

# SHARING SOVEREIGNTY

## STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

### SUPPORTING FRANCE'S PERCEPTION AS A GREAT POWER

TAMÁS BALÁZS

#### **Introduction and hypotheses**

This paper argues that conventional sovereignty can no longer account for France's perception as a great power, therefore, suggests Stephen Krasner's approach in analyzing French Africa policy. The basic assumption is that France can maintain its relative power by intervening in weak and failing states in sub-Saharan Africa. Interventions in its former colonies have long played a vital role in enhancing France's perception as a great power in the international system and in the protection of its vital national interests worldwide. Since the decolonization, there have been around fifty interventions on the continent. (Roesch, 2015) French Africa policy can be easily regarded as France's belief in a civilizing mission since French officials have always stressed the importance of encouraging regional stability and development, and the support of democratic governments.

At this point, French Africa policy and Krasner's shared sovereignty intersect. He claims that the two principal policy tools for addressing the problems of failing and collapsed states are inadequate. In order to improve governance in failing and collapsed states, Krasner calls for the creation of two new institutions: *de facto* trusteeships and shared sovereignty arrangements with regional and international organizations or, in some cases, more powerful and better-governed states. Such a powerful state would easily and willingly be France. I argue that state and non-state actors both play an important role in maintaining France's perception of being a great power through the possibility of creating shared sovereignty. Moreover, shared sovereignty or partnerships would be the best tool for France for maintaining its influence in sub-Saharan Africa, since such arrangements would be legitimated by the target state even if violating the core principle of Westphalian sovereignty (i.e., autonomy). (Krasner, 2004) Krasner himself claims that state actions are guided by concerns for power and interest rather than normative concerns for fulfilling a sovereignty norm.

## Arguments and counterarguments – debates in the literature

If one is about to look at the theoretical background of sovereignty, security issues always come first. Especially in the 21st century when one of the biggest challenges is how to deal with failed and badly governed states – bearing in mind the fact that Westphalian sovereignty encompasses the idea of non-interference in domestic affairs by external actors. Concerning this issue, several perspectives exist in current IR on state development.

Firstly, the conventional modernization-perspective which argues that having economic development results in democratization. According to Lipset, by providing foreign assistance to economically underdeveloped countries, economic development would probably occur (i.e., the more aid leads to more growth). So far, this assumption has proved to be incorrect. (Lipset, 1959)

Huntington emphasizes the role of institutionalization in state development from the public administration perspective. He claims that political mobilization without political institutionalization leads to political decay – and the case of Iraq completely justifies this argument. Although Huntington considers the construction of political institutions vital, he does not explain where these institutions come from. (Huntington, 1979: 1-8)

Rational-choice institutionalism attributes development to people if they can strike a successful deal. In this case, institutions increase the probability of people making such deals. Robert H. Bates argues that if rulers want to stay in power, they can do it by conventional modes of taxation or by exploitation. His argument is that in Africa in the seventies, there was a sharp decline in growth rates as a result of the rising energy prices which led to declining tax revenues. Rulers, as a response, switched from conventional taxation to rent-seeking exploitation, because only rent-seeking exploitation could provide them with enough resources to pay off their supporters. (Bates and Bates, 2015: 129-135)

A fourth perspective emphasizes the importance of path dependence. Acemoglu and others suggest that random developments determine a polity on a certain path and that path is difficult to change, even if it is not optimal regarding economic growth or political development. (Acemoglu et al., 2008)

All four perspectives above fail to propose an adequate solution for weak and badly governed states to how state development can be achieved. They just describe what should be done but lack the “how” and do not consider direct intervention as a viable option. Krasner, on the other hand, breaks down sovereignty into different components and proposes active intervention – or better said: cooperation – in the context of shared sovereignty.

He distinguishes between domestic sovereignty, interdependence sovereignty, international legal sovereignty, and Westphalian sovereignty. Domestic sovereignty refers to the ability of the state to control its domestic affairs while interdependence sovereignty refers to the state’s ability to control cross-border issues. International legal sovereignty shows whether a state is recognized and gets to be a member of international organizations with the right to diplomatically represent itself.

Westphalian sovereignty is a state's negative right and encompasses the idea of non-interference in domestic affairs by external actors. (Krasner, 1999)

Many examples could be listed to show that all state entities may exercise some of these characteristics, but they do not necessarily exhibit them all. Taiwan, for example, has Westphalian sovereignty and effective domestic sovereignty but does not have international legal sovereignty as it is internationally recognized only by a few states. Moreover, each member of the European Union has international legal sovereignty and effective domestic sovereignty, but all of them lack Westphalian sovereignty by having accepted both supranational institutions and qualified majority voting. (Krasner, 1999: 33-41)

In his 1999 book, Krasner analyses the durability and performance of norms of sovereignty in the international system. It has been frequently argued that globalization is eroding long-standing respect for sovereignty by challenging the ability of states to exercise control over their territory, governance, and international affairs. Nevertheless, Krasner points out that challenges to state sovereignty are nothing new in world politics. He argues that international actors have always interfered in each other's affairs and his key point is that even if the international community claims to be upholding sovereign rights, boundaries, and responsibilities, it often violates them in the name of upholding those conditions. The perceptions have changed, of course; it would be impossible to consider the conquest of one state by another legitimate in the 21st century. Yet, subtle violations of sovereignty occur on a regular basis. These can range from the enforcement of human rights norms to the implementation of economic restructuring (e.g., the allocation system of foreign aid).

According to Krasner, "*poor governance is a widespread problem.*" (Krasner, 2004: 118) Indeed, historical facts suggest that failed, weak, incompetent, or abusive national authority structures can result in endemic violence (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo), exploitative political leaders, falling life expectancy, declining per capita income (e.g., Zimbabwe), and even state-sponsored genocide (e.g., Rwanda). Besides, history has shown that the consequences can easily spill across international borders. For all that, powerful states cannot ignore governance failures because they threaten their economic and security interests. Failed and weak states can easily become safe havens for terrorists where they can operate freely. On the other hand, "*gross violations of human rights present unpleasant political choices for democratic leaders in powerful states.*" (Krasner, 2004: 94) After the unhappy events in Rwanda, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan issued a report entitled *The Responsibility to Protect*, which "*defends the principle of humanitarian intervention when governments abuse or fail to protect their own citizens.*" (Krasner, 2004: 95)

Krasner points out that conventional norms of sovereignty offer two options: governance assistance and transitional administration. However, their effectiveness often proves to be limited and consequently inadequate, even if a foreign power has militarily intervened in a given country – a very good example of this is Iraq. Although "*the scope of transitional administration or peacekeeping and peace-building operations has ranged from the full assertion of executive authority by*

*the UN for some period of time to more modest efforts involving monitoring the implementation of peace agreements*”, transitional administration has only worked in reality for the easiest cases, when key actors could reach a mutually acceptable agreement. (Krasner, 2004: 99)

Krasner offers two options for dealing with failing states: *de facto* trusteeship and shared sovereignty. In a trusteeship, “*international actors would assume control over local functions for an indefinite period of time*”; while shared sovereignty – which would be best to refer to as “*partnerships*” – would involve “*the engagement of external actors in some of the domestic authority structures of the target state for an indefinite period of time.*” (Krasner, 2004: 114) This way, France could call herself a ‘responsible sovereign’ – which, in my view, would automatically encompass the perception of being a great power – and help its former weak African colonies to govern effectively domestically and play by the rules internationally.

Krasner also gives answers to such questions as why political leaders of a failing state might accept shared sovereignty. He brings several cases to support his argument: firstly, to secure external resources by either payment for raw materials’ exploitation or foreign assistance; secondly, to encourage the departure of occupying forces; or thirdly, to attract voters. (Krasner, 2004: 119)

### **Mali as an empirical case**

I chose Mali for an empirical case, because it clearly illustrates how sharing sovereignty can be a legitimate source for France to keep the influence over its former colonial country. Furthermore, the case of Mali also indicates what kind of roles state and non-state actors play and how their actions intersect with the French ‘great power’ perception. Finally, Mali is also a good example of proving that only sharing sovereignty could help the region’s problems in the long term.

Instability and rebellion have always been constant features of Malian political life and thus the political scene has always been overshadowed by struggles for power. The social (i.e., Mali’s remarkably ethnically diverse population) and economic disparity of Mali can be described by drawing a line dividing the north from the south. Northerners (especially the Tuareg population) have felt that development programs have favored the south at their expense. (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2013) Unfortunately, Mali failed both to balance the economic development across all of its regions and to create an inclusive national identity that would encompass its citizens regardless of ethnic and tribal identities.

As I have already pointed out, one of the biggest challenges of failed and badly governed states is that the consequences can easily spill across international borders. Another recent feature of today’s conflicts is that they involve heavily armed actors. Mali’s case perfectly illustrates the assumptions written above: Mali-based Tuareg movements forged an alliance with Islamist extremists from a number of neighboring countries (Niger, Mauritania, and Algeria). In addition, Tuareg fighters formed part of the Qaddafi regime and, after the fall of that regime, they returned home with making use of those weapons they had acquired. All of the above accumulated in

the 2012 rebellion in Mali, which took place at a time when the government of Mali was at its weakest.

France has always considered West Africa to be its sphere of geopolitical influence and has been one of the most deeply involved international players in Mali. Thus, French military intervention did not come as a surprise. The justifications might have changed concerning the interventions involving fights against terrorist groups, yet I argue that France's economic interests have always been the unchanging motive for French intervention in Africa. Though France has limited direct economic interests in Mali, it still remains important in West Africa as part of a region where France is very active economically. Any threats to Mali's stability thus perceived as a threat to

French economic interests in neighboring countries (i.e., Niger or Ivory Coast – out of which Niger is of utmost importance for France because of the uranium sources).

Although direct French military intervention came after the declaration of a state of emergency by the government in Bamako and an official request for military aid, it perfectly intersected with the policy of a “hegemonic France” in Africa. The official request allowed France to justify her action as being an effort to help a friendly state without disregarding conventional Malian sovereignty. Furthermore, France fought against armed non-state actors (i.e., Islamist extremist groups), thus the intervention could be claimed as being actions of the ‘War on Terror’. (Kurtulus, 2005: 57-84) Probably this is the reason for the absence of any international or regional opposition to the direct French military intervention. It is interesting to note that it was a non-state actor that – indirectly – triggered the French intervention. In other words, an armed non-state actor secured the persistent French influence in the country.

The intervention may have solved an immediate problem and achieved two of its stated aims: it expelled Islamist extremist groups and liberated the cities in the north. So, in military terms, France's efforts have been remarkable (Kurtulus, 2005: 57-84) and confirmed France's stance as a ‘great power’ in the international scene.

On December 20, 2012, the UN Security Council authorized the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) to assist the Malian authorities in regaining control over their northern territory. This regional military force should have been led by the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), but AFISMA proved to be unable to deliver its task. (Avezov and Smit, 2014) In January 2013, the Malian transitional government requested additional assistance from France, which became known as Operation Serval. On April 25,

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2013, the Security Council replaced AFISMA with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). MINUSMA was given a robust mandate “with the right to use ‘all necessary means’ to perform its tasks, including protecting civilian centers and taking proactive steps to ‘prevent the return of armed elements to those areas.’” (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, n.d.) Operation Serval was given formal status as a parallel force to MINUSMA, with the mandate to conduct counterinsurgency operations that fell outside MINUSMA’s scope. As of now, Operation Barkhane (the successor of Operation Serval, the French military mission in Mali) is conducting joint operations and providing medical services with the help of non-state actors. MINUSMA is still active, while now it focuses on duties such as “ensuring security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; and assisting the reestablishment of State authority, the rebuilding of the security sector, and the promotion and protection of human rights in that country.” (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, n.d.)

It is very interesting to see that non-state actors, such as the NGOs providing medical care (e.g., MFM – Medicine For Mali) or those tasked with monitoring human rights (e.g., Amnesty International), also contribute to maintaining French interests: namely to secure the environment for economic activities.

As I already mentioned, Mali is also a good example of proving that only sharing sovereignty could help the regions’ problems in the long term. The intervention has probably solved an immediate problem; however, two basic requirements should be fulfilled if French and allied African forces want to succeed in the long term. The first one is the fate of the Tuareg rebel groups. The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (a Tuareg group) offered its services to French forces and their African allies. It promised to give help to pursue the members of Islamist extremist groups. The second issue is more comprehensive and would require the establishment of an overall policy that would be backed by both regional and international bodies. An unbiased and complete solution should be found to meet Tuareg demands. It is unsolved so far, none of the Malian government’s previous attempts could build a new relationship with the Tuareg. It will be necessarily a long process, because the mutual trust has been long missing. Education might be helpful in bridging the relationship between the Tuaregs and the government, and education is typically a field where non-state actors could take lion’s share. (Weiss et al., 2013)

## **Conclusion**

This paper argued that Stephen Krasner’s shared sovereignty could bring new perspectives in analyzing French Africa policy because state actions have always been guided by concerns for power and interest rather than normative concerns for fulfilling a sovereignty norm. Based on the assumption that France can maintain its relative power by intervening in weak and failing states in sub-Saharan Africa, Krasner’s shared sovereignty, in a way, legitimizes these interventions. The paper attempted to give an overview on the existing literature on state development in recent IR,

bearing in mind that, in the 21st century one, of the biggest challenges is how to deal with failed and badly governed states. For this, Krasner's approach to distinguishing between the types of sovereignty was adopted and the paper concluded with the fact that international actors have always interfered in each other's affairs in the name of upholding sovereign rights.

By looking at the case of Mali, it turned out that conventional norms of sovereignty are inadequate in the long term. By introducing shared sovereignty, the problem of Sahel countries might become solvable. Moreover, France could call herself a 'responsible sovereign' – the perception of still being a great power – and help its former weak African colonies to govern effectively domestically and play by the rules internationally. It was claimed that state and non-state actors play a very important role in maintaining France's perception of being a great power – “funnily” either by triggering a conflict themselves or taking part in helping solve it. To sum up, shared sovereignty or partnerships would be the best tool for France for maintaining its influence in sub-Saharan Africa, since such arrangements would be legitimated by the target state even if violating the core principle of Westphalian sovereignty. ☀

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