

## THE FRENCH WAR ON AL QA'IDA IN AFRICA

In January 2013, France intervened in its former African colony, Mali, to stop an Al Qa'ida advance on the capital. French special forces, warplanes, and army units struck with rapid and unexpected force. Their intervention quickly repelled the jihadist advance, and soon the terrorists had been chased from their safe haven in Mali's desolate north – an impressive accomplishment.

Although there have been many books on the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there are almost none on the recent military interventions of America's allies. Because it was quick, effective, and relatively low cost, the story of France's intervention in Mali contains valuable lessons for future strategy.

Based on exclusive interviews with high-level civilian and military officials in Paris, Washington, and Bamako, *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa* offers a fast-paced, concise strategic overview of this conflict. As terrorist groups proliferate across North Africa, what France accomplished in Mali is an important reference point for national security experts.

Christopher S. Chivvis is Associate Director of the RAND International Security and Defense Policy Center and teaches at the Johns Hopkins Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. Chivvis has worked in the Pentagon; published widely, including in *Foreign Policy*, *The National Interest*, and *The New York Times*; and appears frequently in media outlets such as CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera. His previous books include *Toppling Qaddafi*, on NATO's military intervention in Libya, and *The Monetary Conservative*, a biography of Jacques Rueff.

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Christopher S. Chivvis  
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**Christopher S. Chivvis**  
*RAND Corporation*



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*For Uma and Usha*

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## PREFACE

In the last few years, the world has witnessed a deeply troubling spread of violent extremist groups across North Africa and the Middle East. Al Qa'ida has proven tenacious and rise of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) has meanwhile opened a whole new era in the history of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, in the Middle East as well as North Africa. From Iraq to Syria to Libya, the United States, its allies, and its partners have confronted the challenge of developing a military strategy that can be both effective against such groups and also politically saleable to domestic populations reluctant to engage again in large-scale counterinsurgency missions of the type the United States undertook in the decade after the 9/11 attacks. The French found such a strategy in their 2013 intervention against al Qa'ida in Mali. France was able relatively quickly, and at a relatively low cost, to eliminate a major al Qa'ida safe haven, restore Mali's integrity, and deal a major blow to the regional terrorist groups that threatened Mali, France, and many other countries. Mali is a poor, weak country with multiple conflicts that have yet to be resolved. It could again descend, as Libya did after the 2011 NATO intervention there, into civil war. But there is little question that the French intervention had an overall positive effect.

Most literature on intervention strategy in the United States focuses on the U.S. experience alone. By bringing the experience of a key ally to light for an American audience, I hope this book will add a valuable perspective to counter-terrorism strategy debate within the U.S. policy and academic community.

I am as grateful as ever, if not more so, for the willingness of many people to contribute valuable time and support to the research and thinking that went into this project. In Paris, I was very lucky to have several of the most knowledgeable experts in the field of French strategic studies and African affairs give time to the project, including Etienne de Durand, Camille Grand, Philippe Gros, Nathalie Guibert, Marc Hecker, Isabelle Laserre, Antonio Missiroli, and Jean-Jacques Patry. In the United States, Jolyon Howorth, Leo Michel, and Douglas Porch contributed sound advice on French military affairs.

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## Preface

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Most of all, thanks to my wife Sumona Guha and my daughters, Uma Kamala and Usha Kate, who were always supportive of my work, despite the extended overseas travel. I can only hope that when my girls reach my age, we will be a little further along in understanding how to deal with the kind of threats and challenges this story presents. Perhaps the outlook will be a little rosier than it is today. The book is dedicated to them.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission in Mali
AQIM	Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb
ATT	Amadou Toumani Toure
CIA	U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
DCRI	Direction Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur (Central Directorate of Homeland Intelligence)
DGSE	Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (General Directorate for External Security)
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
ECOWAS	Economic Community for West African States
EU	European Union
EUFOR	European Union Force
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIA	Groupe Islamique Armé (Armed Islamic Group)
GPS	Global Positioning System
GSPC	Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat)
GTIA	Groupe Tactique Interarmes (Joint Tactical Group)
HCUA	High Council for the Unity of the Azawad
IBK	Ibrahim Boubacar Keita
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IFOR	Implementation Force

xviii	Abbreviations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham
JCET	Joint Combined Exchange Training
KFOR	Kosovo Force
kWh	Kilo-Watt Hours
MAA	Arab Movement of the Azawad
MINURCA	United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic
MINURCAT	United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNLA	Mouvement Nationale pour la Liberation de l’Azawad (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l’Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l’Oues (Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
RAF	Royal Air Force
RCE	Regional Command East
RPG	Rocket-Propelled Grenade
SFOR	Stabilization Force – Bosnia
SOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
TRANSCOM	U.S. Transportation Command
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNAMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMIBH	United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire

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UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia	
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force – Former Yugoslavia	
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia	
USAID	United States Agency for International Development	