

Overcoming Opposition at the UNSC: Regional Multilateralism as a Form of Collective Pressure

Stefano Recchia 

Southern Methodist University

Abstract

Research suggests that military interveners often seek endorsements from regional international organizations (IOs), in addition to approval from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), to reassure international and domestic audiences. Toward that end, interveners should seek the endorsement of continent-wide regional IOs with the broadest and most diverse membership, which are most likely to be independent. In practice, however, interveners often seek endorsements from subregional IOs with narrow membership and aggregate preferences similar to their own. This should weaken the reassurance/legitimation effect significantly. I argue that such narrower regional endorsements are sought not so much to reassure skeptical audiences, as to pressure reluctant UNSC members to approve the intervention by putting those members' relations with regional partners at stake. To illustrate this argument and probe its plausibility, I reconstruct France's successful efforts to obtain UNSC approval for its interventions in Côte d'Ivoire (2002–2003) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2003) at a time when the United States was hesitant to support France because of the two countries' falling-out over the Iraq War. For evidence I rely on original interviews with senior French and US officials.

Keywords: international legitimacy, signaling, realist institutionalism, United Nations Security Council, French military interventions, Operation Licorne, Operation Artemis

Introduction

Military interveners typically view approval from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as uniquely valuable. By legitimizing the use of force, it helps them counter accusations of neocolonialism and, more generally, avert international pushback (Thompson 2006; Coleman 2007; Charbonneau 2008); facilitates operational burden sharing (Kreps 2011; Recchia 2015a); and increases domestic support at home (Chapman 2011; Grieco et al. 2011). However, members of the UNSC, including its veto-wielding permanent members, may be reluctant to offer their approval—either because they worry that the intervention will undermine regional stability and harm their own geopolitical interests, or because they want to retaliate against the intervener's lack of support on issues of interest to them. When this is the

case, the intervener faces an uphill diplomatic struggle. This article explores how military interveners can leverage antecedent backing from regional international organizations (IOs) to pressure reluctant members of the UNSC to approve the intervention.

Research suggests that military interveners often seek endorsements from regional IOs, in addition to UN approval, to signal their benign intentions and the wisdom of the proposed policy to skeptical audiences both internationally (Thompson 2006; Westra 2007) and domestically (Fang 2008; Chapman 2011; Grieco et al. 2011). To that end, military interveners should seek endorsements from continent-wide regional IOs with the broadest and most diverse membership, which are most likely to be independent and unbiased—such as the African Union (AU), the Organization for Security and Co-operation

in Europe (OSCE), and the Organization of American States (OAS). In practice, however, interveners often seek the endorsement of subregional IOs with narrow membership and aggregate preferences similar to their own. This should weaken the signaling and legitimation effect significantly. I argue that interveners covet such narrower regional endorsements not so much for signaling/reassurance purposes, as to steer the collective weight of the regional IO's membership toward holdouts on the UNSC and thereby persuade those holdouts to support the intervention. The backing of a regional IO commits its members to supporting the policy, which can be expected to turn up the heat on UNSC holdouts by putting the latter's relations with regional partners at stake.

This article illustrates how regional multilateralism can be used for leverage at the UNSC, through two case studies of French military intervention decision-making. Specifically, I trace the decision-making process on France's 2002–2003 intervention in Côte d'Ivoire and its 2003 intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). France is the only European country that still regularly deploys its own military forces in substantial numbers on combat missions to sub-Saharan Africa. Until the mid-1990s, France frequently intervened in Francophone Africa unilaterally, without seeking multilateral backing. Over the last two decades, however, French policymakers have increasingly sought to legitimize their interventions by working hard to obtain UNSC resolutions of approval (Gegout 2017, ch. 4). French policy elites were chastened by the experience of the Rwandan genocide, when Paris had supported a murderous regime at great cost to France's international standing. Members of the French foreign policy establishment now acknowledge that this “wrenching experience” resulted in France taking “a step back” and ultimately “gave birth to the multilateral turn in France's security policy toward Africa” (French Senate 2011, 29; see also Chafer, Cumming, and van der Velde 2020). What is surprising, given the controversial nature of France's postcolonial interventions, is how successful Paris has been at obtaining UNSC approval (Erforth 2020; see also Table 1).

The 2002–03 Côte d'Ivoire intervention and 2003 DRC intervention are the two cases in which, over the last two decades, France was arguably *least likely* to obtain UNSC approval.¹ That is because France's turn toward the UNSC in these cases coincided with growing

Franco-American tensions over Iraq. By February 2003, when France sought UN approval for its intervention in Côte d'Ivoire, bilateral relations between Washington and Paris had taken a significant turn for the worse: only a few weeks earlier, France's foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, had publicly expressed his country's opposition to a UNSC resolution authorizing US military action against Iraq, indicating that Paris might veto it (Gordon and Shapiro 2004, 123; Recchia 2015b, 638). After the French President, Jacques Chirac, reiterated the veto threat and Washington's effort to obtain a UN mandate for the Iraq War failed, US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice vowed to “punish France” (Hoagland 2003). The George W. Bush administration's desire to make Chirac and his team pay a price for their antagonistic stance on Iraq largely explains why the United States was initially hesitant to back UNSC resolutions of approval for France's interventions in Côte d'Ivoire and the DRC. Nevertheless, in both cases, France ended up with unanimous resolutions of approval from the Council—in February and May 2003, respectively.

This article shows that policymakers in Paris worked hard to secure prior endorsements from subregional IOs whose members had preferences similar to France's—the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the Côte d'Ivoire case and the European Union (EU) in the DRC case—primarily to pressure the United States into backing these interventions at the UNSC. The Côte d'Ivoire and DRC case studies are intended primarily as plausibility probes. Yet these two cases appear to be part of a pattern: as illustrated in Table 1, France has consistently sought endorsements of its African interventions from regional IOs (usually subregional IOs whose key members had preferences similar to its own) *before* seeking UNSC resolutions of approval. A systematic investigation of all cases of French intervention policy is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, is quite likely that in many cases from Rwanda in 1994 onward, French policymakers viewed regional multilateral backing as a way of smoothing their path toward UNSC approval by increasing the pressure on UNSC holdouts.

I derive the evidence for my analysis primarily from original interviews that I conducted with high-ranking French and US officials involved in policymaking on the cases under investigation. French policymaking regarding military intervention is highly centralized, with decisions usually taken by the president and a small group of senior diplomatic and military advisers. I interviewed more than a dozen French officials from this inner circle of power—including the president's chief military adviser, two French permanent representatives to the UNSC

1 A “least likely” case, as Gerring (2007, 115) notes, “is one that, on all dimensions *except* the dimension of theoretical interest, is predicted not to achieve a certain outcome, and yet it does so.”

Table 1. France's principal African interventions, 1994–2014

<i>Target country, year, operation code name</i>	<i>Regional endorsement: date and organization</i>	<i>UNSC approval: Date and resolution</i>	<i>Operation launch date</i>
Rwanda, 1994 (Operation Turquoise)	June 17, 1994, Western European Union (WEU): France requests backing; ^a Germany opposes. ^b	June 22, 1994, SCR 929: Authorizes France and its African partners to “us[e] all necessary means” to contribute to civilian protection.	June 23, 1994
Côte Ivoire, 2002–2003 (Operation Licorne)	January 26, 2003, Conference of ECOWAS members + South Africa, Angola, Cameroon, and Gabon: “Expresses the hope that” the UNSC “will affirm...the right of” ECOWAS and French forces to ensure the protection of civilians. ^c	February 4, 2003, SCR 1464: Authorizes ECOWAS forces “together with the French forces supporting them to take the necessary steps” for civilian protection.	September 22, 2002 ^d
Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2003 (Operation Artemis)	May 19, 2003, European Union (EU) Council: Expresses support in principle for EU humanitarian mission with France as “framework nation”; then formally approves on June 5. ^d	May 30, 2003, SCR 1484: Authorizes deployment of “[m]ultinational Force in Bunia...to contribute to the stabilization of the security conditions.”	June 12, 2003
Chad, 2008 (EUFOR Chad-CAR)	September 12, 2007, EU Council: Approves “general concept” for EU military operation; on September 17, EU foreign policy chief formally conveys “urgent need” for UNSC approval. ^e	September 25, 2007, SCR 1778: Authorizes EU operation “to contribute to protecting civilians in danger [and]...facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.”	January 28, 2008
Libya, 2011 (Operation Harmattan)	March 12, 2011, League of Arab States (LAS) Council: Calls on UNSC to “take the necessary measures to impose immediately a no-fly zone” and “establish safe areas in places exposed to shelling.” ^f	March 17, 2011, SCR 1973: Authorizes France and its partners “to take all necessary measures,...to protect civilians and civilian populated areas.”	March 19, 2011
Côte Ivoire, 2011 (Operation Licorne II)	December 24, 2010, ECOWAS Heads of State and Government: Express support for “use of legitimate force” to enforce electoral outcome in Côte Ivoire; ^g on March 24, request that UNSC authorize use of “all necessary means.” ^h	March 30, 2011, SCR 1975: “Recalls its authorization and...calls upon all parties to cooperate fully in the operation of UN...and French forces.”	April 2, 2011
Mali, 2013 (Operation Serval)	January 19, 2013, ECOWAS Heads of State and Government: “Express their profound gratitude to France” for its assistance in halting the advance of terrorist groups. ⁱ	April 25, 2013, SCR 2100: “Welcom[es] the swift action by the French forces” and “authorizes French troops...to use all necessary means” to support African stabilization mission.	January 11, 2013 ^j
Central African Republic, 2013 (Operation Sangaris)	November 13, 2013, AU Peace and Security Committee: “Welcomes” proposed French deployment in support of AU stabilization mission, in the face of serious “communal and religious tensions and clashes.” ^j	December 5, 2013, SCR 2127: “Authorizes the French forces in the CAR,...to take all necessary measures to support” AU peace mission.	December 5, 2013

^a Intervention initially launched without UNSC approval.

^b <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB472/pdf/mzc04003.pdf>

^c <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB472/pdf/mzc01519.pdf>

^d https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CI_030126_Paris%20Conclusions.pdf

^e <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32003E0423&from=EN>

^f <https://documents-dds-ny.ny.gov/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/513/56/PDF/N0751356.pdf?OpenElement>

^g [http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/Arab%20League%20Ministerial%20level%20statement%2012%20march%202011%20-%20english\(1\).pdf](http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/Arab%20League%20Ministerial%20level%20statement%2012%20march%202011%20-%20english(1).pdf)

^h <http://www.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2010-24-december-Extra.pdf>

ⁱ <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Cote%20d'Ivoire%20s%202011%20182.pdf>

^j <https://www.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2013-Extra-Jan-Mali.pdf>

^k <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/auc-psc-com-406-car-13-11-2013.pdf>

who had also previously served as the president's chief diplomatic advisers, and the Foreign Ministry's director of African affairs.² Information gathered from interviews is sometimes problematic, as personal memories may be clouded by hindsight. Nevertheless, interviews with key officials are often the only way of reconstructing the motives behind particular policies and strategies. Wherever feasible, for additional corroboration, I triangulate the evidence from interviews with information from official documents, published memoirs, and secondary sources.

The article is structured as follows. The first part reviews prominent hypotheses about IO approval as a way of reassuring skeptical audiences, before laying out in greater detail my own argument on regional approval as a way of pressuring hesitant UNSC members. The second part traces the French decision-making process on Côte d'Ivoire in 2002–2003, focusing on France's effort to secure UN approval by harnessing ECOWAS support. The third part examines French decision-making on the DRC in 2003, when policymakers in Paris sought the EU's endorsement and participation, hopeful that it would help them obtain a unanimous UNSC resolution of approval. The conclusion sums up key findings and discusses broader implications of the argument.

Regional Approval as a Signal of Legitimacy and Appropriateness

Reassuring Third-Party States

The classic argument about the benefits of multilateral approval for military intervention, including approval from regional IOs, is that it helps signal benign intentions to third-party states and thus reassures them about the intervener's goals. Wedgwood (2002, 173) writes that regional multilateral backing helps legitimize military action by offering an "impartial certification" that it is "not intended to serve the narrow interests of a single country." A related argument is that the endorsement of regional IOs signals an "action's congruence with [widely accepted] rules," especially when it is viewed as part of a cumulative legitimation process at the apex of which stands UNSC approval (Westra 2010, 523). The underlying expectation is that signaling benign intentions and policy restraint helps interveners avert pushback in the form of retaliation and "soft balancing" by third-party states, thus minimizing the "international political costs" of military action (Thompson 2009, 19).

The minimum requirements identified in the literature for regional IOs to be able to perform this signaling or

"information transmission" function are that they must have a mandate in the field of international security and a formal voting mechanism by which member states can approve or block an initiative (Kreps 2008, 588). Besides this, Thompson (2006, 7) notes, "it is the neutrality of IOs in particular that allows them to serve as informative agents of the international community. Because they have standing memberships with diverse interests and cannot be controlled by individual states," such bodies can "impose constraints on a coercer, making signaling of limited ambitions possible." In short, the ability of IOs to transmit relevant information about an intervener's intentions is a function of their independence from particular interests, which is likely to be related to the breadth and diversity of their membership: "the greater the independence, the greater the information that is sent" (Thompson 2009, 33–4).

Reassuring Domestic Audiences

Others argue that IO approval is beneficial primarily for the signals it sends to domestic audiences in the countries that initiate military action (Fang 2008; Chapman 2009; Grieco et al. 2011) and that contribute troops or financing (Johns and Davies 2014; Tago and Ikeda 2015). The underlying assumption is that the domestic public faces problems of asymmetric information when it comes to assessing its leaders' arguments in favor of military intervention. Endorsements from relevant IOs, the argument goes, offer a valuable form of external validation; they reassure a "rationally ignorant" public about the wisdom and intentions of its leaders and, more generally, signal that the proposed intervention amounts to "good policy"—i.e., is an appropriate response to the situation at hand (see esp. Chapman 2011). This scholarship builds on earlier public opinion research, which found that domestic audiences tend to be more supportive of armed intervention if it enjoys multilateral backing (Kull 2002).³

The ability of a particular IO to send valuable signals domestically, like its ability to transmit information internationally, should be a function of the organization's independence. This is sometimes operationalized as the distance between the IO's aggregate preferences and the preferences of the state that is requesting organizational approval. Chapman (2009, 736) argues that "when multilateral security bodies hold aggregate preferences that are perceived to be generally opposed to the foreign pol-

2 Respectively, Henri Bentégeat, Jean-David Levitte, Jean-Marc de La Sablière, and Bruno Joubert.

3 Busby et al. (2020) find that US policy elites crave UNSC approval even more than the broader US public—presumably because elites better understand that the UN legitimation facilitates operational burden sharing.

icy goals of a proposing state, support or authorization from those bodies can be a powerful signal to an uninformed audience that a proposed policy is worth supporting.” Therefore, Chapman hypothesizes, the effect of IO approval on domestic support for military intervention “should increase as an IO is seen as less likely to grant authorization”; indeed, he suggests that “governments face some incentive to appeal to institutions that appear likely to oppose them,” based on the expectation that while approval from such bodies provides a boon to public support, lack of approval is not necessarily harmful (Chapman 2009, 736; 2011, ch. 3).

Observable Implications

It follows from these information transmission arguments that US leaders, for example, should rarely seek endorsements from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—an organization of Western countries whose security interests are quite closely aligned with those of the United States and in which Washington has traditionally held a hegemonic position. One should expect NATO approval to provide only a moderate signal to skeptical audiences that US interventions are appropriate (for a similar argument, see Chu 2018).

More generally, military interveners should display little interest in endorsements from subregional IOs with fairly homogeneous membership, such as ECOWAS or the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), because such organizations frequently display limited independence and powerful states may sway them by buying off their most influential members.⁴ Instead, the United States and other Western interveners, such as France, should seek endorsements from heterogeneous, continent-wide regional IOs, including ones that have sometimes decried Western interventions as neocolonial (such as the AU and OAS), thereby maximizing perceptions of organizational independence and the related ability to send valuable signals.⁵ In addition, there should be case-specific evidence (e.g., from interviews and memoirs) that when policymakers seek regional IO endorsements for military interventions, they are in fact motivated by a desire to reassure international and domestic audiences.

4 The United States, for example, easily obtained CARICOM’s backing for its 1994 Haiti intervention (Kreps 2011, 81).

5 The AU, for example, opposed the 2011 Libya intervention launched by France, Britain, and the United States, and the OAS condemned the 1989 US intervention in Panama (Recchia 2015a, 100).

Pressuring Hesitant UNSC Members

An alternative hypothesis is that military interveners view regional multilateral endorsements as a way of putting pressure on hesitant UNSC members to follow suit and approve the intervention. Approval from the UNSC, as noted, is uniquely valuable—not least because, barring clear cases of self-defense, it remains a *sine qua non* condition for the international legality of armed intervention.

Undoubtedly there are other strategies available to military interveners who wish to pressure hesitant UNSC members to come on board. Interveners may offer sizeable economic incentives, or side payments, to UNSC holdouts. During the run-up to the 1991 Persian Gulf War, for example, the United States offered hundreds of millions of dollars to recalcitrant UNSC members to obtain their cooperation (Thompson 2009, 81–2; Recchia 2015a, 2).⁶ Yet another possibility is for prospective interveners to indicate that they have “outside options”: by making it clear that they are willing to bypass the UNSC, they can increase their bargaining leverage and may be able to persuade other Council members to offer their affirmative vote (Voeten 2001).

The ability to offer sizeable side payments and pursue outside options, however, is usually limited to the world’s top-tier powers: only military and economic superpowers, such as the United States and perhaps increasingly China, are likely to be able to bribe their way to UNSC approval, and only they can credibly threaten to intervene without it.⁷ Second-tier powers, including France, may be able to lead military interventions in regions of traditional interest to them, but they probably will have to rely on other means to overcome opposition at the UNSC.⁸

Leveraging the Collective Weight of Regional Endorsements

When faced with a skeptical UNSC, second-tier powers are especially likely to seek to form regional multilateral coalitions in support of their preferred policy, to pressure hesitant UNSC members to come on board. Nothing, of

6 See Henke (2019) for a systematic analysis of the role of side payments in multilateral military coalition building.

7 Voeten (2001, 845) recognizes that the option to act outside the UNSC is likely to be available only to a “dominant state” that can shoulder the material and political costs of unilateral action.

8 Classifying France as a “second-tier” power may seem controversial. However, France clearly fails to meet the superpower threshold and may also increasingly fall short of the great-power threshold, given its declining share of world economic output and comparatively limited investments in upgrading its military capabilities.

course, precludes superpowers from also having recourse to this strategy, but superpowers have a broader array of tools at their disposal and may find it easier to simply use their own formidable capabilities to put bilateral pressure on UNSC holdouts.

The endorsement of regional IOs, expressed through formal resolutions of approval, involves “a public, and therefore potentially costly, commitment to support [the] policy on the part of all those...members who have offered their affirmative vote” (Recchia 2016, 83). It thus results in those IO members putting their collective weight behind the policy. While such pledges of support are not absolute—they usually leave some wiggle room, like most international commitments—they nevertheless reduce the freedom of action of those who have expressed their support and clearly signal where states stand on a particular issue (see also Martin 2017). Military interveners, I argue, may seek such commitments in order to channel the region’s collective pressure toward holdouts on the UNSC (including superpowers) and persuade those holdouts to reassess their interests and come on board. If working through regional IOs allows second-tier powers to take on and bargain effectively with superpowers at the UNSC, this suggests that multilateral institutions can be viewed as tools for challenging rather than simply replicating the international distribution of power.

The pressure on UNSC holdouts as a result of regional multilateral endorsements is likely to be especially effective when members of the regional IO entertain close military, political, and economic relations with the UNSC holdouts. In these circumstances, the latter’s continued opposition would risk putting valuable relations at stake. Specifically, if a UNSC member persists in its refusal to support a proposed intervention, in spite of strong regional backing for the policy, members of the regional IO may stop viewing the recalcitrant UNSC member as a reliable partner. This could, in turn, negatively affect the UNSC holdout’s relationships with members of the regional IO across an array of issues—including security cooperation, migration management, and trade and investment access. Going further, states from the region might engage in concerted “soft balancing,” using their combined weight in international forums to delay, frustrate, and undermine the UNSC holdout’s policies in various fields (Pape 2005). Even the possibility that this could happen may generate leverage.

Formal endorsements of a proposed intervention from regional IOs are likely to be more effective at overcoming UNSC opposition than merely bilateral expressions of support from regional partners. If regional partners limit themselves to bilateral expressions of support, a powerful UNSC member that opposes

the policy may convince them to revisit their stance by offering inducements or threatening retaliation; however, this becomes more difficult once states from the region have formally voted in a multilateral body to support the intervention. In short, expressions of support can be expected to involve a stronger commitment that is more difficult to overturn when they are channeled through collective votes in regional IOs. This is in line with the argument that working through formal multilateral institutions helps states “lock in their commitments” in a way that bilateral agreements and expressions of support can rarely match (Ikenberry 2001, 41).⁹

The argument developed in this article about regional multilateral endorsements as a source of influence at the UNSC draws on and contributes to realist institutionalism in international relations. While some structural realists dismiss IOs as epiphenomenal, scholars in the classical realist tradition have long recognized that IOs can help legitimize state action, facilitate the aggregation of capabilities, and more generally augment national power. Morgenthau (1985, 34) noted that “power exercised with moral or legal authority must be distinguished from naked power,” before adding that “power exercised...in the name of the United Nations has a better chance to succeed than equivalent power exercised by an ‘aggressor’ nation.” Modern realist institutionalism builds on these insights, pointing out that IOs are not merely platforms through which states “advance their goals and manifest their capabilities” but also valuable instruments that “enhance the power, soft or otherwise, of states” (Weitsman 2014, 2–3; see also Barkin and Weitsman 2019). I argue that regional IOs can enhance national power, specifically by facilitating policy coordination among like-minded states and the application of political pressure on opponents, in line with (realist) ideas of external balancing.

Observable Implications

If military interveners seek endorsements from regional IOs to pressure hesitant UNSC members by putting the latter’s relations with regional partners at stake, we should observe the following. First, military interveners

- 9 A different hypothesis is that regional IO endorsements “rhetorically entrap” hesitant UNSC members that have previously stressed the importance of deferring to the views of regional IOs. Such rhetorical entrapment, although difficult to observe, might arise when UNSC members seek to uphold traditional sovereignty principles, such as for proposed UN peace operations that lack host-state consent (Glanville 2013).

Table 2. Summary of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (information transmission): When military interveners seek endorsements from regional IOs, they do so to signal to international and domestic audiences that the proposed policy is legitimate and appropriate.

Hypothesis 2 (political pressure): When military interveners seek endorsements from regional IOs, they do so to pressure hesitant UNSC members to approve the intervention by putting those members' relations with regional partners at stake.

should typically approach regional bodies whose members entertain close political, military, and economic relations with UNSC holdouts. For example, policymakers in Paris wishing to increase pressure on US leaders to back French interventions at the UNSC should seek prior endorsements from the EU—a regional organization in which Paris wields considerable influence and that includes some of Washington's principal allies and economic partners.

Second, it should not surprise us to find interveners choosing to engage with regional or subregional IOs whose membership is fairly homogeneous and whose aggregate preferences are close to the interveners'—based on the expectation that such IOs will be more likely to endorse the proposed policy. My argument is not that regional IOs with a broader and more diverse membership are necessarily ill-suited to exert pressure on reluctant UNSC members. Endorsements from continent-wide IOs, such as the AU or the OSCE, might well be helpful to that end. Simply, endorsements from more diverse continental IOs tend to be significantly more difficult to obtain, and assuming that the goal is to pressure hesitant UNSC members by putting relations with key partners at stake, such broader endorsements may not offer additional payoffs.

In short, to assess the regional pressure hypothesis, we should begin by taking a closer look at the types of regional IOs that military interveners choose to work with. If the IOs whose endorsements are sought have the characteristics outlined above, the hypothesis is *prima facie* plausible. In addition, there should be evidence from interviews, memoirs, and other sources that when policymakers from intervening states seek regional IO endorsements, they are in fact motivated to a considerable degree by a desire to pressure hesitant UNSC members to offer their affirmative vote. Ideally, once the regional IO has offered its backing, previously hesitant UNSC members should follow suit and support the intervention. Finally, policymakers from previously hesitant UNSC members should acknowledge that regional multilateral pressure played a key role in turning their national leadership around. Such candor, however, can be expected to be rare, because foreign policy leaders—especially from states that self-identify as great

powers—are usually reluctant to acknowledge that they yielded to international pressure.

France and the Côte d'Ivoire Crisis of 2002–2003

After Côte d'Ivoire gained independence from France in 1960, for roughly three decades it was one of the wealthiest and most stable countries in West Africa. Beginning in the late 1980s, however, economic growth slowed down markedly as the price of cocoa, Côte d'Ivoire's main export commodity, dropped on global markets (Bat 2012, 636–7). Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who ruled the country until his death in 1993, was able to maintain political stability even as the economy stagnated by balancing competing groups and interests. Yet after Houphouët-Boigny's death, domestic and international pressure to open up Côte d'Ivoire's political system led his successors to abandon the consensus-based model of politics and increasingly resort to sectarianism. Henri Konan Bédié acceded to the presidency in 1995 by espousing the doctrine of *ivoirité*, which stigmatized the country's northern Muslims as “foreigners” and, once enshrined in law, excluded them from many national posts (Notin 2013, 19–20). This divisive doctrine was pushed further by Laurent Gbagbo, a populist elected to the presidency in October 2000 (Bat 2012, 643).

The marginalization of Côte d'Ivoire's northern populations resulted in growing political discontent. Tensions boiled over on September 19, 2002, when disgruntled army officers from the north launched an armed insurrection. Troops loyal to President Gbagbo foiled an attempted coup in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire's political and administrative center; but several northern cities fell to the rebellion almost immediately, resulting in a *de facto* partition of the country (Bat 2012, 644–5; Notin 2013, 46–50). On September 20, as the rebels were preparing for an all-out attack on Abidjan, members of President Gbagbo's government requested that French military forces, already based in the country under a bilateral defense treaty, move out of their barracks and come to the government's assistance (Konadje 2014, 78).

Why France Decided to Intervene (And Then Could Not Withdraw)

The next morning, on September 21, French President Jacques Chirac called an emergency meeting on the Côte d'Ivoire crisis with his chief military adviser, General Henri Bénéteat, and Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin (Notin 2013, 52). According to General Bénéteat, the president immediately made it clear that activating the defense treaty, which committed France to assisting the Ivorian government in case of external aggression, was "out of the question."¹⁰ French officials understood that the rebels in Côte d'Ivoire were supported by neighboring Burkina Faso (US Embassy Paris 2005, para. 8). However, after the Rwanda experience of the 1990s, when France had supported the incumbent government against a foreign-backed rebellion and that government then became implicated in a genocide, policymakers in Paris were reluctant to openly take sides in sectarian conflicts marked by mass popular mobilization (Notin 2013, 53). Moreover, Chirac, a conservative politician, did not have much sympathy for Gbagbo's left-wing populism (D'Ersu 2007, 88).

At the same time, for Chirac doing nothing was not an option. There were more than 20,000 French nationals living in Abidjan at the time. During the September 21 meeting, Bénéteat explained that evacuating such a large number of French citizens would take several days. Yet the rebels were likely to mount an attack on Abidjan within hours. If the rebels entered the city, there would likely be large-scale street fighting, putting French lives at risk. In short, the rebels' advance had to be brought to a halt, and only French forces could reliably achieve that objective.¹¹ Taking Bénéteat's advice, on September 22, the French president ordered a military intervention to stop the rebels (Chirac 2011, 425). "So we stopped them," Bénéteat recalls, adding that "our goal at this point was merely to stop the rebels—not to interpose ourselves between rebels and government forces."¹²

Within days, French leaders reached out to ECOWAS, a regional IO with experience in crisis management, asking that it take the lead in political mediation efforts and work to swiftly deploy a regional peacekeeping force.¹³ "We were very reluctant to be involved in domestic politics in this former colony, to take sides," remembers Jean-David Levitte, who had previously been Chirac's chief

diplomatic adviser and was now France's permanent representative to the United Nations.¹⁴ Reportedly, policymakers in Paris also briefly considered the possibility of securing the EU's involvement in a peace operation in Côte d'Ivoire, but after it became clear that this was a nonstarter with other EU members, French leaders chose to concentrate on ECOWAS (Charbonneau 2008).

On September 29, ECOWAS heads of state set up a contact group to facilitate talks between the conflicting parties in Côte d'Ivoire and agreed in principle to deploy a peacekeeping force (ECOWAS 2002a). A few weeks later, on October 17, ECOWAS mediation efforts yielded a fragile cease-fire. At this point, the French military, expecting that the ECOWAS peacekeeping deployment would occur soon enough, agreed to take on a formal interposition role on a temporary basis. This resulted in French forces policing a "green line" between the rebel-held north and the government-controlled south of the country (Notin 2013, 63; Konadje 2014, 83–6). The ECOWAS deployment, however, experienced several delays. It took until November 18 for five ECOWAS member states—Benin, Ghana, Niger, Senegal, and Togo—to commit to the deployment of 1,200 soldiers mandated to "take over from French troops" (ECOWAS 2002b). As late as early December, this regional peacekeeping force was still to be deployed. Meanwhile, the roughly 1,200 French forces on the ground were unable to completely prevent incursions across the cease-fire line: in late November, the rebels returned to the offensive, and the resulting skirmishes produced numerous civilian casualties (Notin 2013, 76–85).

The French military operation, code-named Licorne, could not simply be terminated after stopping the rebel advance. It was unthinkable for Chirac and his team to abandon some 20,000 French nationals in Côte d'Ivoire to their fate. Moreover, by early December, several nongovernmental organizations were describing a pre-genocidal situation with an acute risk of mass atrocities (Hara and Ero 2002). A French withdrawal under such circumstances would have been morally untenable, and the growing media attention suggested that it could result in a serious blow to France's standing (*Le Monde* 2002). At the same time, resembling a catch-22 situation, the French military presence was opposed by both the rebels and President Gbagbo: the former accused Paris of preventing their military victory, while the latter complained that France had de facto legitimized the rebellion and

10 Author interview with General Henri Bénéteat (chief of the military staff of the French president, April 1999–October 2002; chief of the general staff, October 2002–October 2006), Paris, March 1, 2017.

11 Bénéteat, author interview.

12 Bénéteat, author interview.

13 Bénéteat, author interview; see also Notin (2013, 54).

14 Author interview with Jean-David Levitte (chief diplomatic adviser to President Chirac, 1995–1999; permanent representative of France to the United Nations, December 1999–December 2002), Paris, March 20, 2017.

was too lukewarm in its support for the rightful government (Bat 2012, 645).¹⁵ In late October, Gbagbo began orchestrating large-scale anti-French protests in Abidjan and elsewhere to underscore his discontent with French policy (Notin 2013, 76–7).

Seeking UN Approval

By the end of 2002, with no prospect of a quick transfer to ECOWAS forces, policymakers in Paris concluded that a UNSC mandate for the Licorne forces would be highly desirable, to legitimize their presence both in Côte d'Ivoire and internationally. As Jean-Pierre Lacroix, then the deputy director for UN affairs at the French Foreign Ministry, recalls, "Initially, in September, we had acted in an emergency, and we felt that in this context our intervention was quite legitimate. But as we realized that there was no quick solution and the French intervention was becoming protracted, the absence of a UN mandate became more of a concern."¹⁶ Levitte, France's ambassador to the UN until December 2002, agrees that "in this very tricky environment, it became very important for us to get a mandate from the United Nations Security Council."¹⁷ Policymakers in Paris also hoped that involving the UNSC and obtaining a UN mandate for Operation Licorne would be a first step toward securing the Council's approval for a UN peacekeeping mission, which could significantly reduce the burden on French troops.¹⁸

French leaders anticipated an uphill struggle at the UNSC. The other veto-wielding permanent members—the United States, Russia, China, and Great Britain—had no important interests at stake in Côte d'Ivoire. Walter Kansteiner, who at the time managed US policy on Africa at the State Department, candidly acknowledges that "the Bush administration didn't give a fig about Côte d'Ivoire."¹⁹ The United States and other UNSC partners should in principle have welcomed France's efforts to sta-

bilize the country. However, as noted, France's turn toward the UNSC on Côte d'Ivoire coincided with growing Franco-American tensions over Iraq. In November 2002, France had supported UNSC Resolution 1441, which threatened "serious consequences" in case of Iraqi noncooperation with UN weapons inspectors, although without explicitly authorizing US military action (Gordon and Shapiro 2004, 108–14). As long as France appeared broadly cooperative on Iraq, the United States reciprocated by offering a degree of support for France's policy on Côte d'Ivoire.

Initially, "the Americans were not opposed to our intervention in Côte d'Ivoire," remembers François Bujon de l'Estang, France's ambassador to the United States until December 2002, before adding, "When I left [Washington], Iraq had not yet poisoned the bilateral relationship."²⁰ Indeed, in November of that year, the Bush administration offered \$3 million to help defray the cost of Nigeria's participation in the planned ECOWAS force for Côte d'Ivoire—although Nigeria ultimately declined to send troops (US Embassy Abuja 2002). In late December, the United States also consented to a statement by the UNSC president expressing the Council's "full support" for the planned ECOWAS force and "commend[ing] France for the efforts it has made" (UN 2002; on the US position, see Smith 2003a). By early 2003, however, after President Bush decided to request a second UNSC resolution explicitly authorizing the use of force against Iraq, France emerged as the principal opponent of such a resolution. This put France and the United States on a collision course (Recchia 2015b). Kansteiner acknowledges that while the US administration had initially been "supportive" of French policy on Côte d'Ivoire, "at some point, it became more contentious, due to Iraq."²¹

There has been speculation that the Bush administration, in an effort to increase its leverage vis-à-vis France, at least implicitly established a link between France's support at the UNSC on Iraq and US backing for a resolution authorizing the French operation in Côte d'Ivoire (Gegout 2017, 197). Asked about this, General Bontégeat, Chirac's top military adviser, answers with surprising candor: "The Americans, given our position concerning a possible operation in Iraq, were absolutely unwilling to accept any discussion of a resolution on Côte d'Ivoire, where France was involved. At the same time, Chirac did not want to abandon his opposition to a

15 After stopping the rebel advance, France had limited itself to offering some logistical support to Côte d'Ivoire's national army (see D'Ersu 2007, 89; Notin 2013, 66).

16 Author interview with Jean-Pierre Lacroix (deputy director, UN affairs, French Foreign Ministry, 2002–2006), Paris, March 27, 2017. For a similar argument, see Konadje (2014, 88–9).

17 Levitte, author interview.

18 Foreign Minister Villepin first broached the idea of a UN peacekeeping mission with his UNSC partners in early 2003 (see Guéhenno 2015, 96).

19 Author telephone interview with Walter Kansteiner (US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, June 2001–November 2003), April 4, 2019.

20 Author interview with François Bujon de l'Estang (French ambassador to the United States, 1995–2002), Paris, December 2, 2014.

21 Kansteiner, author interview.

resolution on Iraq—so he was stuck.”²² This account is corroborated by Ambassador Bruno Joubert, then the director of African affairs at the French Foreign Ministry.²³ A former senior US State Department official working on Africa at the time more reluctantly acknowledges that “there were some senior people in the [US] administration, especially at the Pentagon, who insisted, well let’s stick it to the French and withhold our support on Côte d’Ivoire.”²⁴

Securing a UN Mandate Through Collective African Pressure

To build up support at the UNSC, France chose to become more directly involved in the political negotiations on Côte d’Ivoire and sought the backing of an African regional coalition for its preferred peacemaking strategy. In early January 2003, Foreign Minister Villepin travelled to Côte d’Ivoire, where he met with both President Gbagbo and rebel leader Guillaume Soro. Villepin’s diplomacy benefited from a display of resolve by French forces, which had begun to push back more vigorously against rebel incursions across the green line (Smith 2003b). The French foreign minister secured the parties’ renewed commitment to the October 2002 cease-fire, as well as their acceptance of an invitation to travel to Paris for negotiations on a comprehensive peace settlement (D’Ersu 2007, 91–2; Villepin 2016, 300). From January 15 onward, representatives of President Gbagbo and the main rebel groups met in Linas-Marcoussis, near Paris, for a ten-day negotiating marathon that was also attended by senior officials from the UN, ECOWAS, and the African Union (Chirac 2011, 427; Notin 2013, 94). On January 24, the Ivorian parties reached a wide-ranging agreement, which among other things foresaw a power-sharing “government of national reconciliation” and an end to the controversial policies of *ivoirité* (Bat 2012, 648).

In previous weeks, French policymakers, hopeful that the parties to the Côte d’Ivoire conflict could be cajoled into a substantial agreement, had already planned a follow-up summit meeting with the leaders of eighteen African countries (including fourteen out of fifteen ECOWAS members, as well as continental powerhouse South Africa) to be held in Paris soon

after the Linas-Marcoussis talks.²⁵ The summit, held on January 25–26, was co-chaired by President Chirac, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa who also headed the AU at the time (Guéhenno 2015, 96). Ambassador Joubert explains that during the run-up to the meeting, he “spent a lot of time in South Africa, to explain to President Mbeki that we were not pursuing national interests and that this was instead about broader objectives.”²⁶ Jean-Marc de La Sablière, then France’s permanent representative to the UNSC, remembers “working all the time on this with the Nigerians and the Ghanaians,” who played a key role within ECOWAS and were very concerned about the situation in Côte d’Ivoire and the attendant risk of cross-border refugee flows. As a result of these coalition-building efforts, explains La Sablière, by the time of the Paris summit, “it was no longer just something between France and Côte d’Ivoire.”²⁷

During the summit in Paris, ECOWAS leaders, joined by South Africa, Angola, Cameroon, and Gabon, endorsed the agreement reached by the Ivorian parties and welcomed the parties’ intention to form a government of national reconciliation. Crucially, the summit’s final communiqué noted that “the heads of State...hope that the [UN] Security Council will affirm...the right of the ECOWAS forces [who in the meantime had begun to deploy] and the forces supporting them [i.e., the French forces] to take the necessary steps to ensure the security and freedom of movement of their personnel and...the protection of civilians immediately threatened with physical violence” (UN 2003a). In short, practically all West African countries, plus South Africa, were now calling on the UNSC to endorse the French military operation. The United States entertained close political relations with ECOWAS at the time and was relying on the regional organization to help it manage a political crisis in Liberia.²⁸ US policymakers were especially sensitive to the position of Nigeria, West Africa’s political and economic heavyweight (and in that period one of the world’s top five exporters of crude oil to the United States), and Ghana, with which Washington had recently concluded

22 Bentégeat, author interview.

23 Author interview with Bruno Joubert (director of African affairs, French Foreign Ministry, January 2003–July 2006), Paris, March 23, 2017.

24 Author telephone interview with Ambassador Alexander Laskaris (Africa officer at the US mission to the UNSC, 1999–2003), April 3, 2017.

25 Tiny Guinea-Bissau was the only ECOWAS member not to participate in the Paris summit (see UN 2003a).

26 Joubert, author interview.

27 Author interview with Jean-Marc de La Sablière (chief diplomatic adviser to President Chirac, 2000–2002; permanent representative of France to the United Nations, 2002–2007), Paris, December 15, 2014.

28 Kansteiner, author interview. The United States intervened in Liberia in August 2003, with ECOWAS support (see Recchia 2015a, 231–4).

a wide-ranging trade agreement.²⁹ Continued US unwillingness to support a UNSC resolution authorizing the French and ECOWAS military presence in Côte d'Ivoire, in the face of a request from Washington's key partners in the region, would have been a clear snub to them.

On January 27, Ambassador La Sablière transmitted a letter to France's partners at the UNSC, informing them of the outcome of the Paris summit and underscoring the will of its participants (UN 2003a; see also Konadje 2014, 106). La Sablière says that he waited until after the Linas-Marcoussis meeting and the Paris summit to table a draft UNSC resolution authorizing the French military presence, in order to step up pressure on the United States: "It was tactical," the French diplomat says. "We had a problem with the Americans because of Iraq, but I thought I could get it approved by proceeding in stages. In the end, the Americans couldn't say no to the Africans."³⁰ French policymakers thus wagered that faced with a united African front, the Bush administration would ultimately come on board. Joubert, the French Foreign Ministry's director of African affairs, confirms this and notes that besides the ECOWAS countries, a key role was played by South Africa—Washington's most significant economic partner on the continent. After South Africa's president joined the West African leaders in supporting the policy, Joubert explains, it would have been politically costly for Washington to continue to oppose a UNSC resolution endorsing the French and ECOWAS military presence: "The Americans understood rather quickly that it wasn't in their interest to sabotage this, because some Africans came to see them and said, enough!"³¹

On February 4, 2003, the UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 1464 on Côte d'Ivoire, which closely mirrored the conclusions of the Paris presidential summit and authorized the presence of ECOWAS and French forces. This was a remarkable success for French diplomacy, considering that Franco-American relations were at the time close to their nadir over the Iraq dispute. Only a few days earlier, on January 20, Foreign Minister Villepin had made France's opposition to a UNSC resolution authorizing military action against Iraq public, indicating during a press conference that Paris might cast a veto (Gordon and Shapiro 2004, 123). There is no conclusive evidence of a causal link between African re-

gional backing for France's policy on Côte d'Ivoire and Washington's final relenting at the UNSC, as no US official approached for this study acknowledged that the United States gave in to international pressure. Nevertheless, it seems likely that in the spring of 2003, France would have found it rather more difficult to obtain Washington's cooperation at the UNSC on the Côte d'Ivoire issue, absent strong backing from ECOWAS and other African countries.

Support from ECOWAS, a subregional IO with a majority-Francophone membership of former French colonies that maintain close ties to Paris, was not particularly well suited to signal benign intentions on the part of France to skeptical audiences. At the same time, the regional leader within ECOWAS, Nigeria, as well as some other members such as Ghana and Liberia, have not historically been close to France; hence, ECOWAS backing may, to some degree, have helped legitimize the intervention by signaling regional consent. It follows that if ECOWAS backing ultimately pushed the United States to approve the intervention, this may have been at least partly because the regional endorsement would have made it more difficult for Washington to publicly justify its continuing opposition by claiming that France's intervention was neocolonial. Either way, French leaders clearly viewed ECOWAS backing as a tool to put pressure on the United States and persuade it to support the intervention at the UNSC. French diplomats expected that once African regional support had been secured, "the Americans couldn't do tit for tat on this" (i.e., retaliate against France's lack of support on Iraq), because it would have hurt Washington's regional standing and could have harmed relations with African partners: "everyone would have said, that's not good."³²

France's 2003 Intervention in the DRC

In the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and that country's takeover by a Tutsi-led rebel army, hundreds of thousands of Hutus, including many *génocidaires*, fled into the DRC (then known as Zaire). The willingness of the DRC's president, Mobutu Sese Seko, to offer a safe haven to these *génocidaires* and related Hutu militias became a thorn in the side of Paul Kagame, Rwanda's new ruler. Kagame formed an alliance with an anti-Mobutu rebel, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, and in May 1997, their combined forces overthrew Mobutu (Carayannis 2016, 665). France under President Chirac had supported Mobutu, a staunch Francophile, until the end—including through covert military action. Chirac's dogged support

29 Ghana's President, John Kufuor, was at the time also leading ECOWAS mediation efforts in Côte d'Ivoire. See *The New York Times* (2003); on Nigeria, see *US Embassy Abuja* (2003).

30 La Sablière, author interview.

31 Joubert, author interview.

32 Joubert, author interview.

for Mobutu, a corrupt autocrat, long after the United States and other Western countries had abandoned their erstwhile Cold War ally, resulted in significant Franco-American friction. In 1996, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher publicly challenged France to stop treating Francophone Africa as its own “private domain” (Dahlburg 1997).

Meanwhile, the short-lived alliance between Kagame and Kabila soon broke down: by 1998, violent conflict had again engulfed the DRC. Rwanda and other neighboring countries (notably, Uganda) reverted to supporting armed rebel groups in the DRC while also dispatching thousands of their regular forces. In 2002, international pressure yielded two important agreements, signed in Pretoria and Luanda, which foresaw the withdrawal, respectively, of all Rwandan and Ugandan troops from the DRC. The pullout of foreign forces, however, created a power vacuum that was rapidly filled by local militias jostling for influence (Guéhenno 2015, 124–5).

In the spring of 2003, the violence became especially acute in the northeastern Ituri region, formerly occupied by Uganda. Fighting between ethnic Lendu and Hema militias produced large-scale casualties and displaced tens of thousands of civilians (Carayannis 2016, 672). By the end of April 2003, peacekeepers from the UN Mission in the DRC—established in 1999 and known by its French acronym, MONUC—were overwhelmed, as thousands of displaced civilians sought refuge around the UN compound in the regional capital, Bunia (Guéhenno 2015, 128–30).

French Motives for Intervening

President Chirac had by then come to support the DRC’s new leader, Joseph Kabila (Laurent-Désiré’s son). The crisis in Ituri risked derailing the entire DRC peace process, weakening the incumbent government and leading to renewed armed interference by Rwanda and Uganda (Cros 2003). French policymakers were worried that “the chaos in Ituri, if left unchecked, would inevitably open the door to more influence, potentially of a destabilizing kind, by neighboring countries.”³³ Consequently, explains Bruno Joubert, then the director for African affairs at the French Foreign Ministry, Chirac and his team began to explore the possibility of launching a military intervention to preserve French interests in the region and “send a signal to neighboring countries not to do anything silly.”³⁴

At about the same time, UN officials in New York were converging around the idea that a robust “bridging operation” carried out by a militarily capable Western

country could be useful to stabilize the precarious humanitarian situation. In early April, UN authorities had deployed 700 Uruguayan peacekeepers to Ituri, in an effort to quell the violence. Over the next few weeks, however, it became clear that the small MONUC contingent, on its own, would not be able to deal with the humanitarian emergency in and around Bunia. UN officials concluded that France, notwithstanding its difficult history in that part of the world, was the only realistic candidate to lead an emergency military operation (Guéhenno 2015, 128–31). When UN Secretary-General Annan approached Chirac in early May, requesting that France lead such an operation, he found receptive ears in Paris (Gegout 2005, 436). According to Joubert, the idea of a French-led bridging operation had in fact been suggested to Annan by France’s foreign minister, Villepin, and his staff.³⁵ By May 13, France had confirmed its availability in principle to lead a multinational force to be deployed in and around Bunia (Ulriksen, Gourlay, and Mace 2004, 511).

Seeking UN Approval

Given France’s problematic history in the region, President Chirac and his advisers were keen to obtain political cover for the intervention from the UNSC, to preempt accusations of neocolonialism.³⁶ A UNSC resolution, adopted with Washington’s and London’s support, could also be expected to put pressure on Uganda and Rwanda (which were close to the United States and Britain) to rein in their allied militias.³⁷ US diplomatic sources confirm that “Chirac laid down several conditions [for the intervention], including UNSC approval...and US and UK political support to ensure cooperation from Uganda and Rwanda” (US Embassy Paris 2004, para. 4). In addition, French military leaders worried about “mission creep,” and they requested a clear exit strategy consisting in a handoff to a strengthened UN force after no more than two months.³⁸ The UNSC’s buy-in, and especially the active support of its five permanent members, was therefore essential, to: (1) limit the risk of sabotage efforts by neighboring countries; and (2) ensure adequate advance planning for the handoff and allow policymakers in Paris to be “reasonably certain” before the French forces intervened that they would be relieved by UN peacekeepers within two months.³⁹

On May 16, the UNSC, through a presidential statement, welcomed the secretary-general’s efforts “to

33 Lacroix, author interview.

34 Joubert, author interview.

35 Joubert, author interview; see also Koepp (2014, 97).

36 Joubert and Lacroix, author interviews.

37 La Sablière, author interview.

38 Bentégeat, author interview; see also Loisel (2004, 74).

39 Joubert, author interview.

address the urgent humanitarian...situation in Bunia” and declared itself willing to consider “options for sending an emergency international force” (UN 2003b). The statement, however, fell short of endorsing an international intervention. None of the UNSC’s permanent members were likely to outright veto an interim stabilization mission that enjoyed the secretary-general’s backing. At the same time, anything less than Washington’s and London’s full support (notably, an abstention on their part) would have sent the wrong signal to Rwanda and Uganda, significantly complicating the efforts of French policymakers.

Washington’s affirmative vote, in particular, could not be taken for granted. When the DRC operation was being planned in May 2003, France’s “relations with the United States were still extremely bad, because of Iraq,” remembers General Bentégeat, then the chief of the French general staff.⁴⁰ Furthermore, among senior diplomats in Washington “there was a little bit of suspicion about French motives,” recalls the US official in charge of Africa policy at the State Department at the time.⁴¹ Because of France’s association with the Rwandan genocide and Chirac’s support for Mobutu during the 1990s, US policymakers were “wonder[ing] what the French are really up to.”⁴² Meanwhile, some officials in Paris felt that the US administration was ambivalent about a French intervention that among other things aimed at stopping Rwandan interference in the DRC, which Kagame had long justified by the pursuit of former *génocidaires*.⁴³ In short, French authorities anticipated that obtaining Washington’s support at the UNSC for a robust French-led intervention in the DRC “would not be easy.”⁴⁴

Securing a UN Mandate by Europeanizing the Mission

Policymakers in Paris had initially drawn up plans for a French-led intervention with a multinational “coalition of the willing” acting under a UNSC mandate (Bagayoko 2004, 102; Loisel 2004, 74). However, French leaders soon changed course: partly because they understood that it would be difficult to achieve unanimous UNSC approval (and especially US backing) for a French-led op-

eration under national command, they decided to request a prior endorsement from the EU and, indeed, sought to frame the operation as a collective EU endeavor. “We really did whatever we could to put this under a European mandate,” remembers Gilles Andréani, then the head of policy planning at the Foreign Ministry in Paris.⁴⁵ The impulse to Europeanize the mission came from the Foreign Ministry under Villepin, where senior officials also saw an opportunity to reinvigorate European defense cooperation after the intra-European rift caused by the Iraq War.⁴⁶ (Some EU countries had chosen to cooperate with the United States over Iraq, criticizing France’s oppositional stance.)

France’s effort to turn the DRC operation into a collective EU endeavor, if successful, could be expected to lock in the United Kingdom’s support, which was essential not only at the UNSC but also vis-à-vis Rwanda. Since a 1998 Franco-British summit held in the French town of St. Malo, cooperation between London and Paris had provided a key impulse toward the development of a common EU security and defense policy (ESDP)—including toward Africa. As late as February 2003, at a bilateral summit in Le Touquet, France, President Chirac and Prime Minister Tony Blair had issued a joint recommendation that “the EU should examine how it can contribute to conflict prevention and peacekeeping in Africa, including through EU autonomous operations, in close co-operation with the United Nations” (French Presidency 2003). The United Kingdom’s commitment to the ESDP’s further development, some scholars argue, may well have “created an expectation of support” on its part for the proposed intervention in the DRC (Duke 2009, 407).⁴⁷

Securing an EU mandate, however, was far from straightforward. The EU had never before mounted a collective military operation in Africa, and some member states worried whether this would be a useful investment of EU resources. Furthermore, several members were reluctant to be associated with a French initiative in the Great Lakes region, because of memories of

40 Bentégeat, author interview.

41 Kansteiner, author interview.

42 Kansteiner, author interview.

43 Author interview with senior French defense official, Paris; see also Gegout (2017, 270).

44 Lacroix, author interview; confirmed in author interview with Admiral Édouard Guillaud (senior assistant to the French Army chief of staff, 2002–2004; chief of the general staff, 2010–2014), Paris, March 24, 2017.

45 Author interview with Gilles Andréani (director of policy planning, French Foreign Ministry, 2002–2004), Paris, November 26, 2014.

46 Andréani and Bentégeat, author interviews; see also Koepf (2014, 97–8).

47 Blair ultimately sent a small UK military contingent to the DRC—seventy Royal Engineers who upgraded the airfield at Bunia. This largely symbolic presence reassured the French military, which believed it would help deter Rwanda and its associated militias; Bentégeat, author interview. See also Gegout (2005, 438).

France's controversial role in Rwanda (Guéhenno 2015, 134). There were also concerns that France wanted to intervene to bolster Kabila, the DRC's unelected president, and thereby advance its own geostrategic interests (US Embassy Paris 2004; Koepf 2014, 99). On May 19, 2003, France's lobbying efforts resulted in a first decision by the EU's defense ministers to study the feasibility of an EU military operation in the DRC (Duke 2009, 401). However, key EU members remained skeptical—notably, Germany, whose foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, declared that he would prefer it if France did not seek the EU's formal imprimatur and instead chose to act with a coalition of the willing. Germany's stance was particularly important, given its position as a nonpermanent member of the UNSC at the time (Loisel 2004, 75; Ulriksen, Gourlay, and Mace 2004, 513).

Seeking to mollify its reluctant European partners, France first of all insisted on the mission's humanitarian character. "We relied on the fact that there was a looming humanitarian crisis to convince our partners," explains Joubert.⁴⁸ Second, French leaders emphasized that implementing the mission as a collective EU operation would strengthen confidence in the ESDP: "This was an opportunity for the European Union to demonstrate that it was capable of mounting this type of operation, at a time when there was a lot of talk about whether Europe would be able to do such a thing."⁴⁹ Third, French policymakers agreed to narrowly circumscribe the mission's scope. The area of operations was limited to Bunia and its airport, and the deployment should imperatively end in September 2003 (Guéhenno 2015, 133). Finally, France agreed to shoulder the lion's share of the operational burden: it carried out most of the planning and committed the vast majority of the 1,800 troops to be deployed.⁵⁰

By late May, the EU's principal member states had indicated their support for the French initiative, and on May 28, France agreed to act as the "framework nation" for an EU emergency operation in the DRC (Loisel 2004, 74). On May 30, the UNSC followed suit: with Washington's support, it adopted Resolution 1484, authorizing "the deployment until 1 September 2003 of an Interim Emergency Multinational force in Bunia...to contribute

to the stabilization of the security conditions and the improvement of the humanitarian situation."⁵¹

Why did the United States ultimately come on board? Once the EU had expressed its support in principle, pending final UN approval, Washington's failure to offer its affirmative vote at the UNSC for an initiative openly backed by some of its principal allies and economic partners—including Germany and the United Kingdom—would have appeared callous and could have entailed tangible costs. Specifically, it could have hampered ongoing efforts to mend the transatlantic split that had opened up over the Iraq War, at a time when several European countries were considering military and police deployments to Iraq as well as financial contributions to the US-led stabilization effort there.⁵²

Manuel Lafont-Rapnouil, then a French diplomat closely involved in policymaking toward the UNSC, sums up the view from Paris as follows: "The 2003 intervention in Ituri was exactly at the worst moment of the Franco-American relationship; but that doesn't hinder the French initiative, because we do it through the EU."⁵³ General Vincent Desportes, at the time the top defense official at the French embassy in Washington, is more explicit about France's motives, suggesting that an important reason for framing the DRC intervention as a collective EU endeavor "was to put pressure on the United States."⁵⁴ Kansteiner, the US assistant secretary of state for Africa at the time, remembers that in Washington, "multiple interagency meetings" were necessary before the Bush administration agreed to support the French initiative, and he recognizes that "the Brits and the EU being supportive clearly helped."⁵⁵ This does not amount to an explicit acknowledgment that the United States yielded

48 Joubert, author interview.

49 Joubert, author interview.

50 Twelve EU member states, including the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Germany, ultimately contributed personnel; however, Sweden was the only country besides France to send combat troops—about eighty special forces (Ulriksen, Gourlay, and Mace 2004, 517; see also Bagayoko 2004, 107).

51 Less than two weeks later, on June 12, EU heads of government gave the final go-ahead for troop deployments to begin (EU 2003).

52 On May 22, 2003, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1483, appealing to member states to help stabilize Iraq. A donors' conference to raise funds for Iraqi reconstruction was planned in Madrid, Spain, for later that year. (The EU ended up pledging US\$235 million on that occasion. See <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-tally-shows-pledges-madrid-october-donors-conference-total-32-billion/>).

53 Author interview with Manuel Lafont-Rapnouil (UN directorate, French Foreign Ministry, April 2002–June 2005; deputy director of UN affairs, 2011–2015), Paris, December 12, 2014.

54 Author interview with Vincent Desportes (senior defense attaché, French embassy, Washington, DC, 2000–2003), Paris, December 10, 2014.

55 Kansteiner, author interview.

to allied pressure, but it probably comes as close as could be expected.

Securing a mandate for the French-led intervention from the EU, a regional organization that includes not only France's closest allies but also most of the world's former colonial powers, is unlikely to have done much to alleviate concerns about French neocolonialism among skeptical audiences, in Africa or elsewhere. The endorsement of other regional IOs with a history of independence from French interests—primarily the AU but also, for example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which includes the DRC and fifteen other mostly Anglophone countries—would have been better suited to signal that France's intentions were genuinely benign.⁵⁶ The EU, however, was uniquely well placed to pressure a hesitant US administration to come on board and fully back the French initiative at the UNSC. This was not the only reason why France worked hard to secure the EU's endorsement and frame the operation as a collective EU initiative (revitalizing the ESDP, as noted, was also an important concern), but it appears to have been a central part of the strategic calculus of policymakers in Paris.

Conclusion

This article has suggested that securing endorsements from regional multilateral bodies can help military interveners put pressure on hesitant UNSC members to follow suit and approve the intervention. Specifically, interveners may view the endorsement of a regional body as a way of committing that body's members to supporting the policy—thereby pressing UNSC holdouts to come on board by putting the latter's relations with regional partners at stake. This strategy is especially likely to bear fruit when the principal holdouts on the UNSC are enmeshed in close political, military, and economic relations with core members of the regional body.

I have illustrated the argument and probed its plausibility through detailed case studies of France's multilateral diplomacy surrounding its interventions in Côte d'Ivoire (2002–2003) and the DRC (2003). Both cases provide strong evidence that France used regional endorsements to overcome opposition at the UNSC. In the Côte d'Ivoire case, it is possible that ECOWAS regional support pressed a hesitant US administration to come on board, not only by putting Washington's relations with regional partners at stake, but also by depriving the ad-

ministration of the argument that this was an illegitimate intervention. By contrast, in the DRC case, the EU's endorsement can less plausibly be seen as having legitimized the intervention internationally, as the EU could in no way signal regional consent from within Africa. Hence, in the DRC case, it is very likely that if the United States ultimately voted in favor of the French-led intervention at the UNSC, in spite of clear misgivings, it did so to avoid harming US political and economic relations with other EU members.

The motivation for seeking regional endorsements theorized in this article—pressuring hesitant UNSC members—was especially visible in the Côte d'Ivoire and DRC cases. Yet as highlighted in [Table 1](#), since the mid-1990s, France has systematically sought endorsements from regional IOs for its interventions in Africa before requesting UNSC approval, for the most part working through ECOWAS and/or the EU. It is likely that in many of these cases, French leaders viewed regional multilateral endorsements as a way of smoothing the path toward UNSC approval by stepping up pressure on hesitant UNSC members. In the run-up to the 2011 Libya intervention, for example, the main advocates of military action, France and the United Kingdom, secured endorsements from two regional multilateral bodies—the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the League of Arab States (LAS). These regional bodies were in a position to put pressure on China and Russia, the principal UNSC holdouts in this case. [Glanville \(2013, 337\)](#) notes that during the years leading up to the Libya intervention, China in particular “had become increasingly close to and also dependent upon Saudi Arabia [for oil shipments],” which leads him to conclude that “given the influential role played by Saudi Arabia in the GCC and the LAS, China may have been reluctant to be seen to stand in the way of these organizations' requests for...action.”

This raises the question whether military interveners are free to “forum shop” and seek the endorsement of regional IOs whose opinion on how to respond to a particular crisis “happens to coincide with their own” ([Glanville 2013, 340](#); see also [Kreps 2011, 11](#)). As suggested in this article, the goals that military interveners pursue through regional multilateral endorsements should influence which particular organizations they approach. If the goal is reassuring skeptical audiences internationally and domestically, then interveners should seek the endorsement of regional IOs that appear especially legitimate in terms of the breadth and diversity of their membership and/or that can plausibly claim to represent the “collective will” of the region targeted by the military action. If, instead, the goal is to exert political pressure on hesitant UNSC members, then interveners should

56 SADC has a history of endorsing military interventions in the region: in 1998, for example, it backed an intervention in the DRC by Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia (see [Coleman 2007](#), ch. 4).

seek the endorsement of regional IOs whose members are enmeshed in close political, military, and economic relations with the principal holdouts on the UNSC; the diversity and “representativeness” of the regional IO’s membership should be secondary. The ability of a military intervener to “forum shop” is thus likely to be constrained by the types of benefits it hopes to achieve through regional backing.

Acknowledgments

For helpful comments on earlier versions of this article I would like to thank Jonathan Chu, Anna Geis, Louise Wiuff Moe, and the three anonymous reviewers. Special thanks also go to Dr. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, director of the Institute for Strategic Studies (IRSEM) at the French Ministry of Defense, for hosting me as a visiting scholar in Paris. I alone am responsible for the content of this article.

References

- Bagayoko, Niagalé. 2004. “L’opération Artémis, un tournant pour la politique européenne de sécurité et de défense?” *Afrique Contemporaine* 209: 101–16.
- Barkin, Samuel J., and Patricia Weitsman. 2019. “Realist Institutionalism and the Institutional Mechanisms of Power Politics.” In *International Institutions and Power Politics: Bridging the Divide*, edited by Anders Wivel and T.V. Paul, 23–40. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Bat, Jean-Pierre. 2012. *Le Syndrome Foccart: La Politique Française en Afrique, de 1959 à Nos Jours*. Paris: Folio.
- Busby, Joshua, Craig Kafura, Jonathan Monten, and Jordan Tama. 2020. “Multilateralism and the Use of Force: Experimental Evidence on the Views of Foreign Policy Elites.” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16 (1): 118–29.
- Carayannis, Tatiana. 2016. “The Democratic Republic of the Congo.” In *The UN Security Council in the 21st Century*, edited by Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte, 661–80. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Chafer, Tony, Gordon Cumming, and Roel van der Velde. 2020. “France’s Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutional Perspective.” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, forthcoming.
- Chapman, Terrence L. 2009. “Audience Beliefs and International Organization Legitimacy.” *International Organization* 63 (4): 733–64.
- . 2011. *Securing Approval: Domestic Politics and Multilateral Authorization for War*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Charbonneau, Bruno. 2008. “Dreams of Empire: France, Europe, and the New Interventionism in Africa.” *Modern & Contemporary France* 16 (3): 279–95.
- Chirac, Jacques. 2011. *Le Temps Présidentiel: Mémoires*. Paris: Nil.
- Chu, Jonathan. 2018. “Information Transmission by International Organizations: A Reassessment.” Working Paper.
- Coleman, Katharina P. 2007. *International Organizations and Peace Enforcement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cros, Marie-France. 2003. “Artemis, une opération politique.” *La Libre Belgique*, June 14.
- Dahlburg, John-Thor. 1997. “Crisis in Zaire Exposes France’s Fading Influence.” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9.
- D’Ersu, Laurent. 2007. “La crise ivoirienne, une intrigue franco-française.” *Politique Africaine* 105: 85–104.
- Duke, Simon. 2009. “Consensus Building in ESDP: The Lessons of Operation Artemis.” *International Politics* 46 (4): 398–412.
- ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). 2002a. “Les Dirigeants de la CEDEAO Mettent en Place un Comité de Médiation pour la Côte d’Ivoire” [ECOWAS Leaders Establish Mediation Committee for Côte d’Ivoire]. Press release 73/2002, October 2.
- . 2002b. “Senegal to Lead ECOWAS Military Mission to Côte d’Ivoire.” Press release 88/2002, November 18.
- Erforth, Benedikt. 2020. *Contemporary French Security Policy in Africa: On Ideas and Wars*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- EU (European Union). 2003. “Council Decision 2003/432/CFSP on the Launching of the EU Military Operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” June 12. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32003D0432&from=EN>.
- Fang, Songying. 2008. “The Informational Role of International Institutions and Domestic Politics.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (2): 305–21.
- French Presidency. 2003. “Declaration on Strengthening European Cooperation in Security and Defence.” February 4. http://www.defense-aerospace.com/article-view/verbatim/16026/new-french_uk-defense-initiative.html.
- French Senate. 2011. “Rapport d’Information sur la Politique Africaine de la France” [Information report on France’s African policy], Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Armed Forces, February 28. <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r10-324/r10-3241.pdf>.
- Gegout, Catherine. 2005. “Causes and Consequences of the EU’s Military Intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Realist Explanation.” *European Foreign Affairs Review* 10 (3): 427–43.
- . 2017. *Why Europe Intervenes in Africa: Security, Prestige and the Legacy of Intervention*. London: Hurst.
- Gerring, John. 2007. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Glanville, Luke. 2013. “Intervention in Libya: From Sovereign Consent to Regional Consent.” *International Studies Perspectives* 14 (3): 325–42.
- Gordon, Philip H., and James Shapiro. 2004. *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis over Iraq*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Grieco, Joseph, Christopher Gelpi, Jason Reifler, and Peter D. Feaver. 2011. “Let’s Get a Second Opinion: International Institutions and American Public Support for War.” *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (2): 563–83.
- Guéhenno, Jean-Marie. 2015. *The Fog of Peace: A Memoir of International Peacekeeping in the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

- Hara, Fabienne, and Comfort Ero. 2002. "Ivory Coast on the Brink." *The Observer*, December 15.
- Henke, Marina E. 2019. "Buying Allies: Payment Practices in Multilateral Military Coalition-Building." *International Security* 43 (4): 128–62.
- Hoagland, Jim. 2003. "Punish France, Ignore Germany, and Forgive Russia." *Washington Post*, April 13.
- Ikenberry, G. John. 2001. *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Johns, Robert, and Graeme Davies. 2014. "Coalitions of the Willing? International Backing and British Public Support for Military Action." *Journal of Peace Research* 51 (6): 767–81.
- Koepf, Tobias. 2014. "The Problems of French-Led Peace Operations in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa in the Twenty-First Century." In *Peace Operations in the Francophone World*, edited by Bruno Charbonneau and Tony Chafer, 91–105. London: Routledge.
- Konadje, Jean-Jacques. 2014. *L'ONU et le Conflit en Côte d'Ivoire*. Paris: Harmattan.
- Kreps, Sarah. 2008. "Multilateral Military Interventions: Theory and Practice." *Political Science Quarterly* 123 (4): 573–603.
- . 2011. *Coalitions of Convenience: United States Military Interventions after the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kull, Steven. 2002. "Public Attitudes Toward Multilateralism." In *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy*, edited by Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman, 99–120. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Le Monde*. 2002. "Abidjan et Paris." December 21.
- Loisel, Sébastien. 2004. "Les leçons d'Artémis: Vers une approche européenne de la gestion militaire des crises?" *Les Champs de Mars* 16: 69–92.
- Martin, Lisa. 2017. "International Institutions: Weak Commitments and Costly Signals." *International Theory* 9 (3): 353–80.
- Morgenthau, Hans J. 1985. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 6th ed., revised by Kenneth W. Thompson. New York: Knopf.
- Notin, Jean-Christophe. 2013. *Le Crocodile et le Scorpion: La France et la Côte d'Ivoire (1999–2013)*. Monaco: Editions du Rocher.
- Pape, Robert A. 2005. "Soft Balancing Against the United States." *International Security* 30 (1): 7–45.
- Recchia, Stefano. 2015a. *Reassuring the Reluctant Warriors: US Civil-Military Relations and Multilateral Intervention*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- . 2015b. "Did Chirac Say 'Non'? Revisiting UN Diplomacy on Iraq, 2002–03." *Political Science Quarterly* 130 (4): 625–54.
- . 2016. "Why Seek International Organization Approval Under Unipolarity? Averting Issue Linkage Vs. Appeasing Congress." *International Relations* 30 (1): 78–101.
- Smith, Stephen. 2003a. "Les principales raisons du plus important engagement militaire français en Afrique depuis vingt ans." *Le Monde*, January 4.
- . 2003b. "Côte d'Ivoire: Neuf soldats français ont été blessés et une trentaine de rebelles tués près de Duékoué." *Le Monde*, January 7.
- Tago, Atsushi, and Maki Ikeda. 2015. "An 'A' for Effort: Experimental Evidence on UN Security Council Engagement and Support for US Military Action in Japan." *British Journal of Political Science* 45 (2): 391–410.
- The New York Times*. 2003. "Ivory Coast Rebels Extend Peace Talks with Ghana President." February 15.
- Thompson, Alexander. 2006. "Coercion Through IOs: The Security Council and the Logic of Information Transmission." *International Organization* 60 (1): 1–34.
- . 2009. *Channels of Power: The UN Security Council and US Statecraft in Iraq*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ulriksen, Ståle, Catriona Gourlay, and Catriona Mace. 2004. "Operation Artemis: The Shape of Things to Come?" *International Peacekeeping* 11 (3): 508–25.
- UN (United Nations). 2002. "Statement by the President of the Security Council on Côte D'Ivoire." Doc. S/PRST/2002/42, December 20.
- . 2003a. "Conclusions of the Conference of Heads of State on Côte D'Ivoire—Paris 25 and 26 January 2003." Published as Annex II to letter dated January 27 from the Permanent Representative of France to the UN, Doc. S/2003/99.
- . 2003b. "Statement by the President of the Security Council on the Democratic Republic of the Congo." Doc. S/PRST/2003/6, May 16.
- US Embassy Abuja. 2002. "Domestic Security Concerns and Budget Woes Preclude GON [Government of Nigeria] Contribution to Côte D'Ivoire Force." Diplomatic cable, November 15.
- . 2003. "Uwechue [Nigeria's Special Envoy on Conflict Resolution] Says GON Will Consider Involvement in Côte D'Ivoire Force." Diplomatic cable, February 6.
- US Embassy Paris. 2004. "France and Central Africa." Diplomatic cable, December 28.
- . 2005. "France and West Africa." Diplomatic cable, January 25.
- Villepin, Dominique de. 2016. *Mémoire de Paix pour Temps de Guerre*. Paris: Grasset.
- Voeten, Erik. 2001. "Outside Options and the Logic of Security Council Action." *American Political Science Review* 95 (4): 845–58.
- Wedgwood, Ruth. 2002. "Unilateral Action in a Multilateral World." In *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy*, edited by Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman, 167–90. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Weitsman, Patricia. 2014. *Waging War: Alliances, Coalitions, and Institutions of Interstate Violence*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Westra, Joel. 2007. *International Law and the Use of Armed Force: The UN Charter and the Major Powers*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2010. "Cumulative Legitimation, Prudential Restraint, and the Maintenance of International Order: A Re-Examination of the UN Charter System." *International Studies Quarterly* 54 (2): 513–33.