

# France in Mali: Now or Never for European Foreign and Security Policy

## REPORT



February 2013

This report reflects the conference rapporteur's understanding of the views expressed by speakers. Moreover, these views are not necessarily those of the organisations that participants represent, nor of *Friends of Europe, Security & Defence Agenda*, nor their respective Board of Trustees, members or partners.

Reproduction in whole or in part is permitted, providing that full credit is given to *Friends of Europe* and *Security & Defence Agenda*, and provided that any such reproduction, whether in whole or in part, is not sold unless incorporated in other works.

---

A *Friends of Europe* and *Security & Defence Agenda* report

Rapporteur: Sophie O'Donoghue

Publisher: Geert Cami

Project Director: Nathalie Furrer

Project Manager: Andrea Ghianda

Project Assistants: Seán Smith and Chloé Lermuzeaux

Original Cover Photo Source: © ArmyRecognition.com

---

**Giles Merritt**, Director of the *Security and Defence Agenda* and Secretary General of *Friends of Europe*, introduced the event by posing a key question: “How can we advance politically in a region we fear will be very unstable? How can we make sure that the French are not left doing a ‘cavalier seul’?”



Instability in Mali had been recognised as a threat, since militant Islamists first seized control of areas in the north of the country in early 2012. The EU has spent the last few months hammering out an intervention strategy aimed at building a more stable political and security structure. These plans were interrupted by the Jihadists’ offensive southwards, causing the government in Bamako to request French military intervention. The French military operation in Mali has called into question the role of the European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). **Arnaud Danjean** MEP, Member of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs and Chair of the Subcommittee on Security, argued that despite unanimous EU support for France’s military mission, very little “visible” backing is being provided.

Throughout the debate, the popular up-rising in Libya in February 2011 surfaced as a key reference point for CSDP in the Sahel. Danjean claimed that the EU faces a similar crisis every two years, and every time the same fundamental question remains: “Is our common security and defence policy up to the challenge?” According to Danjean, “most of the time, the answer is no”.



*“Is our Common Security and Defence Policy up to the challenge? Most of the time, the answer is no.”*

**Arnaud Danjean**

Danjean conceded that Libya was a learning curve: the EU was taken by surprise and thus did not have the appropriate tools to react quickly, prompting NATO to step in. However, “the situation in Mali did not take the EU by surprise” he argued. The EU had identified the threat long before. In fact, it had adopted a very detailed strategy addressing the instability of the Sahel region two years ago, which envisaged the EU as taking a leading role. The strategy specifically advocated concerted action in the security and development domains as the way forward.

Danjean said there was a political consensus in the EU regarding Mali. All EU 27 member states were on board, which was not the case in the run up to the Libyan mission. He argued that this time around the EU had the instruments ready at its disposal: the EU training mission had been in the pipe-line for many





months, indicating that the EU was ready to act. Furthermore, whereas NATO took the lead in Libya, it has shown no interest in acting in Mali. “So who else if not the EU?” concluded Danjean.

“Everything was in place for the EU to be in the frontline,” he underlined. The UN resolution on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2012, gave the green light for a military operation in 2013. Danjean’s frustration at the lack of action by other member states became clear during the debate: “We have had everything in place for many months and then only one member state was able to react, militarily speaking.”

**Nicholas Westcott**, Managing Director Africa, European External Action Service (EEAS), insisted that “France is not alone” since “The EU Foreign Affairs Council gave unanimous support to French action in words, as well as in logistics and assistance.” He explained that not many member states are in a position to operate in the difficult environment of the Sahara. France was uniquely able to do so, as it was the only country with both the capability and the will to intervene, thereby preventing the state of Mali collapsing completely.



*“The EU Foreign Affairs Council gave unanimous support to French action in words, as well as in logistics and assistance.”*

**Nicholas Westcott**

Danjean countered that mere logistical support is not what was envisaged when the CSDP was originally set up. He expressed his fear that if Europe’s ambition was to only have training missions, he did not think the EU was even up to this challenge. Whilst recognising that training is an important aspect, he maintained that this should be a regular EU policy rather than anything exceptional. “The CSDP is essentially about crisis management and the capacity to project forces collectively, and this has simply not happened,” argued Danjean.

Responding to the point about the lack of “visible” support for France, Westcott stated that the European financial effort is undoubtedly significant, but added that “it is hard to make finance visible”. Westcott was nevertheless keen to emphasise the African Union’s role in the response. “We believe that there must be an African solution to an African problem,” he argued. He emphasised that, although AU capabilities are not yet ready, the EU is in the process of helping the neighbouring African countries to

speed up their support for Mali. In his opinion, outside forces ought to assist the people of Mali find a new political system that responds to their needs, rather than imposing one on them. To this end, Westcott highlighted how the EU is acting to support three different approaches:



*“We believe that there must be an African solution to an African problem.”*

**Nicholas Westcott**

Firstly, security must be re-established, which requires military intervention in the form of support for the Malian army. The EU is helping the Malian army to “become an effective fighting force” that defends its state and people and respects the civil authority.

Secondly, since the coup d’état, the political process in Mali has undergone a slow transition. A timetable mapping the future “restoration of constitutional and democratic government will be on the table in the next two weeks,” said Westcott. A further meeting will take place on the 5<sup>th</sup> February in Brussels to decide how that roadmap can be supported. Without a viable political structure, the crisis will be prolonged, he argued.

Thirdly, the EU is urgently looking at the economic development of Mali. Revenues in Mali have dropped significantly as a result of the deteriorating security situation. Financial and development assistance needs to be set into motion, which is something that the EU is prioritising, according to Westcott. EU Development Commissioner, Andris Piebalgs, will be sending a group to work with the Malian government very soon.

“Those three elements will help the solution in the long run, but it will take some time, and you cannot achieve anything until there is a secure and stable situation,” concluded Westcott.

However, Danjean criticised the EU for focusing too much on ‘soft power’ instruments, contending that the EU doctrine in Mali is a case of “solidarity from behind”. He spoke of his disappointment with the





apparent “reluctance to engage in real security issues”. Member states have shown their full political support for French military action in Mali but failed to do much more, argued Danjean, leaving France once more as the de facto European army. “It is not sustainable for France to remain alone,” said Danjean, adding that “it is a very bad signal for Europe”. Furthermore, it emerged from the discussion that, although the Mali operation seemed to present the ideal opportunity, the EU battlegroups were not activated. “What is the battlegroup mechanism there for? We have it on paper, so why do we not use it?” Danjean added.



*“It is not sustainable for France to remain alone... it is a very bad signal for Europe. What is the battlegroup mechanism there for? We have it on paper, so why do we not use it?”*

**Arnaud Danjean**

The question at the heart of the discussion goes beyond the Malian crisis. Does the EU genuinely want a strong security and defence policy? “Where does this lack of coordinated action leave our security? When will we seriously engage with these countries?” asked Danjean.



***Friends of Europe  
Les Amis de l'Europe***

*Friends of Europe* is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the analysis and wider understanding of European policy issues.

Bibliothèque Solvay – Parc Léopold – Rue Belliard 137 –  
1040 Brussels – Belgium

Tel.: +32 (0)2 737 91 45 – Fax: +32 (0)2 738 75 97 E-  
mail: [info@friendsofeurope.org](mailto:info@friendsofeurope.org)

**[www.friendsofeurope.org](http://www.friendsofeurope.org)**

[www.facebook.com/friendsofeurope.foe](http://www.facebook.com/friendsofeurope.foe)  
[www.twitter.com/friendsofeurope](http://www.twitter.com/friendsofeurope)

**SECURITY & DEFENCE AGENDA  
(SDA)**

4 Rue de la Science  
1000 Brussels, Belgium

**Tel:** +32 (0)2 300 29 92

**Fax:** +32 (0)2 300 29 90

**E-mail:** [info@securitydefenceagenda.org](mailto:info@securitydefenceagenda.org)

**[www.securitydefenceagenda.org](http://www.securitydefenceagenda.org)**

Follow us on twitter [@secdefagenda](https://twitter.com/secdefagenda)  
[@facebook.com/s.d.agenda](https://facebook.com/s.d.agenda)