



# Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,  
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

to the All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) on  
Global Security and Non-Proliferation and the United Nations  
- Mali

3 July 2013

Lord Hannay,

Honourable members of the Houses of Parliament,

Thank you for your invitation, and I'm happy to be able to speak to you about Mali. We are in fact moving onto a new phase, and our meeting today strikes me as a good opportunity to assess briefly what France and the international community have accomplished, as well as the next steps.

Fifteen months after the coup d'état, six months after Operation Serval was launched, three days after the handover from Afisma to Minusma, 25 days before the first round of the presidential election, where do we stand? What lessons can the crisis in Mali and the Sahel teach us about Franco-British cooperation? I'm also delighted that a delegation of British MPs<sup>1</sup> was able to visit Bamako in June.

#### I/ Update on the situation

A/ Let's cast our minds back around six months to December 2012 and January 2013. For several weeks, columns of pickups carrying gunmen had been seen heading for southern Mali, and particularly towards the towns of Konna and Léré. On 10 January 2013, armed terrorist groups captured Konna. President Traoré then requested the support of France and the UN to prevent an irreversible turnaround in the situation. On 11 January, the French President took the decision to launch Operation Serval to halt the jihadists groups' advance towards Bamako. This military operation came after several months of diplomatic work at the Security Council in New York in 2012 (Resolutions 2056, 2071 and 2085), at a time when the international community was seeking closer involvement by the African organizations to stabilize the

situation in Mali. The EU was already doing preliminary work for the deployment of a training mission for the Malian armed forces.

The French President then tasked Operation Serval with three missions:

1/ To halt the advance of the terrorist groups towards Bamako;

2/ To restore Mali's sovereignty and integrity throughout her territory;

3/ To enable the international community's decisions to be implemented so that Mali could regain control of her own territory.

These goals were achieved one after another by our forces, supporting the Malian army, with our allies' support and with the involvement of the ECOWAS countries and Mali's neighbours; and the Afisma forces have gradually taken over from us.

B/ Today is 3 July. The terrorists have been partially eliminated. Security has now been restored and the Malian flag is flying throughout the country. Funds have been raised to restart the country's economy, and elections will be held in a few weeks' time. Overall it's a success. Not everything in Mali is settled and not everything throughout the Sahel is settled. But when you compare the situation six months ago to the situation today, we think we can be proud of what's been achieved. When I say "we" I mean France and all those who have supported her – and I'll return later to the United Kingdom's immediate and invaluable backing. This success is clear, too, in the decision taken at the United Nations on 25 June to

move from the Afisma to the Minusma operation from 1 July onwards and thus give the UN the final say over the process.

1/ Regarding the military situation, territorial integrity has been restored. There's still a lot of work to do, of course. Minusma, which includes soldiers, police and civilian experts, has been replacing Afisma since 1 July. It will be the UN's third-largest peacekeeping operation, with 6,000 soldiers today and nearly 12,000 at the end of this year. For its part, in February the European Union (armed with the support of some 20 member states) launched a training mission for the Malian army (EUTM Mali) which has already trained a battalion being deployed at national level, while a second has begun its training.

For us, the French, there are currently three priorities: a) to reconcile the different parties involved; b) to hold elections; and c) the military handover to the UN forces.

In this context, the French forces, which numbered almost 5,000 in the spring, will see their numbers reduced to around 3,000 until the end of the election, then to 2,000 at the end of the transition to Minusma.

At the end of 2013, we'll have no more than 1,000 or so soldiers deployed.

2/ At democratic and political level, there's undeniably been major progress. Preparations for the presidential election are on track. We've spurred our partners into action to muster the necessary budget and technical support. The EU has committed €17 million and sent an electoral observation mission. The election campaign proper will begin on 7 July and the first round, as you know, will be held on 28 July. The intensive reconciliation process is also

making headway. A Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission has been set up, and above all – particularly thanks to Burkina Faso’s mediation – a 25-article agreement, of which the international community is guarantor, was signed in Ouagadougou on 18 June between the government and the armed groups.

3/ Economic development is the third side of the triangle we mentioned from the outset: security, democracy, development. If one side of the triangle is missing, the others can’t be achieved. At the development level, France was among the first donors to resume her aid to Mali in February. She proposed to the EU that the conference “Together for a New Mali” be organized on 15 May, co-chaired by the French President. The meeting was a success, because just over €3 billion in financing over two years was promised. France contributed €280 million and the EU €580 million. The UK has also contributed to this effort for the Sahel region. This has also enabled important reforms to be identified, particularly in terms of good governance and support for decentralization.

## II/ A few words now on the security and military aspects.

There are three lessons we can learn from Operation Serval.

A/ The first lesson is that France demonstrated her ability to enter a theatre of operations swiftly, and this ability proved decisive in fighting the terrorist groups in a race against the clock and in getting the African forces deployed in the same operation. The pre-positioning of permanent forces in Africa (Senegal and Gabon, but also the forces deployed in operations in Chad and Côte d’Ivoire) and the importance of our network of embassies and defence attachés were key factors in this responsiveness.

In January some people were predicting a laborious and low-key African deployment. People were saying, “before September 2013”, but thanks to the speed and effectiveness of our intervention it took our African friends and all Mali’s neighbours only a few days to create and reinforce Afisma. The first African troops arrived in Bamako on 13 January, after our first intervention on 11 January. They were then followed by the Chadians on the 16th and the Togolese on the 17th. This shows that our role as initiator and facilitator was crucial to the rallying and deployment of African forces in the Malian theatre. Likewise, I should point out that Minusma, which some predicted would be slow, is taking up position as we speak, under the authority of Rwandan General Jean-Bosco Kazura. He holds responsibility for the forces hitherto deployed in Afisma, which will be broadened to become Minusma. I’d also like to mention that France is happy to be welcoming contingents from the Afisma and Minusma forces, who will parade on the Champs-Élysées on 14 July.

B/ The second lesson is about teamwork by the Europeans and Africans to foster stability in the Sahel. Europe’s security is being played out in the Sahel, and the Sahel’s security is our collective responsibility. Today there’s no longer a dividing line between French-speaking and English-speaking Africa in terms of security. The White Paper on French defence policy, presented to the President in April, recalls that the weakness of certain states’ infrastructure and security resources represents a threat. There’s now a community of security interests in the Sahel, and it will be up to us – particularly us French and British – to nurture and strengthen it.

C/ The third, more strictly military, lesson we’ve learnt from the way France has acted in the Mali operation is that we’ve got hardened, effective, well-trained and well-equipped forces.

During this period our soldiers have been working in extreme conditions. Our Defence Minister always says we have one enemy, the terrorist groups, and two adversaries, distance and climate. The conditions in which our forces intervened were extremely harsh: they always are when the temperature is as high as 50 degrees in the shade. This human ability and courage – six soldiers paid with their lives – was combined with state-of-the-art equipment. We used multirole Rafales, perfectly operational under all conditions, Tigre helicopters, VBCI armoured vehicles and our most cutting-edge technology.

But France was far from acting alone. Our European allies – first among them the British – but also our American allies carried out more than 1,000 flights towards and within the theatre of operations. 30% of the strategic freight was transported by our allies. Not only the United Kingdom but also the United States, Canada, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany were present in-theatre. About 50% of the in-flight refuelling was carried out by the United States. So our allies' solidarity was both immediate and for the long haul.

### III/ Franco-British cooperation in Mali/the Sahel region and in Africa

To conclude, a few thoughts on the excellent cooperation between our two countries in the Mali crisis, and more broadly, Africa, and on the possible implications.

A/ On the bilateral front, our joint efforts fully reflect the spirit and letter of the Lancaster House Agreement. We're talking about a region close to Europe where our interests – national as much as European – are directly at stake. In-depth cooperation between France

and the United Kingdom in the Sahel region is perfectly consistent with the wide-ranging intensification of our bilateral defence cooperation.

It was, of course, during the battles fought together in Libya in the spring of 2011 that our defence relationship really increased in power, following the signature of the Lancaster House Agreement in November 2010. The support the United Kingdom provided for Operation Serval falls within the framework of this partnership, and this is the message Prime Minister David Cameron gave us as early as 12 January.

What's more, the experience of the Mali operations is today one of the overarching themes of our bilateral discussion on capabilities and the nature of the operations we could conduct in future with the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force we are building.

B/ We can make even better use of all the European Security and Defence Policy instruments.

The security and economic challenges raised by maritime piracy off the Horn of Africa fully justified a European response. Following the example of what happened for Somalia, we can safely bet that consolidated action in the face of the Sahel crisis will highlight the pertinence of joint engagement by Europe, which alone can deploy a “comprehensive approach” including military, economic and humanitarian capabilities and so on.

C/ Our work can focus on several key areas

1/ Better coordination of our joint approach vis-à-vis CSDP missions in the region. We can more effectively anticipate the procedures in the decision-making process in order to improve the speed and flexibility of our crisis response.

Indeed, we share many common goals, whether as regards EUTM Mali's crucial role, the need for a border security mission in Libya to be swiftly implemented, the political will to think about the presence of EUCAP Sahel Niger in the region (for example, geared more towards Nigeria) etc. On all these issues, a greater dialogue with the United Kingdom, as far in advance as possible, should prove constructive in conducting our European strategy in the region.

2/ We can also work together even more to steer more effectively what the EU does, particularly in Africa. Greater dialogue is desirable on the priorities attached to the various financial instruments mobilized in the area. The consultations and negotiations we've conducted together over the past few months on the devolution of the African Peace Facility illustrate how useful such coordination could be.

3/ Finally, cooperation on fighting terrorism and organized crime is another suitable area of cooperation.

The In Amenas attack in Algeria was a turning point. David Cameron visited Algeria afterwards, the first visit by a British prime minister to the country since its independence. In this battle against terrorism, I welcome the results achieved by the British G8 presidency regarding ransom payments and the fight against drug trafficking, organized crime and the proliferation of conventional arms in the Sahel strip.

Together we could be more successful in our ambitions by combining diplomatic resources at the United Nations and in Brussels, military resources at national and also European and NATO level, and mobilizing on the basis of our often shared view of the world./.

<sup>1</sup>Mike Gapes and Mark Hendrick