 3 and moved back to France on 17 February. GTIA 2 secured Gao and its surroundings. GTIA 3 and 4, together with elite Chadian troops, tightened the noose from Tessalit, Aguelhok, and Kidal around the Tigharghar hills in the Adrar des Ifoghas.

The jihadists had the choice of dispersing in small groups in the countryside or defending their sanctuary in the craggy Adrar des Ifoghas. The rugged terrain there made it very difficult to detect them from the air. Therefore, Chadian and French ground units had to pursue them on foot, advancing and clearing the slopes under helicopter and artillery support from truck-mounted 155 mm self-propelled gun-howitzers known as Caesars.¹¹ These strikes destroyed the jihadists' fire support, consisting of towed Russian 122 mm howitzers (D-30s) and multiple-rocket launchers (BM-21s).

On 19 February, an airborne pathfinder from GTIA 4 was killed while clearing an enemy outpost in Amettetai valley.¹² The next day, Chadian troops clashed with a large group of jihadists in the Tigharghar hills. With French air support, they neutralized more than 90 jihadists—including some leaders of AQIM—but 23 were killed in action, and a few dozen were wounded during the fight and afterward when some jihadists blew themselves up at close range. A French paratrooper was killed on 2 March

while assaulting an enemy position in the northern sector.¹³

The joint French-Chadian operation in the Tigharghar range lasted a few more days in very difficult conditions due to the harsh terrain and the punishing heat, but it led to the capture of large weapon and supply depots around the Amettetai valley.¹⁴ Military search techniques honed in Afghanistan were very useful to clear the caves and caches scattered in the mountains.

However, the jihadist armed groups had not been totally eliminated in the Adrar des Ifoghas. On 21 February, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device blew up a Chadian fuel depot in Kidal. Around the same time, about thirty insurgents and suicide bombers attacked Malian and Nigerian troops in Gao. The French mechanized quick-reaction force from GTIA 2, with attack helicopter support, eliminated them. On 6 March, a French corporal—a member of a liaison team to a Malian unit—was killed near Imenas, 100 km east of Gao. This happened after his unit successfully cleared a village in cooperation with GTIA 2.¹⁵

March 2013. The Serval brigade maintained its effort in the north until the end of March, seizing large quantities of food, ammunition, and improvised-explosive-device components from AQIM's sanctuary. The threat from improvised explosive devices was real and caused the next two French deaths: a reconnaissance vehicle (AMX-10RC) driver on 16 March and a special forces operator on 29 April, both with pressure-plate devices.

April 2013. In April, the brigade's effort focused on the area between Gao and Kidal, while Task Force Sabre (special operations forces) carried out long-range reconnaissance operations in the north

Recent French combat experience in Afghanistan contributed to—

- ➔ High tactical proficiency and effective body armor and helmets that minimized French losses
- ➔ High-quality medical support
- ➔ Up-to-date combat support including fires digital equipment for tactical air control parties and helicopter pilots

Figure 6. Main Lessons Learned from Phase 2

and west of Mali. The jihadist armed groups avoided direct engagements, while the brigade carried out a series of cordon and search operations on suspected weapons caches.

Lessons from phase 2, clearing the Gao Region and the Adrar des Ifoghas. In the fighting phase, French units capitalized on their combat experience in Afghanistan. Many soldiers of Operation Serval fought in the valleys of Kapisa province as late as summer 2011. The French losses in Mali remained low because of their high tactical proficiency and the quality of their body armor and helmets, themselves a legacy of lessons learned in Afghanistan.

Medical support also maintained operational standards developed in Afghanistan, from individual kits to forward lifesaving surgery modules, treating Chadian and French wounded in large numbers as well as noncombat injuries due to dehydration or fractures. Combat support involved the whole range of fires from mortars to laser-guided bombs. New digital equipment facilitated the work of tactical air control parties, helicopter pilots, and infantry fighting-vehicle crews, but dismounted infantry units did not use it. Figure 6 summarizes the main lessons learned in phase 2.



French and Malian soldiers shake hands 21 January 2013 in Diabaly, Mali, after Malian forces, with French Army support, took back two Malian towns from terrorists.

(Photo courtesy of Defense Staff (État-major des armées), French Ministry of Defense)

Transition (May 2013)

On 11 May, the 3rd Mechanized Brigade was relieved by the 6th Light Armored Brigade, with heavy augmentation by French Foreign Legion units. The number of French troops dwindled to 2,000.

Further south, the European Union Training Mission brought the first Malian battalion on the road to high readiness at the Koulikoro Training Area, with a composite cadre of French, British, German, Italian, Polish, Slovenian, Greek, Hungarian, and Scandinavian instructors. The aim of this mission was to quickly give Malian troops the capability to maintain their territorial integrity.

In accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013, African-led International Support Mission to Mali troops were to be integrated into the larger stabilization force of MINUSMA, which would total up to 12,600 soldiers. French troops would remain in Mali as part of a quick-reaction force in support of MINUSMA.

Challenges of the transition. The enormity of the operational area, paired with its proximity to Algerian and Nigerian borders, made it very difficult to control for French and Malian ground troops, even with

augmentation by nearly 10,000 additional African soldiers. Many insurgents dropped their weapons and fled on foot or on camel, avoiding the use of their telltale pickup trucks. Many AQIM members used their smuggling experience to take all possible escape routes between Mauritania and Libya, and many remain at large. Their capture would require the full cooperation of all regional actors, an effort that falls well beyond the military's role.

The weather was favorable for operations during the assault phase, with a single sand storm

complicating the seizure of Kidal. However, during the rainy season (June to October), air support and ground movement in subsequent phases (not discussed in this article) were hampered, complicating surveillance, reconnaissance, logistics, and maneuver.

Update, November 2014. The handover to Malian authorities has become a long-lasting collaborative effort between African Union and European Union political leaders, with the French Army ensuring quick-reaction forces in support of Malian confidence building. Since the end of Serval in July 2014, France has built on its operational successes as well as Malian successes in order to adopt a regional approach to the transnational security challenges in this part of the world. All French operations in the Sahel have been merged into Operation Barkhane, covering Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.

Nevertheless, stability in Mali will need a political settlement, not only between southern and northern ethnic groups but also within the Malian Army itself. If the southern Malian units conduct themselves well, the population likely will resist the return of the insurgents. The Malian government established the Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation 6 March 2013 to examine any reported abuses by military forces operating in the north.

Conclusion

The French president, minister of defense, and even the news media praised the exceptional reactivity, the professionalism, and the determination of French troops during phases 0 through 2 in 2013. François Hollande even paid a visit to Malian interim president Diocounda Traoré, in just-liberated Timbuktu, 2 February 2013. However, as old soldiers say, a mission is not over until the last unit is dismissed into its barracks and every piece of equipment has been turned in and accounted for.

The first challenges of 2013 for France were passed with flying colors.¹⁶ The Afghan combat experience of French troops, combined with their knowledge of the African theater and a good bit of luck, produced good results against a fleeing enemy over more than ninety-five percent of the Malian territory. This mission highlighted the return of France to its traditional area of interest—French-speaking Africa—in compliance with the defense white paper, released July 2013.¹⁷ This role had been somewhat overshadowed by France's engagement in Afghanistan from 2008 to 2012, notwithstanding intense operations in Ivory Coast and Central African Republic in 2010 and 2011. However, the volume of the French deployment, in such a short time, over such a distance, was indeed unprecedented. ■

Lt. Gen. Olivier Tramond, French Army, is the former commander of the Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces (Center for Doctrine for the Employment of Forces), French Army Combined Arms Center, Paris. As an airborne marine infantryman, he served in various staff and command assignments from Paris to the Pacific and took part in many operations in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Africa. He now serves in the inspector corps, next to the Minister of Defense.

Lt. Col. Philippe Seigneur, French Army, was a staff officer in the lessons learned department of the Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces. He served as an infantry field grade officer in Bosnia, Chad, and Ivory Coast before occupying various international staff positions from Germany to Afghanistan. He is now serving in Germany.

NOTES

1. Laura Seay, "Mali is Not a Stan: When it Comes to Covering Africa's Latest Conflict, It's Suddenly Amateur Hour," *Foreign Policy.com*, 30 January 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/01/30/mali_is_not_afghanistan_france_africa?page=0,1.

2. François Hollande, speech to the National Institute of Higher Defense Studies, translated by Philippe Seigneur, 24 May 2013.

3. Mériadec Raffray, "Les Rébellions Touarègues au Sahel," research study for the *Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces*, posted at the website of the French Ministry of Defense, 7 January 2013, <http://www.cdef.terre.defense.gouv.fr/publications/cahier-du-retex/recherche/les-rebellions-touaregues-au-sahel>. Ahmadou Toumani Touré is a former army lieutenant colonel who seized power by a coup d'état in

March 1991, before handing over power to democratically elected president Alpha Oumar Konaré in 1992. He was nevertheless elected president in 2002 with sixty-four percent of the vote, and in 2007 with seventy-one percent.

4. Ibid, 72. The group now known as Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (formerly *Groupe Salafiste de Prédication et de Combat*) took 33 European tourists as hostages in February 2003 and released them 18 August 2011 (one Austrian tourist died of exhaustion during captivity). Other French hostages were taken in 2010, 2011, and 2012; some have been released, others have died in captivity or been killed, and at least one remains captive.

5. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2085, 20 December 2012, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2085%20%282012%29.

6. For more information about the European Union Training Mission, see their website, "EUTM-Mali," http://www.eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eutm-mali/index_en.htm.

7. See the names of the French soldiers who have died in Mali, at the French Army website: <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/base/in-memoriam/mali>. For more about French special forces in the Sahel, see Jean-Marc Tanguy's blog post at *Le Mamouth*, "COS:+1000 ... (Actualisé Avec Liens)" 4 March 2013, <http://lemamouth.blogspot.fr/2013/03/cos-1000.html>.

8. François Hollande, at a press conference in Dubai, translated by Philippe Seigneur, 15 January 2013. See transcript online in French, "Conférence de presse du Président de la République à Dubaï," website of the *Présidence de la République Française*, <http://www.elysee.fr/conferences-de-presse/article/conference-de-presse-du-president-de-la-republique-a-dubaï/>.

9. Andrew Hanson, "The French Military in Africa," at Council on Foreign Relations website, 8 February 2008, <http://www.cfr.org/france/french-military-africa/p12578#p3>.

10. Canada provided one Boeing C-17 Globemaster III military transport aircraft, Great Britain provided one C-17, the United States provided three C-17s, Belgium provided two Lockheed C-130 Hercules military transport aircraft, Denmark provided one C-130, and Germany provided two Transall C-160 military transport aircraft.

11. The name "Caesar" refers to *camion équipé d'un système d'artillerie*, maximum range 40 km.

12. See <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/base/in-memoriam/mali>.

13. Ibid.

14. See Jean-Dominique Merchet, "Nord-Mali: L'opération Panthère se Solde par une Victoire dans l'Ametettai (actualisé)," blog post at *Secret défense* website, 5 March 2013, http://www.marianne.net/blogsecretdefense/Nord-Mali-l-operation-Panthere-se-solde-par-une-victoire-dans-l-Ametettai_a972.html.

15. See <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/base/in-memoriam/mali>.

16. Dan Murphy, "The French are Winning Handily in Mali," blog post at *The Christian Science Monitor*, 31 January 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Backchannels/2013/0131/The-French-are-winning-handily-in-Mali>.

17. See the defense white paper, English version, "French White Paper on Defence and National Security—2013" [Republic of France] Ministry of Defence, 2013, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/portail-defense>.

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