

‘Not to do less but to do better ...’:

## French military policy in Africa

RACHEL UTLEY\*

Even in the new century, military conflict has continued to characterize large areas of the African continent. In the past two years tensions and conflicts have continued to scar West Africa (in Sierra Leone), Central Africa (in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Burundi) and East Africa (between Ethiopia and Eritrea, in Sudan and in Somalia). In Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo, internal conflicts became regionalized with the intervention of neighbouring countries, drawing in Liberia and Guinea in the former case, and Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia in the latter. At the time of writing, disarmament measures and peace talks proceed with some difficulty. In the east, an uneasy peace is holding between Ethiopia and Eritrea after the June 2000 peace agreement. Efforts to end the civil war in Sudan continue falteringly, and in Somalia, despite the installation of President Abdulkassim Salat Hassan in August 2000, local warlords still clash with government forces. This list is at best indicative; it is certainly not exhaustive.

One of the Western powers to have been most involved in Africa has been France. Major French interest in the region stems from the country's past as a colonial power, but it did not end with decolonization. Indeed, residual French influence in Africa, even after the majority of African states had gained independence, was one of the key elements in France's claims to international rank and status during the Cold War period. However, the nature and extent of France's African policy have been fundamentally revised in recent years. It rapidly became clear in the 1990s that the bases of the policy, as it had previously been conducted, were unequivocally inappropriate for the post-Cold War world. In line with a policy reorientation which began, slowly, under Mitterrand, and was accelerated under prime ministers Juppé (from 1995 to 1997) and Jospin (since 1997), France has sought to reduce its military commitments; to develop relations with states not traditionally forming part of the so-

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called 'French zone' in Africa; and to redirect aid and development assistance according to more transparent, more effective and more liberal democratic principles.

It is only a short time since many of these changes were implemented, and so any pretensions to offer a definitive assessment of their impact would be misplaced. Nevertheless, it is hoped that at least a useful interim assessment can be made, focusing on the military measures, considering in turn France's long-standing military interests in Africa; the imperatives for change by the mid-1990s; the nature and extent of the changes imposed to date, and their consequences; and finally, the prospects for future French action in Africa, and the likelihood that Paris will seek to undertake any such actions in cooperative, multilateral frameworks—potentially with the British on board.<sup>1</sup>

### **The *gendarme* of Africa**

Africa's importance to France has been multifaceted. Economically, Africa has constituted a reasonable investment for France over the years, and still accounts for approximately 5 per cent of France's external trade.<sup>2</sup> Strategically, too, Africa has been a useful asset to France, which has maintained forces in a number of friendly, or at least francophone, African states. France's bases in Africa have proved valuable in the protection of France's wider commercial, military and strategic interests.

These interests are, however, far outweighed by less tangible but no less significant political calculations. France has to a very great extent measured its national power and status—*grandeur* in the Gaullist terminology—in accordance with its presence and potential for exercising power across the globe. Thus, on decolonization, Paris sought to maintain close ties with as many of its former colonies as possible. A French community came into being, with its own franc as currency; defence and military cooperation agreements were maintained; and from the 1970s regular and high-profile Franco-African summits were held at the level of heads of state and government. Seeking to offer African states a real alternative to alignment with the superpowers, France sought to be Africa's mouthpiece in the developed world, at least in theory advocating African interests and concerns where they would otherwise be neglected, and in practice gaining diplomatic weight from the subsequent support of many African governments, for example in the UN.

The most overt aspect of France's residual ties with Africa, though, was the application of defence and military agreements. Facilitating French intervention in domestic affairs where friendly regimes were threatened, as well as action

<sup>1</sup> For pertinent discussions of the recent non-military reforms in France's African policy see R. Marchal, 'France and Africa: the emergence of essential reforms?' *International Affairs* 74: 2, April 1998, pp. 355–72; G. Cumming, 'Modernisation without "banalisation": towards a new era in French African aid relations', *Modern and Contemporary France* 8: 3, 2000, pp. 359–70.

<sup>2</sup> From the internet pages of the French foreign ministry. 'La politique africaine (11 janvier 2001)', at <[www.diplomatie.fr/actual/dossiers/polafrique/index.html](http://www.diplomatie.fr/actual/dossiers/polafrique/index.html)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001.

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when the former colonies faced external threats, these agreements resulted in many French military interventions in Africa—among others, in Mauritania, Senegal, Congo, Gabon, Cameroon and Chad in the 1960s; Chad again, as well as Djibouti, Western Sahara, Central African Republic and Zaire in the 1970s; Chad twice more in the 1980s; and Rwanda in the 1990s. France was widely referred to as the *gendarme* of Africa.

### **Imperatives for change by the mid-1990s**

During the 1990s, however, it became clear to French policy-makers that the bases of France's Africa policy were urgently in need of change. The reasons for this were varied, encompassing political, economic and military factors, and were inextricably linked to the reorientation and adaptation of France's external policy to the new realities of the post-Cold War era. There were four major factors in this reassessment.

First, French policy in Africa did not escape scrutiny in the context of the far-reaching external policy reappraisals required after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, by April 1990 a senior adviser in the French foreign ministry, Erik Arnoult, was explicit in his assessment of the 'complete failure' of France's policies and actions in Africa to date.<sup>3</sup> In correspondence with Jacques Attali, one of Mitterrand's most senior advisers, he was scathing about the failure of French aid materially to affect the fate of African peoples, and about Paris's previous support for illiberal, corrupt regimes at the expense of local opposition groups. He called for a drastic reconsideration of the terms and conditions of France's aid to the continent. At the same time, Mitterrand's minister for Franco-African cooperation, Jean-Pierre Cot, and defence minister Pierre Joxe, were advocating an end to the Franco-African relationship as it had previously existed.<sup>4</sup> Although Mitterrand was reluctant to accept the entirety of Arnoult's criticisms, or to implement the kind of change that the foreign ministry adviser and some other ministers were advocating, he was prepared to call for internal reforms such as democratization, as signposted by his speech to the Franco-African summit at La Baule in 1990.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding limitations, then, the nature and impact of France's Africa policy were now under consideration at the highest levels.

<sup>3</sup> J. Attali, *Verbatim*, vol. 3: *chronique des années 1988–1991* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), p. 472, diary entry for 20 April 1990.

<sup>4</sup> A. Adebajo, 'Folie de grandeur', *The World Today* 53: 6, June 1997, pp. 147–50 at p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> Mitterrand's keen interests in African affairs went back at least as far as his ministerial career under the Fourth Republic, when he had served as minister for overseas territories in the Pleven administration from July 1950 to Feb. 1951. He was also very briefly *ministre d'état* with responsibility for Algeria and North Africa in the Faure administration from Jan. to Feb. 1952. He maintained these interests and the connections he had made at the time he held these ministerial positions throughout his subsequent career, upholding the practice of operating an 'Africa cell' in the Elysée Palace during his presidency. Given the depth of these ties, it was perhaps unsurprising that he should have been reluctant to countenance radical change in France's African policy in the early 1990s. For the text of the speech at La Baule see F. Mitterrand, *Discours 1981–1995* (Paris: Europolis, 1995), pp. 328–41.

The second, critical factor was the emergent crisis in the Great Lakes region, beginning with events in Rwanda in 1994. Although Rwanda had never been a French colony, Paris had nurtured close ties with Kigali since Rwanda's independence from Belgium in 1959, concluding a military cooperation agreement in 1975. As the Hutu-dominated government of President Habyarimana came under challenge from the mainly Tutsi rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front from 1990, French troops were deployed in Rwanda from October of that year, with the objective of protecting both French nationals in the country and Habyarimana's government. The supply of military hardware to government forces was rapidly increased. Although French troops were withdrawn in December 1993, after France had facilitated the conclusion of a power-sharing agreement between Hutus and Tutsis in August, there were strong precedents for France's political pressure and military intervention in Rwanda by the mid-1990s.

Habyarimana's suspicious death in a plane crash in April 1994 unleashed a frenzied genocide by the Hutu militia against the Tutsi population, in which up to one million Tutsis were slaughtered. Simultaneously, the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front advanced across the country, defeating the French-equipped and trained government forces, and prompting the flight of up to two million Hutus, including some implicated in the genocide, into neighbouring Zaire and Tanzania. In response, France undertook a mission to evacuate not only French citizens, but also certain senior Rwandan political figures and their families—some of whom, it transpired, were implicated in the genocide.

As the situation in Rwanda continued to deteriorate, and the international community vacillated in its response, further military intervention was considered by the French government. Although the government was divided, Prime Minister Edouard Balladur found a compromise: French military intervention would be authorized, but only under strict conditions. The operation had to be explicitly sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council; it was to be of limited duration; and it was to have primarily humanitarian goals.<sup>6</sup> *Opération Turquoise* was therefore implemented from 24 June to 22 August 1994, involving 2,500 French troops, in accordance with Resolution 929 of the UN Security Council.

France's chief of the defence staff, Admiral Jacques Lanxade, subsequently claimed that *Opération Turquoise* had been a humanitarian success.<sup>7</sup> Politically, however, a balance of opinion in the French literature suggests that the failures of France's Africa policy had been clearly exposed: France had supported and equipped a corrupt, undemocratic government, had sent troops to defend it from rebellion, and had established safe havens for Hutus—including perpetrators of genocide—to protect 'friends' of France from public scrutiny and accountability. External opinion was not necessarily any more favourable to the consequences of French action. For France's African allies, in particular, Paris had shown itself

<sup>6</sup> Unsigned, 'Les cinq conditions de Balladur', *La Croix*, 23 June 1994.

<sup>7</sup> J. Lanxade, 'L'opération Turquoise', *Défense Nationale* 51: 2, Feb. 1995, pp. 7–15 at p. 13.

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to be less than principled, advocating democratic reform on the one hand and intervening to shore up undemocratic regimes on the other. While a reassertion of the traditional French role might have been welcome in some quarters, the value of that support was now open to question, as French troops had been unable to prevent the rebel advances in Rwanda. Balladur's caveats on the commitment of French forces were also far from reassuring: linkage with the UN, rejection of open-ended commitments and the emphasis on humanitarian concerns were all thus far unprecedented regarding France's military interventions in Africa.

If Rwanda catapulted French African policy up the political agenda, highlighting the perils and limitations inherent not only in the traditional approach, but also in the 'middle way' approach of Balladur, France received another shock to the political and military system with further crisis in the Great Lakes region from 1996, this time in Zaire. France had given active support, including military support, to the regime of President Mobutu, at least since the 1970s. As Mobutu's leadership was increasingly threatened by rebels under Laurent Kabila, and as the Zairean armed forces proved incapable of preventing rebel gains, Paris proposed the deployment of a multinational humanitarian force and the convening of an international peace conference for the entire Great Lakes region. Critically, France maintained political support for Mobutu, insisting that his government remained Zaire's only legitimate authority.

However, French policy proved to be largely overtaken by events. Mobutu's regime was rapidly weakened, and his armed forces were pitifully inadequate in the face of the rebel offensive. Moreover, France became increasingly isolated within the international community: Washington abandoned its former Zairean ally in favour of Kabila; no support for the French position was forthcoming from Paris's European allies; and the African countries who were most strongly implicated in the crisis were hostile to Mobutu and hence to the French stance on his maintenance in power. The limits of French influence, and the consequences thereof, were clear: according to a prominent analyst of Franco-African relations, the Zairean crisis 'constituted a grave factor in the destabilization of France's traditional African policy'.<sup>8</sup>

Third, the unfolding crisis in the Great Lakes region further indicated in Paris that the realities of international power and influence in Africa were fast beginning to change. While French influence apparently waned, Paris saw new moves by others—notably on the part of the Clinton administration—to renew and extend ties with numerous African states. Visits to the continent by Secretary of State Warren Christopher in October 1996, followed by Hillary Clinton in March 1997, Madeleine Albright in December 1997 and Bill Clinton in 1998,<sup>9</sup> all bore witness to the fact. So did Washington's earlier role in the power

<sup>8</sup> H. Sada, 'Réexamen de la politique militaire française en Afrique?', *Défense Nationale* 53: 6, June 1997, pp. 183–5 at p. 183.

<sup>9</sup> H. Sada, 'Etats-Unis: le retour en Afrique?', *Défense Nationale* 52: 12, Dec. 1996, pp. 183–5 at p. 183 and 'La politique africaine des Etats-Unis', *Défense Nationale* 54: 2, Feb. 1998, pp. 186–7.

transfer to Kabila in the former Zaire, where France had supported Mobutu to the end; the American initiative presented in June 1997 to the Denver summit of the G7 for a new economic and commercial relationship with Africa;<sup>10</sup> and Washington's openings towards a 'new generation of African leaders' from 1998.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it was clear to Paris that various of the African states, including the francophone states, were receptive to American approaches. The significant purpose of France's Africa policy since the 1960s had been to secure power and influence not only in Africa but also through Africa on the wider international stage; its failure to do either by the later 1990s was a clear blow. For geopolitical reasons too, then, the need for change was underlined.

Reinforcing the political with the pragmatic, the fourth factor in the adaptation of France's Africa policy links two otherwise distinct elements: the decision taken in 1996, under Chirac's presidency, to abandon conscription and move towards wholly professional armed forces; and the long-term European focus to France's external policies, including defence.

France's armed forces had undergone successive reorganizations since the beginning of the 1990s, designed to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness. Successive plans were each more radical than the last, and yet as French troops were ever more widely deployed in the early 1990s in UN peacekeeping operations, the constitutional restrictions on the use of conscript forces beyond France's borders placed further strain on the country's limited professional military means, and undermined the reforms imposed. According to Chirac's proposals the armed forces will be reduced in number from the 1996 level of 573,000 to 440,000 by the end of 2002,<sup>12</sup> an overall reduction of more than 23 per cent. Within this total, the army bears the brunt of the cuts, with personnel levels scheduled to fall by approximately 35 per cent. In the context of such a profound reorganization of France's armed forces, full maintenance of the longstanding commitment to Africa became impossible.

Simultaneously, the question of Europe had a dual impact on French African policy. On the one hand, France's political commitment to European union, including a commitment to common defence, was increasingly formalized in government planning. Thus, both the 1994 defence white paper and the 1997–2002 military planning law emphasized clearly the European and Euro-Atlantic cooperative frameworks within which future French military actions were envisaged, and the wider variety of threats the international community was perceived to face. In this situation, Africa inevitably took on lesser significance as a potential theatre of operations.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Sada, 'La politique africaine des Etats-Unis', p. 187.

<sup>11</sup> H. Sada, 'Les Etats-Unis et les "Nouveaux Dirigeants Africains"', *Défense Nationale* 54: 7, July 1998, pp. 187–8.

<sup>12</sup> From the internet pages of the French defence ministry, at <[www.defense.gouv.fr/sga/sga\\_sup\\_4/resshumaines\\_s4/professionalisation\\_s4.htm](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/sga/sga_sup_4/resshumaines_s4/professionalisation_s4.htm)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001.

<sup>13</sup> In fact the low place occupied by Africa in the hierarchy of potential French military actions was indicated in each of these documents: the white paper suggested that intervention in Africa was only the fourth possible scenario for military action out of six, and in section 1.2.3 of the military planning law on 'France's international responsibilities', while it was stated that 'As a permanent member of the UN

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On the other hand, the impact of Europe was as much practical as it was political. It was about hard cash. The French economy had been in some difficulties since the 1970s, and successive governments had failed to improve the situation. Consequently, the defence budget had regularly been under pressure from the early 1980s, not only seeing cuts in annual expenditure calculations, compared with the provisions of the five-year planning laws, but also finding annually agreed expenditure subject to retrospective cuts.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, by the mid- to late 1990s, as France struggled to meet the economic convergence criteria for the single European currency, and all aspects of the national budget were feeling the pressure, defence spending was again under threat. Extensive basing of troops in Africa, for prolonged periods, with the enhanced salary and other costs this entailed, became a primary area for reconsideration.

Given the cumulative weight of these factors, the need for change in this policy area became more widely recognized, and figured more prominently in the concerns of each of the major political groupings. However, catalysts for change were needed; and these were provided by changes in presidency and government experienced in the 1990s. First came the election of a right-wing government under Balladur to serve under the Socialist Mitterrand from 1993 to 1995. Giving a little more room for manoeuvre in certain aspects of defence and foreign policy, this facilitated the initial amendments contained in the white paper, and in the Rwanda operation. After Chirac's accession to the presidency in 1995, the right-wing government led by Juppé took office with the clear aim of revising France's policy in Africa. However, its options and opportunities were partially restricted by Chirac's attachment to aspects of the more traditional stance.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, when the left won the legislative elections of 1997, compelling Chirac into a prolonged period of political cohabitation with a Socialist government under Lionel Jospin, further change was attainable.

A combination of factors during the 1990s thus made the continuation of France's traditional policies towards Africa untenable. Realization of the shortcomings of the policy as it had been conducted since the 1960s; bitter experience in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region; recognition that the realities of power and influence were changing in Africa, albeit belatedly, in the post-Cold War period; acknowledgement that both professionalization and Europeanization of France's defence and military positions militated against the traditional African policy: all these elements culminated in the most promising atmosphere

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Security Council and a nuclear power, France finally has responsibilities to assume in peacekeeping and international security, as well as solidarity commitments in Africa and the Middle East', these responsibilities were placed after national defence obligations and commitments in the European and Euro-Atlantic frameworks. See *Livre blanc sur la défense, 1994* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1994), p. 94; *Projet de loi relatif à la programmation militaire pour les années 1997 à 2002*, press release (Paris: Ministère de la Défense/SIRPA, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> See R. E. Utley, *The French defence debate: consensus and continuity in the Mitterrand era* (London: Macmillan, 2000), chs 4, 7.

<sup>15</sup> As indicated not least by his appointment of Jacques Foccart as African adviser (a post Foccart had occupied under de Gaulle).

for change that France had experienced in almost 40 years. The political alternations of the 1990s were the key to exploiting this opportunity to the full.

### France's new Africa policy

'Visibly, Africa is changing', claimed Lionel Jospin in 1997.<sup>16</sup> For the French prime minister, the changes under way in Africa were to provide the context in which France could alter the bases of an African policy which had become unsustainable. France proposed a 'new partnership' with Africa,<sup>17</sup> whereby the French commitment remained, but the assumptions which underpinned it were fundamentally revised. France would no longer take the primary role in ensuring relative stability and security in Africa, even on behalf of its former colonies. Troop numbers would fall, and bases would close. Defence agreements and military cooperation programmes would change—in most cases, would diminish. The focus of France's security commitment in Africa would increasingly be emphasized in multilateral terms, with the onus on African states to develop regional approaches to stability, security and conflict resolution. In this context, the 1998 renaming of the bi-annual Franco-African summit—from the Conference of Heads of State of France and Africa, to the Conference of Heads of State of Africa and France—was more than a cosmetic change.

The headline component of the military changes was a reduction in format and location of France's prepositioned forces in Africa. The clear majority of France's prepositioned forces are stationed in Africa, their missions being 'preventative in character and [with] a protection and intelligence function'.<sup>18</sup> Their significance extends far beyond this, however; as the chief of the defence staff, General Kelche, stated, 'Prepositioning brings an effective contribution to crisis prevention, [and] to the reactivity of the French intervention capability. In addition it has the double merit of allowing troop rotation, while ensuring their operational training.'<sup>19</sup> Moreover, for a medium-sized power such as France, with global ambitions and arguably inadequate means to fulfil them, prepositioned forces also constituted an essential factor in force projection and mobility.

Prior to the Jospin government's reforms, French forces in Africa numbered in the region of 8,500, allowing for small annual variations,<sup>20</sup> and they were deployed in seven African states—Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Gabon, Ivory Coast and Senegal—to which France was linked by defence agreements. By the end of the reforms in 2002, the personnel level will

<sup>16</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d20/5\\_3.htm](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d20/5_3.htm)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Allocution du Premier ministre devant la communauté française à Dakar (Sénégal), 19 décembre 1997'.

<sup>17</sup> L. Jospin, 'La politique de défense de la France', *Défense Nationale* 53: 11, Nov. 1997, pp. 3–14 at p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> <[www.assemblee-nationale.fr/rap-info/i2591.asp](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/rap-info/i2591.asp)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: parliamentary report, J.-M. Boucheron, *Rapport d'information sur les forces françaises de Djibouti*, Assemblée Nationale, no. 2591, 21 Sept 2000.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> See S. Gregory, 'The French military in Africa: past and present', *African Affairs* 99, 2000, pp. 435–48 at p. 438.



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have been reduced to 5,300,<sup>21</sup> a reduction of well over one-third, to be deployed in five African bases (of the previous list, the small mission in Cameroon and the much larger one in the Central African Republic have already closed). Despite the level of reduction in personnel, the French government maintains that there will be no 'appreciable effect' on France's capability for action,<sup>22</sup> given the increased mobility of remaining forces as a consequence of professionalization.

In addition to these measures for prepositioned forces, military cooperation has also been substantially revised. Cooperation is distinct from the defence agreements: to simplify, defence agreements effectively transfer responsibility for states' external defence and security to France, and thus allow the permanent deployment of prepositioned troops, while cooperation focuses on French military assistance, at a lower scale and level, in the training and equipment of African states' own armed forces. Twenty-three cooperation agreements are still in place.

As defence minister Alain Richard stated in October 1997, France would increasingly modify the terms and function of cooperation, 'in order to pursue its evolution towards an ever more balanced and more flexible relationship with friendly African forces'.<sup>23</sup> In 1998 this statement of intent was elaborated by Jospin, who said that the reforms 'aim[ed] particularly at promoting a more comprehensive concept of cooperation, whose ends [were] no longer only military or diplomatic, but [which] integrate[d] strategic dialogue, the preparation and support of exports, and actions for regional stability, into a new strategy of presence and influence'.<sup>24</sup> A much wider view of the goals of French Africa policy was thus being taken. In practice, however, this change has not been too well received by many of France's African partners, who have seen the numbers and resources of French military cooperation personnel fall, and a significant proportion of what remains redirected towards other initiatives. In Chad, for example, a pre-reform level of 250 personnel assigned to military cooperation was reduced to 66 by 1999. Their budget has suffered a similar reduction, to only a quarter of what it had previously been. And yet Chad's self-perceived need for military cooperation remained undiminished; while national armed forces lacked training and resources, and suffered irregular salary payments, the French contribution in supplying most of their fuel and equipment (excluding weapons) was critical.<sup>25</sup> Compounding the reductions in military assistance to

<sup>21</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d20/5\\_3.htm](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d20/5_3.htm)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Extraits de l'intervention d'Alain Richard à l'Assemblée Nationale, le 6 novembre 1998 (débat budgétaire)'.

<sup>22</sup> Jospin, 'La politique de défense de la France', p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier.d20/5\\_3.htm](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier.d20/5_3.htm)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Discours du ministre de la défense à la veille de la conférence de Dakar sur le maintien de la paix (Extraits), 20 octobre 1997'.

<sup>24</sup> L. Jospin, 'Evolution générale de la politique de défense de la France', *Défense Nationale* 54: 11, Nov. 1998, pp. 5–20 at p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> <[www.assemblee-nationale.fr/rap-info/i1701.asp](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/rap-info/i1701.asp)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: parliamentary report, Y. Dauge, J.-C. Lefort and M. Ternet, *Rapport d'information sur la réforme de la coopération appliquée au Tchad et à la Centrafrique*, Assemblée Nationale, no. 1701, 16 June 99. I should reiterate the differences between defence agreements allowing the pre-positioning of forces, under which approximately 850 soldiers still serve in Chad following French military operations there in 1986 (*Opération Epervier*), and the military cooperation arrangements, which mobilize the reduced figure of 66 personnel.

African states per se was the redirection of cooperation resources to France's regional peacekeeping training initiative, RECAMP (*Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix*/Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capabilities)—a redirection which accounted for 20 per cent of military cooperation assets and resources by 1998.<sup>26</sup> Not surprisingly, Chad's defence minister in 1999 was most keen to restore cooperation to its former levels.<sup>27</sup>

The third aspect of the reforms, and perhaps the most far-reaching in terms of the foundations of France's previous Africa policy, has been the multi-lateralism which characterizes the new approach. As Jospin declared explicitly in 1997, 'France cannot ensure, alone, the security of its African partners.'<sup>28</sup> This change in stance has had two particular consequences. First, Paris became very keen to shift the primary responsibility for the maintenance of security and stability in Africa to African states themselves. Second, when external assistance was required, the French government was determined that France should increasingly fulfil its residual interests and commitments alongside a variety of international partners.

Emphasis on Paris's preferred future role for Africa in the maintenance of peace and stability was clear. Take defence minister Richard: 'We consider that the Africans must ensure their security more and more by themselves.'<sup>29</sup> However, this did not mean individually: France sought to promote multilateral sub-regional or regional initiatives, for example, under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity. As foreign minister Hubert Védrine argued in September 1998, in a comment which related specifically to the then widening crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but which characterized much of the broader French thinking on Africa at that time, the 'regional contagion of crises justifies that regional organizations play a greater role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts'.<sup>30</sup>

In pursuit of this objective, France gave the search for peace and stability a high priority as a theme in Franco-African summits. That held in Ouagadougou, in December 1996—while the right under Juppé still held power in France—affirmed that France and the African states would work together in favour of security, primarily through the OAU but also through various subregional groupings, as well as through the UN. The summit in Paris in November 1998 was entirely devoted to consideration of military security issues and the possibilities for regional cooperation in search thereof. In addition, France had widely supported and celebrated the Inter-African Mission for the Surveillance

<sup>26</sup> <[www.france.diplomatie.fr/actual/evenements/20confi3.html](http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/actual/evenements/20confi3.html)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: Africa–France summit, 'Discours d'ouverture du président de la République, M. Jacques Chirac (Paris, 27 novembre 1998)'.

<sup>27</sup> Dauge et al., *Rapport d'information* 1701, 16 June 1999.

<sup>28</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d20/5\\_3.htm](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d20/5_3.htm)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Allocution du Premier ministre devant les forces françaises du Cap Vert, 20 décembre 1997'.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Extraits de l'intervention d'Alain Richard'.

<sup>30</sup> <[www.france.diplomatie.fr/actual/evenements/20conf10.html](http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/actual/evenements/20conf10.html)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: '53ème Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies. Réunion ministérielle du Conseil de Sécurité sur l'Afrique: Discours du ministre des Affaires Etrangères, M. Hubert Védrine (New York, 24 septembre 1998)'.

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of the Bangui Accords (MISAB), set up to seek a solution to the instability in the Central African Republic (CAR). Further French contributions included financial assistance to the conflict prevention, management and resolution arm of the OAU; the donation of FFfr 3 million to assist ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) in implementing its 1998 moratorium on the manufacture, import and export of small arms; and, since 1999, financial and logistic support to a 600-strong ECOWAS multinational battalion separating warring parties in conflict in Guinea-Bissau.<sup>31</sup>

In the event that inter-African solutions did *not* succeed in maintaining or restoring peace and security, the French envisaged action through the UN. As foreign minister Védrine argued, 'The Security Council must retain the primary responsibility in questions of the maintenance of international peace and security, in Africa as elsewhere.'<sup>32</sup> France, as a permanent member of the Security Council, and self-proclaimed advocate of the African states, was determined to play a significant part. However, what Paris does *not* intend is that French troops should fulfil the same role they did in the early 1990s. The days of France leading the lists of contributors to UN peacekeeping operations would seem to have gone, at least on current evidence. A clear example of this is provided by the crisis in the Central African Republic from 1996 to 1997. Here, a series of mutinies by armed forces personnel, initially over unpaid salaries and their terms and conditions of service, became more extensive and more politicized and threatened the elected regime of President Patassé. At the time, the CAR was home to the second largest French base in Africa after Djibouti, and was linked to France by a defence agreement under which France held responsibility for the maintenance of internal order as well as defence from external aggression. French troops were therefore drawn into the fighting, to protect foreign nationals, reasonably enough, and also to restore order, to mediate between the mutineers and the president, and to maintain the latter in power.

France rapidly risked becoming mired in the internal crises of the CAR. The restoration of order undertaken as each mutiny unfolded led to French troops fighting mutineers in the streets. Its worst manifestation, in reprisal for the killing of two French officers, left 100 civilians and 50 mutineers dead.<sup>33</sup> In this climate, even President Chirac warmed to the idea that France's Africa policy was in drastic need of change. As a preliminary response the Franco-African summit at Ouagadougou was prevailed upon to assist in finding a solution to the crisis. The leaders of Gabon, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali undertook a political initiative to reduce tensions, and thus to extricate France. Agreements were concluded in January 1997, leading to the establishment of MISAB. This body was given not only diplomatic support but, more practically, logistic and financial

<sup>31</sup> <[www.diplomatie.fr/actual/dossiers/polafricaine/index.html](http://www.diplomatie.fr/actual/dossiers/polafricaine/index.html)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: details from 'La politique africaine (11 janvier 2001)'.

<sup>32</sup> <[www.france.diplomatie.fr/actual/evenements/2oconf10.html](http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/actual/evenements/2oconf10.html)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: '53ème Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies'.

<sup>33</sup> Adebajo, 'Folie de grandeur', p. 150.

support by Paris until its replacement by a UN force, MINURCA, in April 1998. France was not, however, a major contributor to MINURCA. The latter's deployment coincided with the closure of France's base in CAR, and France was not keen to maintain the considerable troop presence which had prevailed until 1996–7. The commitment which France did make, effectively redesignating some of its forces from national to UN personnel, amounted to 215 soldiers out of a force strength of 1,350, and those French troops were to be engaged exclusively in logistic and medical functions.<sup>34</sup> This was indeed a major turning-point in the adaptation of France's African policy.

Subsequent events have reiterated this pattern of distance between France's declaratory commitment to the UN's role in maintaining African stability and the military means it has placed at the organization's disposal. It has, for example, disengaged itself from the commitment to MINURCA since April 1999.<sup>35</sup> Three observers were committed to the UN's original mission for the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the current UN mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, approximately 4,000 strong, France has committed medical resources based in Djibouti and twelve soldiers on the ground: two within the operation's general staff, and ten integrated in a Dutch–Canadian brigade.<sup>36</sup>

If multilateralism through commitment to UN operations has been qualified, France's desire to encourage an inter-African multilateralism was most clearly embodied in practice through the RECAMP initiative. RECAMP was developed in coordination with the United States and the United Kingdom, and is a partner programme to Washington's Africa Crisis Response Initiative. It is designed to provide both training and equipment to enable African states better to maintain security and stability on the continent, and to function in this manner in close cooperation with the UN and the OAU.<sup>37</sup> Equipment for the use of one peacekeeping battalion, and the resources of a surgical field hospital, were made available by France in Senegal in January 1998. This equipment function has already been invoked: the Senegalese battalion which participated in the UN's first mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) was equipped in this way.<sup>38</sup> Like France's current approach to involvement in Africa more widely, RECAMP is not limited to francophone African states. As with the Africa–France summits, and increasingly with the non-military aspects of France's aid and development programmes, RECAMP is open to any African

<sup>34</sup> H. Sada, 'La MISAB: une mission efficace en République centrafricaine', *Défense Nationale* 54: 6, June 1998, pp. 185–7.

<sup>35</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/forces/operations/afrique/minurca/princ.htm](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/forces/operations/afrique/minurca/princ.htm)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'La mission des nations unies en République centrafricaine'.

<sup>36</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/communiqués/c160101/160101.html](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/communiqués/c160101/160101.html)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Participation des Armées Françaises à la Mission des Nations unies en Ethiopie et en Erythrée (MINUEE)'.

<sup>37</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d6/](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d6/)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Le concept "Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix (RECAMP)," Paris, le 7 mai 1998'.

<sup>38</sup> <[www.diplomatie.fr/actualite/article.asp?cat=5&th=11&ar=2081](http://www.diplomatie.fr/actualite/article.asp?cat=5&th=11&ar=2081)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Programme français de renforcement des capacités africaines de maintien de la paix: séminaire politico-militaire de l'exercice Tanzanite (Dar Es Salam, 8–10 mai 2001); Déclaration du Porte-Parole adjoint du Quai d'Orsay, Paris, 16 mai 2001'.

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state wishing to participate. Moreover, and encouragingly from the French perspective, it seems to be successful in this objective: the third RECAMP exercise, Tanzanite, in May 2001, primarily involved anglophone and lusophone states.<sup>39</sup>

The changes thus applied to France's Africa policy, particularly in the military elements discussed here, have indeed been considerable. However, not everything has changed: there *is* a constancy. France still seeks to maintain prestige and influence in Africa; it is the means by which that prestige and influence are maintained that are fundamentally different from those which prevailed in the Cold War and early post-Cold War years. Recognizing its own limitations, France has sought to minimize its national military exposure in Africa, while maximizing the potential benefit to be gained from exercising other forms of military and political influence—the prioritization of RECAMP, for example, or the multilateralization of intervention mechanisms. What, then, can be said about Paris's current and future perception of threat on the African continent, and prospects for military action therein?

### **Cause for concern**

There remain many causes for concern on the African continent, and their military dimensions are still considerable. From Paris's perspective, it seems that the main threats in the nearer term stem first from the potential for states' internal instability to recur, or to proliferate, giving rise to possible power seizures, and the violence and conflict this can entail; and second, from the risk that any prolongation of internal instability can render a state vulnerable to external intervention, resulting in the spillover of internal tensions into regional conflict. Less emphasis seems to be placed, at present, on the possibility of overtly territorial disputes developing between states.

France, like the rest of the international community, now has a wealth of experience to prove that internal instability can push a state towards wider crisis. Burundi, Rwanda, Zaire, Central African Republic—all francophone states—have demonstrated the point in recent years. Ivory Coast is a typical example of the potential for instability which is likely to feature in French concerns.

In Ivory Coast, a military regime under General Robert Guei seized power in a coup in December 1999, ousting the Ivorian president Henri Konan Bédié. Rejecting the possibility of exercising power in the long term, Guei promised to return the country to democratic processes by October 2000. Unfortunately, Guei reneged on his promise, imposing himself as the main party's candidate for the October elections and legislating to prevent major rivals, such as Alassane Ouattara, from standing against him. His rejection of defeat by the socialist Laurent Gbagbo was the catalyst for public demonstrations, which descended into ethnic violence in which elements of the armed forces were implicated. President Gbagbo, belatedly installed in power, had great difficulty in restoring

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

order in any sense. Economically the country had been in crisis since the suspension of international aid at the end of 1998; politically his victory was dubious, given the number of candidates excluded from standing. Public disorder was widespread and military repression followed. Notwithstanding these difficulties, France unexpectedly offered FFfr 800 million to get Ivory Coast afloat again,<sup>40</sup> as long as the legislative elections to be held in December 2000 were more democratic than the presidential ballot had been. They were not; French aid was not paid;<sup>41</sup> and Gbagbo became intransigent.<sup>42</sup>

From this low point there has been some improvement in the bilateral situation in more recent months. Gbagbo undertook a week-long visit to France in June 2001, meeting President Chirac, Prime Minister Jospin and foreign minister Védrine. Further improvements have occurred as Gbagbo has sought since October to ameliorate the situation in respect of both external security, addressing tensions between Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso over accusations that the latter was trying to destabilize his government, and internal stability, inviting his main political rivals to national reconciliation talks. Progress remains uncertain; while Gbagbo secured the return from exile in France of former president Bédié, other notable rivals, including Ouattara and General Guei, were absent from the beginning of the negotiations. Given the longstanding connections between France and Ivory Coast, the recent revival of their relations, the continued uncertainty regarding the internal cohesion of Ivory Coast and its possible consequences for regional stability, the situation will continue to give cause for concern in Paris.

The significance of such developments in Paris's perception of threat lies not simply in the events themselves, as shown in its limited responses to such events over the last two years or so. It lies, rather, in two other factors. First, France is keen to shift the emphasis of its African policy towards more effective aid and development assistance, opening up more commercial opportunities in the process. Internal political instability is rarely helpful in achieving this type of goal. Second, there remains the question of defence agreements. Among those currently in force is that between France and Ivory Coast, and it includes still-secret provisions on the maintenance of internal order.<sup>43</sup> In this aspect France is walking a tightrope. Paris has called in recent years for a rereading of such agreements in general, and their possible downwards revision. Nevertheless, in the case of Ivory Coast, Védrine claimed in July 2001 that the question was not currently at the forefront of concerns.<sup>44</sup> While the French have thus far avoided

<sup>40</sup> S. Smith, 'Matignon soutient politiquement et financièrement Abidjan', *Le Monde*, 11 Dec. 2000.

<sup>41</sup> S. Smith, 'Le premier ministre ivoirien Pascal Affi N'Guessan quitte Paris sans assurance d'un soutien financier', *Le Monde*, 21 Feb. 2001.

<sup>42</sup> S. Smith, 'Laurent Gbagbo: "Si la France ne veut plus nous aider, il nous faudra chercher ailleurs un soutien"', *Le Monde*, 18 Dec. 2000.

<sup>43</sup> <[www.assemblee-nationale.fr/rap-info/i2237.asp](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/rap-info/i2237.asp)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: parliamentary report, F. Lamy, *Rapport d'information sur le contrôle parlementaire des opérations extérieures*, Assemblée Nationale, no. 2237, 8 March 2000.

<sup>44</sup> <[www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actual/dossiers/afrique/vedrine110701.html](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actual/dossiers/afrique/vedrine110701.html)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Politique africaine de la France. Entretien du ministre des Affaires étrangères, M. Hubert Védrine, avec le quotidien "Le Monde" (Paris, 11 juillet 2001)'.

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being drawn into very real internal difficulties in Ivory Coast, it is impossible to say that it will be able to remain aloof. The same concern would relate to other states with which France maintains defence agreements, such as Senegal, which is struggling with questions of internal stability over as yet unresolved Casamance separatism.

The prospect that local instability or conflict could spill over into wider regional conflict is also a factor in France's perception of threat in Africa at present. Take West Africa more widely: the area has not recently been noted for its stability, with tensions in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau; significant refugee populations; the implication of Charles Taylor's Liberian government in the problems; and recent tensions between Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso. Védérine's point about regional contagion looms large. Similar concerns relate to the Democratic Republic of Congo. France has welcomed the latest initiatives for peace, undertaken since Joseph Kabila assumed the leadership on the assassination of his father in January 2001. Indeed, Paris took a leading role in drafting and securing agreement on UN Security Council Resolution 1341 of 22 February 2001, for the withdrawal of foreign troops from the DRC, the opening of dialogue between Congolese factions and the deployment of a UN force to monitor the disengagement.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, France maintains clear interests in the evolution of events in the DRC, leading a UN Security Council mission of inquiry in the Great Lakes region in May 2001—a mission which focused explicitly on the military dimensions of the Lusaka peace agreement of 1999.<sup>46</sup> In this context it seems an unavoidable conclusion that France is seeking to regain some of the political initiative and influence it lost in the Great Lakes region, particularly to the United States, when Paris continued to back Mobutu in the mid- to late 1990s. The uncertain path of the peace process, and the potential for further instability in the future, will accordingly remain a source of concern to French authorities for the foreseeable future.

The situation in Guinea, and its similar potential for regional contagion and instability, is also likely to be a cause for concern. Guinean armed forces have recently been engaged in conflict against armed groups in the south of the country, which were allegedly supported by Liberia. Conversely, Liberia has claimed to be engaged in its own fight against Guinea-supported rebels in the north. Up to 400,000 refugees in the area—displaced Guineans, as well as those who fled conflict in Sierra Leone—have been a massive complicating factor. Neighbouring countries (mentioned above) are themselves greatly unstable. Early in 2001, President Chirac was a prominent proponent of international intervention to alleviate an impending humanitarian crisis,<sup>47</sup> although troops were not deployed. While tentative moves towards more peaceful relationships

<sup>45</sup> A. B. P., 'L'ONU adopte un plan de désengagement militaire en République Démocratique du Congo', *Le Monde*, 23 Feb. 2001.

<sup>46</sup> <[www.diplomatie.fr/actualite/article.asp?cat=5&th=11&ar=2077](http://www.diplomatie.fr/actualite/article.asp?cat=5&th=11&ar=2077)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: declaration by a spokesperson of the French foreign ministry, 29 May 2001.

<sup>47</sup> B. Breuillac, 'En attendant la force d'interposition ouest-africaine', *Le Monde*, 14 Feb. 2001.

between Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have begun,<sup>48</sup> the scale of the task remains considerable. France's political, military and economic links with this volatile African region are likely to dictate a continuing interest in, and encouragement for, peace and security measures—including the slim possibility of intervention, which France will have to measure against the other priorities of its new approach to Africa.

These two scenarios of internal instability per se, and internal instability leading to regional crises, are uppermost in the mind of the French government. There is much less emphasis on the re-emergence of relatively small-scale territorial disputes, such as that which has engaged Ethiopia and Eritrea. Here too, France welcomed moves for peace, and until a final resolution of all issues outstanding is reached Paris will continue to keep a weather eye on this area, not least because of its proximity to Djibouti, still France's largest and most strategically important base in Africa.<sup>49</sup>

France's African policy is in a period of transition, which complicates any assessment of how Paris will respond to events in the medium to long term. To an extent, this plainly depends on developments in Africa. If current military conflicts are contained and resolved, and African states progress as smoothly as external powers and authorities would like towards stability, peace and prosperity, France's current concerns will be substantially alleviated. However, it is likely that achievements will fall short of this ideal. In this light, and in view of the preference in Paris to avoid unilateral commitments in Africa in the future, attempts to establish a coordinated approach with London have been particularly noteworthy. As defence minister Richard insisted in 1997, France would work in Africa 'in close liaison with other European or Western countries already providing military assistance, in particular Great Britain'.<sup>50</sup> Extending previous tentative measures, France and Britain worked alongside each other and the United States in proposing and establishing their initiatives to train African soldiers in peacekeeping techniques. Further efforts were made in the narrower Franco-British context, codified at the St Malo summit in December 1998. A joint declaration noted 'the special role and the responsibility which the UK and France ... [had] in Africa, and their willingness to remain fully engaged there'.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, it sought to identify particular areas in which cooperation could be enhanced.

Nineteen ninety-nine seemed to be a good year for implementing this new approach. Robin Cook and Hubert Védrine made a joint visit to Ivory Coast in March, linked to a conference of French and British ambassadors in Africa;<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> <[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/Africa/newsid\\_1491000/1491747.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/Africa/newsid_1491000/1491747.stm)>, accessed 19 Oct. 2001: unsigned, 'Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone edge closer'.

<sup>49</sup> For further consideration of Djibouti's significance to France, see Gregory, 'The French military in Africa', pp. 443–5.

<sup>50</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/communiqués/d201097/201097.html](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/communiqués/d201097/201097.html)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Discours du ministre de la défense'.

<sup>51</sup> <[www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?1797](http://www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?1797)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Joint Declaration on Co-operation in Africa, 04.12.98'.

<sup>52</sup> <[www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?2105](http://www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?2105)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Franco-British co-operation in Africa, 11.03.99'.



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Védrine visited Cook's official residence Chevening in July, specifically to discuss African issues;<sup>53</sup> and a meeting of British, French and African foreign ministers took place in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York in September.<sup>54</sup> Further extension of the cooperative principle was envisaged for 2001, with a joint visit of the French and British foreign ministers planned to Nigeria and Mali.<sup>55</sup>

Although the Chevening meeting covered the conflicts in the DRC, Sierra Leone and other crisis areas, as well as wider African issues, the overriding emphasis of Franco-British cooperation to date has been diplomatic. It has dealt with the possibility of information exchange between the capitals, and between local embassies; potential co-location of embassies in Africa, where France is more widely represented than Britain; and consideration of exchanging personnel between the ministries in Paris and London. There has been less emphasis on specifically military cooperation on the ground, although joint training for African peacekeepers has taken place in West Africa,<sup>56</sup> and at Britain's request France provided short-term transit facilities in Senegal for citizens evacuated from Sierra Leone, military stopover facilities in Dakar and limited technical support.<sup>57</sup>

Nonetheless, it seems that the cooperative approach is still moving forwards. At the Franco-British summit in Cahors in February 2001 a more detailed declaration on Africa was issued, with more overt consideration of peace and security issues. This included a declared determination to work to reduce conflict, jointly supporting efforts to limit trade in small arms and to prevent natural resources—such as 'conflict diamonds'—from fuelling hostilities; a commitment to the pursuit of peace in the DRC and Sierra Leone; a similar commitment to enhance peace support operations through the UN; and moves to coordinate joint ships' visits (defence diplomacy) to African ports. While cooperation is evidently deepening, declaratory diplomatic measures still seem to take priority over firm action.

What *is* important is that, the case of Sierra Leone apart, Britain seems to share France's reluctance to countenance significant military engagement in Africa. The Strategic Defence Review and the Defence White Paper of 1999 are very thin on the potential for action in Africa, and a statement on British policy available at the Foreign Office's website carries uncanny echoes of the French position:

<sup>53</sup> <[www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?2686](http://www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?2686)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'British/French meeting on Africa, 27 July 1999'.

<sup>54</sup> <[www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?2833](http://www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?2833)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Meeting between British, French and African foreign ministers, 22 Sept. 1999'.

<sup>55</sup> Robin Cook was replaced as Foreign Secretary by Jack Straw before the visit could take place. While Straw did not go ahead with the visit, his counterpart Védrine did make the trip in June 2001.

<sup>56</sup> <[www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?2686](http://www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?2686)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'British/French meeting on Africa'.

<sup>57</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/forces/.../afrique/sierra\\_Leone.htm](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/forces/.../afrique/sierra_Leone.htm)>, accessed 4 Jan. 2001: 'Soutien à l'évacuation de ressortissants au Sierra Leone'.

Britain wants a brighter future for Africa. Our policy is simple: to promote positive change throughout the continent ... Democratic process, accountability, transparency, good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights are all important in themselves. They also kickstart economies and deter wars ... The people who will build lasting peace and prosperity in Africa are the people of Africa themselves.<sup>58</sup>

Consequently, it seems that the short- to medium-term prospects of anything but small-scale, localized cooperation between Britain and France are slim. Nor would the UNPROFOR example—France and Britain taking leading roles in a major peacekeeping operation—seem likely to be replicated (at least, not in Africa). On the one hand, France and Britain apparently share a preference, in principle, to act in support of military intervention by others, rather than doing so themselves. On the other, while France prioritizes the UN, and makes limited operational contributions, distance from the UN has been one of the characteristics of Britain's recent commitment in Sierra Leone. Therefore it seems that, while Britain and France will continue to work more closely together in such areas as broad policy, diplomacy, peace support and military training initiatives, on balance, larger-scale cooperative military interventions do not appear to be an imminent prospect.

## Conclusion

'Not to do less but to do better.'<sup>59</sup> That was how Lionel Jospin characterized France's new African policy. However, it is hard to avoid the impression that in the military aspects of that policy even more than the rest, France *does* wish to do less, and to gain greater credit for it. There is little doubt that France's previous African policy was in need of urgent adjustment. Nonetheless, as the situation in Africa remains seriously unstable, and as France still retains deep interests in the continent, it remains to be seen whether Jospin can in fact do less *and* do better. It would be an achievement indeed.

<sup>58</sup> <[www.fco.gov.uk/news/keythemepage.asp?PageId=67](http://www.fco.gov.uk/news/keythemepage.asp?PageId=67)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Britain and Africa in the 21st century: British policy'.

<sup>59</sup> <[www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d20/5\\_3.htm](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d20/5_3.htm)>, accessed 17 Oct. 2001: 'Allocution du Premier ministre'.