



The successful legitimization of the French interventions in Sahel

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Abstract

This thesis aims to contribute to the scholarship of International Relations (IR) by researching the processes that lie at the heart of military interventions and their legitimization through the lens of securitization theory. Focusing on the case of the French operations Serval and Barkhane in Sahel. This study builds on the contention that securitization is best applicable to military interventions in the form of a sequential model that distinguish three steps: the stage of identification, the stage of mobilization and the stage of desecuritization. Coupled with a qualitative content analysis it becomes a redoubtable tool to uncover the construction of legitimization.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Interest of study and aim.

After the end of the Cold war, the official motives and nature of military interventions have greatly changed, with pre-emptive military action against a potential threat or anti-insurgent operations becoming increasingly common (Newman, 2010; Olsson, 2015). New issues are considered as legitimate threats and cause for armed measures, best exemplified by the dynamics of the Global War on Terrorism; thus, prompting a redefinition of international security. These new types of interventions differ from the traditional invocation of military action as a response to a threat to the own national sovereignty of states, consequently their legitimacy is often questioned (Zimmermann, 2017). Indeed, the immediate danger posed by such threats is not necessarily perceived as obvious to home audiences, while the international community, notably through the United Nations is increasingly watchful of such dealings (ibid). This is problematic, as the support of the aforementioned audiences is vital to a stable commitment to a military intervention, especially when the sending state is a democratic nation. These audiences therefore need persuasion that a military intervention and the use of violence are indeed justified. France is no stranger to these problematics. While the French military has infamously operated ‘freely’ in Africa in times of the Cold War (Bergamaschi, 2013; Wing, 2016) its actions are now under the special scrutiny of international and importantly French national audiences (Tardy, 2020). Nonetheless, it has recently renewed its presence, focusing on the African region of Sahel, through its successive operations Serval (2013-2014) and Barkhane (2014-present); an engagement that has been relatively stable and is in majority perceived as legitimate internationally and in France. Prompting the question of what mechanisms lie at the heart of the interventions and how the French government legitimized its renewed presence.

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The legitimization of this new types of threats, and forms of military interventions have become an important subject to the contemporary scholarship of International Relations (IR). The late 20th century witnessed dramatic societal and political change globally, thus sparking the creation of new IR theories to better analyse and comprehend the world. Notably with the development of constructivist theories, thought to interpret the world as the result of social and historical constructions (Williams, 2003). As such, the securitization theory, first developed in 1998 by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde contend that security concerns are not ‘objective’, rather socially constructed. The theory offers a framework to observe how securitizing actors, through their speech acts, aim at convincing a target audience to accept the claim that an issue is threatening enough to deserve immediate and extraordinary action (Buzan et. al, 1998). Hence, securitization is a relevant tool to observe and further understand the dynamics of legitimization and the legitimization of military interventions (Hughes, 2007; Roe, 2008; Stritzel and Chang, 2015).

1.2 Research question and proposition

Scholars of securitization theory with interest in military legitimization have continuously built on the original account of the theory to make it more suitable to this specific puzzle. Accordingly, Paul Roe argues that securitization is best understood as a two-stage, or sequential, process (Roe, 2008), discerning a stage of ‘identification’ and a stage of ‘mobilisation’. Hubert Zimmermann, shares Roe’s assumption and develops it further by arguing that in cases of successful legitimization, a third stage of ‘desecuritization’ can be observed (Zimmermann, 2017).

With these developments in mind, this thesis argues that behind the legitimacy of the French interventions lies a successful process of securitization that can be observable in three distinct stages. Thus, asking the following research question: ***How can securitization theory help in understanding the legitimization of the French interventions in Sahel?***

This thesis seeks to contribute to the field of International Relations in engaging the mentioned debates with the conduct of an analysis on the legitimization of military intervention through the lens of securitization. This study further contributes to a body of literature on the French military

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interventions in Sahel: Serval and Barkhane and on processes of French decision making in matters of security.

1.3 Thesis outline

Following this introductory chapter, the literature review will develop on the challenges at the heart of the French interventions including how research has previously approached its legitimacy, relevant applications of securitization will be presented. Later, the theoretical chapter will motivate the theoretical framework that will articulate the conduct of the study. The fourth chapter will inform the choice of material and the methodological decisions behind the research design of this thesis. Finally, the analysis will provide an answer to the question at heart in this project by the means of a qualitative content analysis of the rhetoric of the French government in its speeches to its parliament and the General Assembly of the United Nations. The scope of the analysis spans from the months leading to intervention Serval in January 2013 to the early months of the implementation of its replacement, Barkhane, in 2014.

1.4 Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a normative and sociological concept, which can be appreciated subjectively (Hurd, 1999; Keohane, 2006). It has to be noted that this study does not dwell on the normative aspects of legitimacy, rather the attention lies on legitimacy as a mean and what it produce, herein the aim of legitimacy is to ensure the stable conduct of military intervention.

Guided by its theoretical framework, this study contends that the operations Serval and Barkhane need to be legitimate in the 'eyes' of the French parliament and the General Assembly of the united nations. Ultimately then, the conceptualization of legitimacy of this thesis lies in the intersubjective conception of norms and values between these two audiences.

2. Literature review

2.1 Questioning the French interventions.

The official purpose of operation Serval is usually presented in literature as a fighting force against terrorist groups present in North-Mali, while Barkhane, its replacement, is described as an extension of the French counterterrorist mission to the larger region of Sahel (Charbonneau, 2017). Behind this apparently simple objective lies a complicated reality; evidenced by a body of literature that does not form a consensus on defining the motives behind the French intervention nor as to whether the renewed presence of the European power is drawing to a close (Tardy, 2020). With the two successive interventions, France renewed and expanded a recurring presence of its military in the Sub-Saharan region. Indeed ‘recurring’, for France has a century old history, notably colonial, with this particular region, and has kept along the years a particular relationship with a number of Sub-Saharan and West-African nations and governments (Wing, 2016). A body of literature, particularly in French, points out the economic imperatives the country has kept with Sahel as a defining motivation behind the interventions (Abourabi, 2016; Haine, 2016). It has been argued by others that behind the intervention is a certain ‘tacit agreement’ between France and certain African nations (Leboeuf and Quénot-Suarez, 2014). An agreement where in exchange for the provision of military support, France gets to showcase the strength of its armed force, ultimately allowing the European Nation to keep a certain prestige and relevance in international relations (Haine, 2016). Besides from the two operations this study focuses on, other missions involving international actors have been established in Sahel, particularly in Mali since 2012. With notably the peacekeeping mission of the United Nations MINUSMA¹ and the European Union training mission in Mali (Charbonneau, 2019). France has arguably played a key role in the creation of international operations (Tardy, 2020: 13), while it is simultaneously coordinating the militaries of local Sahelian nations (idem; Charbonneau, 2019). It is important to distinguish the French endeavours from other international efforts (Tardy, 2020), unlike the MINUSMA or the EUTM-Mali the French operations are focused on active counterterrorism and their intentions inherently

¹ United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (from French : Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali).

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belligerent (Tardy, 2020). Barkhane, an ongoing operation, involves other actors, notably the countries of the G5 Sahel², nonetheless its command is unilateral and the French involvement in the region remains idiosyncratic (ibid).

An important body of literature is critical regarding the impacts the interventions have had and are having (Charbonneau, 2017; Wing, 2016). It appears that consensus mounts on the idea that the operations have not tackled the underlying issues that plagued Sahel (Boeke and Schuurman, 2015), it is believed that despite its overwhelming military superiority France has not destroyed but merely scattered the terrorist groups it fought (Harmon, 2015; Sabrow, 2016). This observation particularly applies to Mali, Bergamaschi (2013) believes the landlocked and mostly deserts country was facing a multi-dimensional crisis prior to the intervention with roots in socio-political context that France failed to address. The situation is widely observed as preoccupying (Charbonneau, 2019), with little elements that are encouraging, progresses are described as “rare, fragile and largely marginal” (ibid: 404). In view of this particular context and historical background Sophia Sabrow (2016) has thought to investigate the local perceptions of the legitimacy of the French operation, she observes that Malian populations have initially perceived France’s intervention positively, granting a ‘pragmatic’ legitimacy to France. Nevertheless, as the intervention lasted the motives of the interventions were increasingly questioned the ‘ideological’ legitimacy of the French army failed (ibid). Nonetheless, as of 2020, the French commitment remains relatively stable, and the legitimacy of the operation is not challenged by the international community nor the French public opinion (Tardy, 2020).

In the second half of the twentieth century, France has infamously led military interventions in Africa, often described as neo-colonial, these interventions were not necessarily legitimate nor perceived as such (Tardy, 2020); despite their ‘illegitimate’ nature, these interventions were hardly challenged (idem), however with the end of the cold war it has become difficult for states to justify unilateral military interventions (Zimmermann, 2017). Thierry Tardy argues that this development particularly applies to France’s policy in Africa “given the degree of controversy that past operations have carried” (2020: 13). In the present days, the international community through the United Nations for example, would strongly condemn such behaviours, and importantly so would the French public opinion, but also local populations (ibid). Serval and Barkhane however have

² Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

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been widely praised by the international community, and while the United Nations did not officially sanction the operations, they are perceived as legal (Bannelier and Christakis, 2013). This support is not trivial to the legitimacy of the operations, Tardy (2020), argues that the legitimacy of interventions Serval and Barkhane lies in their well embedded in multilateralism and in France's reliance on international institutions, the author argues such developments are the results of French pragmatic efforts, efforts to distance itself from the ghosts of the past. Additional literature asserts that the expansion of the French military presence was legitimized by the framing of the intervention as a force to combat terrorism (Charbonneau and Sears, 2014; Wing, 2016). The argument forwarded by these authors is not backed by a specific theory of International Relations, it is however reminiscent of the assumptions of securitization theory, which declares that threats are not objectives but created, as such issues are framed into matters of security (Buzan et. al, 1998). This argument is furthermore plausible; evidenced by a body of securitization focused literature that examines a shift of how Africa and the region of Sahel in particular is perceived.

Rita Abrahamsen (2005) argued that in the early 21st century, interactions of western nations with 'Africa' shifted from the category of "development/humanitarianism" toward a category of "risk/fear/threat" (ibid: 55). Through a qualitative content analysis of Blair's administration speeches and policy, the scholar claims that the securitization of the continent helped legitimize the 'war on terrorism' (ibid). This observation is further shared by Lacher (2008) and Aning (2010) Olsen (2014). Wolfram Lacher affirms that the war on terrorism, chiefly under the impulse of the United-States, the greater region of Sahara has been turned into a matter of security. To observe a process of securitization the author qualitatively analyses primary sources such as local newspapers and secondary sources with academic articles. The authors of the aforementioned studies agree that the securitization process has had a negative impact on key development areas, furthermore it is seen as a process that has been enforced by western states onto African nations. Fisher and Anderson (2015) observe however, that a number of African regimes have found leverage in this context of securitization to cement their hold on power, by further securitizing issues in their own countries, they were able to direct the aid received by western nations, transferring aid from the realm of development/ humanitarian goals to security (Fisher and Anderson, 2015: 151). These studies provide an early glance at what can be understood with the help of the securitization

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framework. Empirically they have shown that the perception of western nations on Saharan and more generally African nations has shifted over the last decades. Supporting the assumption forwarded by Wing (2016) it is plausible that the framing of 'terrorism' has been a defining feature behind the legitimization of the French interventions. Nevertheless, the next chapter will demonstrate that it is one thing to claim an issue as a matter of security, but it is quite another to actually implement an emergency measure to counter it militarily.

2.2 Applications of securitization

The end of the cold war has generated a redefinition of what can be understood as a threat. Security threats used to be directed at other states, they have become more diffuse, and their immediate danger not obvious (Zimmermann, 2017). The decisions for governments to deploy their military have accordingly evolved; and pre-emptive action against potential future threats has become a common motive for intervention (Newman, 2010) a phenomenon that has been magnified with the advent of the global war on terror that resulted after the events of September 2001 (Olsson, 2015). This type of military interventions can become a source of contestation, internationally and nationally, particularly when the sending state is democratic (ibid). Indeed, the threats targeted are often located far from the sending state's territory and the immediate danger they pose is not always evident. Furthermore, these interventions are somewhat paradoxical as they seek to bring stability and security to a certain situation, though are themselves a source of violence and insecurity (Wæver, 2000; Zimmerman, 2017). It is therefore essential for an intervention to be perceived as legitimize if it wants to achieve "a stabilizing degree of routine, immunizing it from effective critique" (Zimmermann, 2017: 226). This thesis is particularly interested in observing how the French government successfully implemented and ensured a stable commitment to operations Serval and Barkhane. To make sense of this puzzle, and bring elements of answer to it, it is essential to turn to theory. The securitization theory of security studies with its emphasis on the construction of meanings is located with the realm of discursive legitimation and political argument (Williams, 2003: 512), it provides analytical tools that allow to observe and unpack the construction of an issue into a matter of security (Buzan et. al, 1998). This sub chapter will present examples of

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literature that have observed similar empirical cases as the one studied in this thesis through the lens of securitization.

The Global War on Terrorism is widely observed as a key development of contemporary international relations. This war of a new age has sparked western nations to intervene militarily in foreign theatres of operations against terrorist actors; therefore, conflicts that flowed from the war on terrorism such as the Iraq war, provide very good ground for securitization analysis. The Iraq war (2003-2011), is notorious for the lack of alleged threats it posed to the intervening states, it is therefore one of the most relevant examples of successful securitization, as can be observed in Hughes's (2007) analysis of the Bush administration's discourse prior to the intervention. Through the application of a securitization framework to the qualitative analysis of various material such as speeches or commission reports, the author demonstrates how speech acts, rather than material factors were the key elements in explaining the escalation of the Iraqi situation into a conflict. Hughes additionally argues that the socialization of the target audience – here the American public – mattered significantly; mentioning that it is unlikely audience support would have been as high as it was “without the embedded dominant discourses of America's moral superiority, [...] and a largely simplistic and negative view of Middle Eastern Arabs” (ibid: 101). This stresses the importance of audience in processes of securitization. Paul Roe (2008) develops further on the role that audience(s) plays in processes of Securitization, he asserts that although a targeted audience may agree with the notion/ proposal/ idea that an issue is a matter of security, it may very well disagree “over the ‘extraordinaryness’ of the measures proposed” (idem: 616). An extraordinary action operates outside the realm of normal politics (Buzan et. al., 1998). Roe, similarly, studies the case of the Iraq war, though through the perspective of the Government of the United-Kingdom led by Tony Blair. Through a discourse analysis of the administration's rhetoric the author observes that while general British public agreed that Hussein's regime could be identifiable as a security issue it did not agree that the use of military force was the required response. It is only after renewed efforts to mobilize the parliament that the intervention was rendered possible and armed force sent to Iraq, impacting the legitimacy of the conflict in the eyes of the British public (idem). This signals that when securitizing a military intervention, more is required than the mere framing of an issue into a matter of security; explained in parts by their violent natures they are more likely to be

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contested. Due, in parts, to their paradoxical characters, military securitizations are often the target of counter-securitizing efforts/ moves. Counter-securitization is a term that has been utilized differently by various scholars (Buzan et al., 1998: 206; Vuori, 2008), herein it follows Stritzel and Chang's (2015) definition³, thus focusing on the concept that counter-securitization are moves that aim at delegitimizing the securitization efforts of the sending state. In their study of the War in Afghanistan Stritzel and Chang observe that the legitimacy of the American intervention has continuously been contested by Taliban groups. The authors rely on a discourse analysis the various communicative methods employed by the Taliban, notably letters and chants. Phenomena of counter-securitization are common and highlight that the legitimization process behind military interventions does not end with the acceptance of extraordinary measures (Zimmermann, 2017). Considering the case of Germany's involvement in the War in Afghanistan, Zimmermann observes that the securitization process was technically successful as troops were sent, however the commitment to the operation has never been stable, and successive governments "found themselves under strong pressure to end the military engagement" (idem: 236). For that reason, Zimmermann believes the scope of what consists of a successful securitization needs to be extended further, even after there has been "boots on the ground" (ibid: 556). Zimmermann contends that a sending state's involvement to a military deployment can only be stable if the pre-intervention efforts of securitization are followed by desecuritizing moves to move back the issue from the sphere of exceptionality and ideally into a realm of normal politics (ibid). It is indeed, complex for securitizing actors to maintain a legitimacy while continuously portraying the original issue as an immediate urgent threat. Continuously stressing a language of security and danger would be self-defeating as it risks depicting military commitment as "a threat rather than a solution to the problem" (idem: 239).

2.3 Gap in literature.

This chapter has first reviewed how the French interventions Serval and Barkhane have been presented in academic literature. Authors have mainly developed their studies around the

³ Counter-securitization may appear as part of an interactive process of moves and counter-moves that are both linguistically regulated by the grammar and illocutionary logic of securitizing speech acts and closely tied to processes of legitimization and delegitimization" (Stritzel and Chang, 2015: 553).

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suboptimal impacts the interventions are having; or on the particular history France shares with Sahelian nations and its contemporary impacts. Authors have pondered on what is making this renewed presence legitimate, it has been argued by some that the framing of terrorism or the embeddedness in institutional are essential factors. A second section has presented research which has applied the theory of securitization, with a focus on how securitization can be used to analyse similar cases to the one at heart in this study. It has presented some of the challenges and specificities associated with the application of securitization theory to cases of military intervention, revealing some challenges and a glimpse of how scholars have adapted the existing literature to the specific needs associated to it.

The claim made by scholars stating that the framing of terrorism has been essential to the legitimization of the interventions is thought-provoking, however their study remain empirical and lacks analytical rigor. Such accounts are insufficient to study the full extent of the legitimization of military interventions. This thesis aims, among other things to bridge this gap in the literature and observe how securitization can be applied to the case of the French interventions to uncover what lies at the heart of their legitimacy. This thesis does however not have the pretention of answering questions regarding the motives of the French government, merely contribute to literature of the empirical case by applying relevant IR theories and methodologies. With regards to the securitization of Sahel or more generally Africa, this research with its observation of French activities specifically, will contribute to a body of literature that is in majority focused on the doings of the United-States or the United-Kingdom.

3. Theory

This chapter will first trace the securitization theory to its roots and will then develop on the specific conceptualizations of the theory this thesis will choose to construct its theoretical framework.

3.1 Premise of the securitization theory.

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The late 20th century, due notably to the end of the Cold War, forced a redefinition of the field of International Relations. Constructivist school of thoughts rose into the mainstream IR scholarship, new theories were created, and the agenda of security 'broadened' and 'deepened' (Williams, 2003). It is in this fertile environment that the Securitization theory of security studies came to existence. The notion of securitization was first outlined by Ole Wæver (1995), building on John Austin and John Searle's understanding of Speech acts, language when presented to an audience both presents an information and performs an action (Buzan et. al, 1998). Wæver further developed the concept with fellow scholars Barry Buzan and Jaap De Wilde in their 1998 work "Security: A framework for analysis". This publication is widely perceived as the outset of the securitization theory; an original account that is also known as the Copenhagen School of Securitization. Their theory contends that 'security' is the outcome of a social construction, not an objective condition (ibid), security issues are analysed by "examining 'securitizing speech-acts'" through which threats become represented and recognized." (Williams, 2003: 513). It would however be an oversimplification to resume their work to simply these assumptions, the Copenhagen school identify certain factors that can facilitate a process of securitization and potentially impede it if they were missing. First, the form of the speech act needs to follow the grammar of security, the vocabulary employed by the securitizing actor should reference security (Buzan et al., 1998). Second aspect is the social position of the securitizing actor regarding security, it is helpful if the actor has an authority over security issues or at least some legitimacy to speak of it (idem). Third, the securitizing actor has to declare a referent object that is existentially threatened. Finally, a securitizing move will be facilitated if the threat is already perceived as dangerous (idem, remains to be determined if mention third one). The highly replicable theoretical framework developed by the Copenhagen School has quickly gained popularity, as it allows scholars the possibility to analyse the construction of security and security threats in a myriad of cases, focusing on various issues and actors (McDonald, 2008: 56). The previous chapter highlighted how it can analyse state foreign policy behaviour (Abrahamsen, 2005), but it has also been applied to matters of health such as Aids or Ebola (Elbe, 2006; Enemark, 2017); to questions of immigration policies (Dover, 2008); water scarcity (Burgess et. al, 2013), and so on. Securitizing actor often focus on states but frequently also consider the media, non-governmental organizations, or interest groups (Zimmermann). Securitization theory is now well anchored into mainstream IR scholarship. As it spread to new actors and new issues, authors have sought to adapt the theory to best serve their

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purposes. Over the years various ontologies and epistemologies have created specific analytical needs (Balzacq, 2015), thus the original account of the Copenhagen school's securitization theory has evolved into various 'securitizations' (ibid).

3.2 Developments

Despite its merit, there are some underlying blind spots left in the work of the Copenhagen school, which has paved the way for many developments. One of the central debates on securitization focuses on the idea that the articulation of a speech-act is too narrow to allow a scholar to study the real world (Williams, 2003; Balzacq, 2005; Stritzel, 2007). Stritzel argues that "in reality, the speech act itself, i.e. literally a single security articulation at a particular point in time, will at best only very rarely explain the entire social process that follows from it" (Stritzel, 2007: 377). Rather securitization is argued to be the result of "a process of articulations creating sequentially a threat text which turns sequentially into a securitization" (ibid). Another central critique revolves around audience(s); the success of a securitizing move is dependent of the acceptance of the audience (Buzan et. al, 1998), nonetheless numerous authors have thought this original claim too narrow (Balzacq, 2005; Roe, 2008). Balzacq asserts that securitization is ultimately audience driven (2005; 2015), it is therefore essential to distinguish the nature and status of the targeted audience(s). Audiences are not imbued with equal power; accordingly, a securitizing actor should make sense of which actors are relevant to their particular issue. Balzacq (2005) argues for instance that public audiences – particularly in liberal democracies – can provide their government with moral support, nevertheless they do not provide the formal support that is necessary for the securitization to be completed; an argument that Roe (2008) demonstrated in his study of the British decision to invade Iraq. Furthermore, the psycho-cultural disposition of the audience should be considered (idem; Hughes, 2007); as securitization relies on the social creation of meaning, it is helpful if the securitizing actor and the audience share some common understandings of language and conceptions of reality (Balzacq, 2015). The advancements on the question of audience are particularly important to our study due to its links with legitimacy. Indeed, legitimacy is a concept that emphasizes agreed norms between an actor and a particular audience (Keohane, 2006). This has been essential to the selection of relevant actors and audiences that will be analysed – the

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selection process is further developed throughout the following chapter on research design. An additional point of criticism points at the normative issues associated with the theory. A large body of literature has built upon the original account of the Securitization theory, to the extent that there coexists various ‘theories’ of securitization, thus Balzacq (2015) argues securitization is an ‘ideal type’ rather than a single theory which combines a set of shared qualitative features (idem: 103). Next section will focus on the applications of securitization to military interventions.

3.3 Securitization and military interventions

Interestingly, it has been argued by some authors, including Knudsen (2001), that securitization theory, by expanding to virtually all corners of security, removes itself from the military sector, a claim that has later been dismissed, illustrated by the successful applications of the theory to military cases (see chapter 2.2), the military dimension remains core to security (Roe, 2008). Nonetheless, scholars have had to adapt the theory and develop new conceptualization for securitization to better serve their purposes. Two main challenges were previously brought to our attention: first, the acceptance of an issue as a potential threat did not easily translate into the acceptance of extraordinary security measures against it; and second, the scope of what was commonly understood as a successful securitization was too narrow to observe the legitimization of a military intervention. To address the first challenge, Roe (2008) claims that securitization can be conceptually revised in terms that he calls the ‘stage of identification’ and the ‘stage of mobilization’ (idem: 616). This sequential view indicates that specific objectives lie at the heart of both stages and thus specific argumentative efforts and speech-acts associated to them (idem). Paul Roe identifies the stage of mobilization as more ‘active’ than the stage of identification which remains purely ‘rhetoric’ (idem: 633). To tackle the second challenge, Zimmermann (2017) has thought to incorporate the concepts of institutionalization and desecuritization as integral parts of the securitization process. Institutionalization as defined by the Copenhagen school indicates a condition in which a security problem has been taken for granted (Buzan et. al, 1998), thus, as part of institutional practices, a security issue does no longer require legitimization (Watson, 2010). Zimmermann claims that in order for an intervention to remain legitimate and its engagement stable, the securitizing actor, i.e. the sending state, should aim towards institutionalization, which is attainable through a process of ‘desecuritization’. There are various understandings of what is

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meant by desecuritization; some authors have mentioned desecuritization as the absence of security (Donnelly, 2015), or as a countermove against an attempt of securitization (Vuori, 2011); though what Zimmermann understand by it corresponds to the process under which a securitized issue is transferred back into the sphere of normal politics (Zimmermann, 2017). Some authors have observed desecuritization as ‘superpositioned’ to securitization, in other words, both securitizing and desecuritizing speech acts may be uttered at the same occasion (Beaulieu Brossard and Austin, 2016). Zimmermann acknowledge the possibility of observing such phenomenon empirically, though the author suggests that speech acts present a clear predominance of either securitizing or desecuritizing arguments. Desecuritization in itself is not a new concept, it has however been typically studied independently of securitization processes, Zimmermann contends that when observing the legitimation of military intervention, it should be added to the sequential procedure suggested by Paul Roe.

3.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis is built upon previous research on securitization and more precisely on research that examined how securitization theory can be used to understand the legitimation of military intervention. Relying strongly on the sequential perspective of securitization developed by Paul Roe and further modeled by Hubert Zimmermann. This model contends that a successful securitization can be traced in three successive stages: identification, mobilization and desecuritization. This sequential framework allows for multiple actors and audiences to be considered. Furthermore, a researcher can consider focusing on different actors and different audience in each stage.

The outcomes of the sequences differ greatly, therefore in order to clarify what is at the heart of each stage this thesis has attributed facilitating conditions. These facilitating conditions are directly drawn from previous research. Their addition to the sequential model seeks to bring further clarity to the processes furthermore it offers the possibility to easily replicate the research to another case. Specific facilitating conditions have been attributed. These facilitating conditions are drawn from previous research and are listed as follows.

i) Stage of identification

In the stage of identification, the securitizing actor seeks to turn an issue into a matter of security. Four facilitating conditions are crucial for its completion: (I) the securitizing actor has a position of authority recognized by its audience (Buzan et. al. 1998); (II) the speech acts address relevant audiences (Balzacq, 2005; Roe, 2008); (III) the speech acts follows the grammar/vocabulary of security (ibid: 33); (IV) the securitizing actor defines a referent object as existentially threatened (ibid). It is important to note that facilitating conditions I and II apply to the entire process and the three stages.

ii) Stage of mobilization

The second stage of the model concerns the embodiment of the security issue into action. Extraordinary measures are defined, and their implementation accepted and enacted, it is the formal setting for intervention. Two facilitating conditions have been defined: (V) the securitizing actor requires immediate action (Roe, 2008); (VI) Extraordinary measures are presented and responsibility is assigned to them (Buzan et. al., 1998).

iii) Stage of desecuritization

Finally, the stage of desecuritization aims to normalize and give a certain degree of routine to the measures. The securitizing actor will subsequently have acquired the legitimacy to deal with the situation. In the final stage the securitizing actor will have to adapt its speech acts considerably, evidenced by its three facilitating conditions: (VII) the securitizing actor declares the measures as successful and downplays its future involvement (Zimmermann, 2017); (VIII) the securitizing actor stresses a return to normality and institutionalization of the issue (Buzan et. al, 1998: 29).

3.5 Contribution to securitization research

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This chapter has revealed that Securitization theory is greatly relevant to analyse the various world phenomena that are of interest to contemporary international relations. This thesis is particularly interested in how securitization can help in understanding the justification and legitimization behind military interventions. This thesis will contribute to the scholarship that aims at applying securitization theory to military security; choosing to follow a sequential model of securitization this thesis will contribute to the accounts of Roe and Zimmermann. The attribution of specific facilitating conditions to each stage of the securitization process will provide guidance to the analysis and serve the overall clarity of the thesis. Furthermore, it provides a good template for replicability; the theoretical framework advanced in this thesis can be reproduced in future research and future cases. Regrettably, while this theory and framework allows to observe the ‘modus operandi’ of security actors and ultimately to answer the research question, it is not appropriate to analyse the motives behind intervention.

4. Research Design

4.1. Epistemological and Ontological position

This present research focuses on how securitization can help in understanding the French government’s legitimization of its interventions Serval and Barkhane. Securitization highlights how issues can transform into matters of security through an interactive process in which a securitizing actor addresses a specific audience via speech acts. This indicates that this study observes security not as an objective reality but as the result of social constructions and interactions. Therefore, this thesis takes a resolutely interpretivist epistemological stance and a constructionist ontological perspective (Lamont, 2016). This orientation has been widely common to previous relevant research. The epistemological and ontological positionings will guide the research design of this thesis along with the theoretical framework.

This chapter will first present the material used in this study for analysis, emphasizing on the guiding principles that have conditioned the selection; a second section will develop on the chosen

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methodology. Mentions of how this thesis address standards of reliability, replicability and validity will be present throughout the chapter.

4.2 Material

The theoretical framework at the heart of this study is grounded on a variety of facilitating conditions, some of which are directly impacting the selection of material. Identifying relevant securitizing actors and audiences is essential to studying processes of securitization.

4.2.1 Securitizing actor

One of the early stated facilitating condition states that a securitizing actor should hold a position of authority, it has become clear by now that the study rotates around the French government, a political elite that holds a position of authority and importantly is relevant to speak of security (Roe, 2008). The focus on the executive branch is shared with previous research as previously observed. What can be understood by the ‘government as a securitizing actor’ remains however quite broad, securitization offers the possibility to study a vast array of material. For example, an author can decide to include impersonal text, e.g. specific policies, to inversely focus on one individual, often the head of state, or perhaps merging the study of both (Abrahamsen, 2005). Some authors have thought to include recording of private conversations (Hughes, 2007). The applications are manifold and expand to all corners of governmental activities, allowing authors to provide a keen understanding of social and political processes. This can nevertheless lead to confusion and uncertainty as to what has guided the material selection, their study can consequently turn difficult to replicate.

Replicability is however one of the guiding principles of this thesis, therefore the selected material is concentrated on five individual actors, who are holding the highest executive positions in regard to security concerns, while the analysis of speech acts will focus exclusively on their public speeches. The five chosen positions of power are the President of the French Republic and its prime

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minister, the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of armed forces and the minister of interior⁴. In the scope of our analysis, which will be developed later, these positions were respectively occupied by François Hollande, Jean-Marc Ayrault, Laurent Fabius, Jean-Yves Le Drian and Manuel Valls. It is important to precise that these individual actors are united as part of one securitizing actor, namely the French government. Though the decision to focus on the president of the Republic and four ministers is ultimately subjective, it has been taken with regards to their relevance to speak of security, as these 5 positions arguably have the most authority in such matters. Additionally, focusing purely on the top executive positions is straight-forward and can be reproduced quite similarly in other studies.

4.2.2 Relevant Audiences

The chosen public speeches have been selected according to the audience in front of which they were uttered by the securitizing actor. This decision is directly drawn from the assumptions of securitization theory and the theoretical framework of this thesis. Understanding the role of audience is essential to the analysis of the process of securitization, indeed, as interactive processes securitizing move are dependent of the audience they address (see 3.2). All audiences do not have the same legitimizing power, nor do they necessarily share common basis for the understanding and transformation of meanings with the securitizing actor. The chosen audiences for the analysis were the French parliament, a bi-cameral legislature composed of the National Assembly and the Senate, along with the General Assembly of the United Nations. Securitizing actors may decide to direct their speech acts to virtually any audience, nonetheless it has been contended by previous researchers that a distinction between ‘enabling’ and ‘empowering’ audience needs being made (Balzacq, 2011). The work of Paul Roe, directed several decisions for this thesis, the author argues that formal support, notably provided by the national parliament is essential for a government to successfully securitize an issue (Roe, 2008); without its approval it is practically impossible for a government to legitimize and conduct a military intervention (idem). The decision to include the French parliament is therefore logical. Focusing a second audience broadens the scope of the

⁴ Président de la République française ; Premier ministre français ; Ministre des Affaires étrangères ; Ministre de la Défense ; Ministre de l'Intérieur.

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research and allows to observe the coherence of the French government in its securitizing efforts. Furthermore, this thesis hopes to observe patterns of interconnectedness in the speech acts directed at both audiences and how they could reference back to each-others. The United Nations through its various bodies does not hold the same ‘constraining’ power over a government than national parliament. It does however not make it irrelevant. Côté argues that securitizing agents should be theorized as actors capable of having “meaningful effect on the intersubjective construction of security values” (Côté, 2016: 541). The United Nations is recognized in previous securitization research as an important legitimizing power influencing the ability of nations to conduct military interventions (Rychnovska, 2014), this is particularly true for liberal democracies and evidently applies to France (Ostermann, 2016; Tardy, 2020). Thus, for the purpose of this study, the chosen audiences are seen as compatible, which implies that both audiences have an intersubjective view, or at least a common understanding of legitimacy. By focusing on the two chosen audiences, this paper does not contend that other audiences have not impacted the legitimization dynamics.

4.2.3 Scope of analysis

The scope of the research is here as well defined by the theoretical framework. Theoreticians of Securitization do not define a specific duration in which securitization is meant to occur, as such the identification stage could span over months. The duration of the said process becomes even more important when it includes a stage of desecuritization which in certain cases takes years and successive governments to complete (Zimmermann, 2017: 236). Nevertheless, the literature that is relevant to our study focuses in majority on particular administrations, for example Tony Blair and his government (Abrahamsen, 2005; Roe, 2008). Hence, this thesis defines its scope to the presidency of Francois Hollande (spanning from 2012 to 2017). This choice is further motivated by subjective consideration of context. Francois Hollande was inaugurated in power in May 2012 which coincides well with a surge of tension in Sahel and the start of hostilities between the Malian army and rebel groups (Charbonneau, 2017). This thesis contends that the transformation of operation Serval into operation Barkhane illustrates the stabilization and routinization of the French intervention in Sahel as the nature of the intervention has not been modified since (Charbonneau, 2019; Tardy, 2020). It is further evidenced by the fact that the French parliament did not exercise

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its right to vote on the continuation of the operation in October 2014. Therefore, the allocution of Francois Hollande at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2014, a month after the start of operation Barkhane will close the scope of the analysis.

4.2.4. Presentation of the material.

The task of selecting the appropriate material for analysis can become challenging if no proper guidelines are set. The theoretical framework of the study has defined some of them. In summary, the nature of the material researched is public speeches, uttered between May 2012 and September 2014 by the president of the French Republic Francois Hollande, and four ministers of his government having relevance to security. The speeches are required to have been given in front of two relevant audiences: the French parliament – including two chambers, the National Assembly, and the Senate – and the United Nations General Assembly. Additional guiding principles are essential and should be included such as the source where the material is extracted from, and the credibility of the material (Halperin and Heath, 2012). All studied speeches were extracted from the same source, “vie-publique.fr” a public website of the French administration. On the website it can be read that the reason for being of this digital service is to provide clear, reliable, varied, and free information, representative of different public opinion⁵. Speeches that were held in front of the United Nations General Assembly were exclusively uttered by Francois Hollande. Their selection process was relatively simple as Hollande gave four speeches in front of this particular audience in the scope of our study, all four were analyzed. It is also noteworthy that Hollande gave no speech to the French parliament, which is due to the nature of his position, French presidents are not allowed to assist to parliamentary sessions, the executive decisions are forwarded via the ministers. Given the scope of the research the task of analysing every speech uttered by the four selected ministers in front of the French parliament would prove too immense; vie-publique.fr allows to refine searches, therefore keywords were used to limit the results ‘Mali’, ‘Sahel’, ‘Serval’, and ‘Barkhane’ were used. Out of 45 results, 12 were finally selected subjectively according to

⁵ <https://www.vie-publique.fr/vie-publique-propos>

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their relevance and whether if the situation in Mali and Sahel or the French intervention was the, or one of the, main topic mentioned. Bringing the total to 16 speeches.

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Qualitative content analysis.

Methodological considerations are essential as they condition how the material will be processed and ultimately how knowledge will be generated. For this research, a qualitative content analysis will be utilized. Qualitative content analysis allows to observe the social construction of reality and meaning. This methodology is aligned with the constructionist ontology of this thesis. The decision to employ this methodology was motivated by its utilization in previous relevant literature (Abrahamsen, 2005; Elbe, 2006), and most importantly because it is adapted to provide answers to the research. Qualitative content analysis is helpful to unpack the meanings and processes that are hidden in language. This methodology allows to study textual data, including the transcript of speeches, through coding categories to identify certain themes, patterns, or processes. In this thesis the theoretical framework will guide the definition of the coding categories.

Why is this methodology useful?

The present study contends that the legitimization of the French operations in Sahel can be identifiable and understood through a process of securitization. The theoretical framework that will be used to address this puzzle is a model that allows to uncover the said processes; it is contended that a successful securitization discerns three distinct stages. Within each stage were allocated facilitating conditions, some of which have been addressed in this chapter, and have guided the choice of material, e.g. the French government as a 'relevant securitizing actor'. Some facilitating conditions remain however to be addressed, they focus on speech acts, i.e. how the language used by the French government in their public speeches performed certain actions and created meanings. Those speech acts are derived from the use of appropriate words towards a certain audience (Balzacq, 2005). Hence it is highly relevant to translate the various speech-acts according to

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'coding categories' for the qualitative content analysis of the material. The coding categories are directed towards a specific objective which will allow extract data efficiently.

4.3.2 Coding categories

The coding categories have been deductively defined from the theoretical framework which is grounded in previous research. Appropriately, they fit the requirements of this study and can be replicated to other studies. Again, they seek to uncover speech-acts in the studied texts.

i) Stage of identification

An issue is transformed into a matter of security.

Coding categories: Threat and Danger/ Language of Security

ii) Stage of mobilization

Extraordinary measures are defined and accepted and enacted.

Coding categories: Urgency / Action / Ascription of Responsibility

iii) Stage of desecuritization

The security issue is transferred back into the realm of normal politics.

Coding categories: Success/ Peace and Stability / Return to normality

Though the sequential division of the theoretical framework implies a certain temporality to the individual stages each coding category will be methodically researched over entire scope covered by the research, i.e. to every speech. This decision aims at producing clear and unbiased results.

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The data extracted will be referred to throughout the analysis and will provide the core of the argumentation.

4.3.3 Limitations of methodology

In the presented research scholars have more often opted for discourse analysis methodology than a qualitative content analysis, allowing them to get a more profound understanding of their specific case, nevertheless it can at times be confusing how the data was produced. To avoid such confusion and to produce reliable results the qualitative content analysis remains resolutely adapted. Approaching the material deductively as it is the case in this thesis permits to attack the material with efficiency. Nevertheless, it could be argued for an inductive approach to be taken instead as it would allow to analyse the material with less assumptions and more ‘open-eyes’ to certain hidden phenomena, that our methodology will not consider. Finally, an additional methodology and set of analysed material would have been beneficial, to triangulate the research, which would have further increased its validity. Focusing on one methodology seems however well appropriate given the context of this thesis.

5. Analysis

The analysis aims to answer the original puzzle at the heart of this thesis, which ponders upon the legitimization military interventions and more specifically the legitimization of the French interventions in Sahel: operations Serval and Barkhane. This thesis claims that the theory of securitization with its focus on discursive legitimation, can appropriately answer the puzzle at hand, thus asking the following research question: How can securitization theory help in understanding the legitimization of the French interventions in Sahel?

In the process that led to this analysis, a theoretical framework has been developed. This framework, directly grounded in securitization theory has guided the research and scope of material

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selection, as well as motivating the choice of a qualitative content analysis as methodology for analysis. The main objective of this analysis is to uncover securitizing speech acts. Speech acts can be identified by the specific use of words and language in relation to an audience. In accordance with the chosen methodology, the theoretical framework has been translated into coding categories. This section of thesis will present the qualitative analysis of the extracted data through the lens of securitization.

The theoretical framework for this analysis defines as successful process of securitization as the result of three successive stages, or sequences. Accordingly, these stages will structure the narration of the findings in respectively chapters. Moreover, within each facilitating conditions have been defined. The sequential model of the securitization process unfolds as follows: first the stage of identification in which the securitizing actor seeks to turn an issue into a matter of security. Second, in the stage of mobilization witnesses the embodiment of a security issue into concrete, extraordinary measures. Finally, the stage of desecuritization, seeks to turn the extraordinary measures into a normalized routine.

The methodical observation of the material has highlighted two distinct processes of mobilization, notably due to their different ascription of responsibility. Therefore, the stage of mobilization will be 'doubled'. The explanation for this phenomenon is largely contextual and does not challenge the overall usefulness of the theoretical framework to answer the research question of the thesis as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter.

5.1 Stage of identification

To observe the transformation of an issue into a matter of security, four facilitating conditions have been presented. The first one (I) asserts that the securitizing actor needs to hold a position of authority that is recognized by its audience. The securitizing actor in this study, the French government has an evident legitimacy to speak of security. Roe (2008) asserts that in liberal democracies, politicians are elected, among other things, to voice such concerns on behalf of the larger public. On the international scene the French government represents France and is therefore viewed as a legitimate, France remains for instance one of the five nations in the United Nations

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Security Council. The first facilitating condition has not been translated into a coding category and neither has the facilitating condition regarding addressing relevant audience (II). This study argues that the French government addressed relevant audiences, to which it feels accountable regarding the legitimization of military intervention: the French Parliament and the United Nations via the General Assembly of the United Nations. This study selects these two audiences as receptors of the French government's speech acts, their choice is motivated in chapter 4.2.2. Essential facilitating conditions remain: the speech acts of the securitizing actor follow the grammar of security (III); and the securitizing actor defines a referent object as existentially threatened. To uncover such patterns in the text, the following coding categories were established: Threat and Danger/ Violence /& Language of security. Unsurprisingly they produced considerable results and one term is omnipresent: terrorism.

In their speeches, French ministers along with François Hollande, unify the threat in Northern Mali as the presence of 'terrorist groups', they are believed to belong in majority to the AQIM⁶ movement (Ayrault, 2012; Fabius, 2012a; Fabius, 2012b), this claim is made following the analysis of French military intelligence (Fabius, 2012c). AQIM along with the other terrorist groups, stationed in Northern Mali are part of an issue qualified as the 'question of Sahel' (Le Drian, 2012a), or the 'Malian or more generally Sahelian situation' (Fabius, 2012a). The first mentions of the crisis were made in July 2012 and in the same month the issue is first qualified as 'serious and complex' (Le Drian, 2012a), then as 'very preoccupying' (Fabius, 2012a) and finally as 'dramatic', noting a dramatization of the issue.

Importantly for the research, what are the referent objects defined by the securitizing actor, who or what is pointed out as existentially threatened by the terrorist groups. When presenting the issue in Mali, Laurent Fabius minister of foreign affairs describes the country as "cut in two" (Fabius, 2012c), divided between the north and south, with the north, being a "stronghold of terrorism" (Fabius, 2012c). Fabius highlights here that the Malian state's survival is already challenged as its territorial integrity is compromised, hence presenting Mali as existentially threatened. The threat is amplified by the claim that the terrorist groups are not planning on occupying solely the northern part of the country, while addressing the 67th general assembly of the United Nations in September 2012 François Hollande argues that the terrorist groups' goal is to "launch offensives" against the

⁶ Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

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states of the Sahelian region (Hollande 2012c), referring to a military vocabulary the French president identifies the terrorist as legitimate security threats, able to export military intervention, such as state actors would. Hollande emphasizing the scope of threat further and argues “it is a threat for Western Africa and for Maghreb”, and stresses further that it is “a risk for the entire international community” (Hollande, 2012c). Identifying the threat as a risk for the ‘entire’ international community, Hollande seeks to universalize the challenge posed by the terrorist groups; he appeals to the empathy of his international audience.

Domestically, the prime minister along with the minister of foreign affairs and minister of defence strain the international reach of the threat, So does the Minister of interior security Manuel Valls who in an address to the senate on homeland security and terrorism designates the “Malian and Sahelian threat” as “oriented towards our own territory”. Similarly, to François Hollande’s address to the United Nations, the ministers here seek to catch the attention of the parliamentarians by exporting the threat to France, in order to support this claim, the French government repeats that “AQIM’s designated enemy is France” (Ayrault, 2012; Fabius, 2012a; Fabius, 2012b; Fabius, 2012c) this enmity indicates the conflictual and belligerent nature of AQIM which extends to all terrorist groups in Sahel.

The minister of Foreign Affairs Laurent Fabius argues that AQIM fighters are “well armed” that they possess a “large number of weapons and money” (Fabius, 2012a), terrorist fighters are qualified as “generally ready to die” in their combat against other movements (Fabius, 2012c). This emphasizes their determination and the extreme means by which they are determined to achieve their goals.

Most importantly in the identification of the terrorist groups as a legitimate threat requiring attention and action is the systematic use of vocabulary of barbarity and criminality which is highly associated to the coding category of danger.

Groups such as AQIM are not only defined as simple ‘terrorists’, they also are portrayed as traffickers of various sorts, indeed Fabius argues that AQIM finances its operations through “hostage ransoms” and diverse “traffics” such as “drugs” (Fabius, 2012c).

This criminality discredits the terrorists as legitimate political actors, hence “impeding possible negotiations” (Hollande, 2012c). To highlight the cruel nature of the threat, Hollande mentions

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“cut off hands”, “raped women” and “displaced children” (Hollande, 2012c). The deprivation of someone’s hands is a disturbing image of barbarity, women and children are generally perceived as civilian in conflict zones, indicating that the terrorists are operating beyond traditional barriers of conflicts.

Furthermore, Hollande (2012c) mentions the destruction of the Timbuktu mausoleums, “the destruction of treasures of humanity”, this reference is not trivial, as it indicates a profound disregard for culture and history. Additionally, it can be observed that the mausoleums are listed as a world heritage site by the UNESCO⁷, enforcing the idea that the terrorists have and no respect for the “collective interest of humanity” (Hollande, 2012a), consequently, no respect of the United Nations’ authority.

In sum, the French government has defined the threat as the terrorist groups present in Northern-Mali and more generally in Sahel. These terror groups are presented as having considerable military capabilities, which is making them increasingly able to conduct a symmetrical warfare against Sahelian nations, it is therefore argued that it is within the reach of these terror groups to endanger the very survival of states.

Mali is defined as the primary referent object; its territorial integrity is presented as partly compromised already. Importantly the threat is highly mobile and threatens the broader regional security. Simultaneously to their development as a full-fledged military force, the groups are a threat to the national security of France and international the international community more generally due to their ability to lead asymmetrical modes of operation as well. The French government argue that France is particularly aimed, indeed, groups such as AQIM have publicly designated the European Nation as their enemy. To enforce their claims, the speech act followed a grammar of security as well as cruelty and barbarity.

In the first identification stage, the French government, has addressed securitizing speech acts to a relevant audience, presenting

observed herein in the speeches of its five officials having the most authority in relevance to security, has presented securitizing speech acts to a relevant audience. While it is not within the

⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

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reach of this present study to observe whether the audiences had been convinced at this point, i.e. if they agreed that the Malian issue was a matter of security, it is very likely they did. Indeed the speech acts of the French government focused on terrorism, an issue that has been aimed by numerous military interventions in the past two decades, and is therefore generally perceived as something dangerous.

5.2 Stage of mobilization

The second stage of the sequential model of securitization seeks to observe how a securitizing actor turns the security issue that has been defined, into a matter that requires extraordinary action. An audience can accept that an issue is dangerous, while simultaneously disagree that measures are required against it, especially if these measures involve the use of force and violence. The theoretical framework of this study has attributed two facilitating conditions to facilitate its success: First, the securitizing actor needs to stress the imperative and urgency of the issue by requiring immediate action (V); following which it needs to present extraordinary measures and ascribe responsibility to them (VI). When the extraordinary measures are accepted and set into motion, the stage can be observed as successful.

This definition poses a challenge to the studied case, as the French government sanctioned its intervention without the official approval of the French Parliament nor the United Nations. This has to do with objective of operation Serval to act swiftly and surprise the terrorist groups it aimed.

This does not make the framework irrelevant, nonetheless two distinct dynamics of mobilization have been identified, this chapter will hence distinguish a stage of mobilization prior to the launch of operation Serval and a second one after.

To extract data from the original material coding categories were defined, in accordance to the facilitating conditions of this stage: Urgency / Action / Ascription of Responsibility.

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A certain contradiction between the two processes of mobilization will be observed, nevertheless, this sub-chapter will argue that altogether they allowed France to legitimate the implementation of its extraordinary measures.

5.2.1 Mobilization prior to the intervention

The first phase of mobilization is coinciding in time with the stage of identification, the speech acts of mobilization followed those of identification. Therefore, the speeches analysed herein were held between July 2012 to December 2012, by the French president or its government in front of the two relevant audiences that are the United Nations 67th general assembly and the French parliament.

From the very first speech that this thesis analyses, the French government has taken responsibility to act regarding the Malian and Sahelian situation in some ways or another. However, there were irregularities in the nature of the proposed means for mobilization as well as to whom, the responsibility was to enforce them. This thesis believes that the French president and its government speak as one voice in matters regarding security, and therefore argues that these changes in France's mobilization speech-acts are the product of external factors and context. What is common to every mobilizing move however, is the designated threat that needs to be acted against: the terrorist groups present in northern Mali and Sahel more generally. In early July 2012, Jean-Marc Ayrault France's prime minister argues that the "determination" of France will be absolute" (Ayrault, 2012) to prevent groups such as AQIM to "perpetuate their violence" (Ayrault, 2012). France lobbies for the resolution 2056 to be voted at the United Nations, this resolution provides the early basis for the creation of an African force to help Mali, recalling the vote of this resolution later in 2013, Ayrault argues that "France's diplomatic efforts have paid off" (Ayrault, 2013c). The French minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian insists on the role regional organizations should play in building the necessary conditions to insure Mali's territorial integrity. Le Drian does not formulate his speech act as a suggestion, he stresses "it has to be the CEDEAO or the African Union, perhaps both" (Le Drian, 2012). Nevertheless, later in his speech, Le Drian opens about the possibility of seeing an "European intervention", both "civil and military" to "consolidate the rule of law" and "ensure security" (ibid). The French government through its

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minister of defence sends mixed signals, though it ascribes responsibility to the African neighbours of Mali, it opens to the eventuality of a European intervention of security. There will however be no more mentions of a European military intervention in the remaining of the year 2012. When addressing the parliament, ministers put forward how European nations as well as States in Sahel have “high expectations vis-à-vis of France” (Fabius, 2012b), this conveys the idea that France’s active involvement is pushed by its European partners and “African friends” (ibid). While at this stage France’s involvement is limited to a role of facilitator, there is a sense that French officials are justifying being involved at all, qualifying African countries as “friends” (Fabius, 2012b; Fabius, 2012c) Fabius suggests that France’s facilitating work is simply explained by the ties of friendship it has with Mali and many Sahelian nations due to their historical relationship. What will really set the course straight for France mobilizing efforts is François Hollande’s speeches held at the general assembly of the United Nations in September 2012. Hollande “asks” for a new gathering of the security council of the United Nation to organize the military intervention led by African states that resolution 2056 allows, he stresses, to “set into motion an intervention the fastest possible” (Hollande, 2012c). The sense of urgency that Hollande wants to share to his audience is further amplified when he argues that there is “no point in negotiating”, extraordinary action being the only viable solution to deal with the terrorist groups. As mentioned in the previous section, the terrorists are presented as groups that cannot be reasoned with, that has no accountability to international norms. Hollande in his speech acts of mobilization, ascribes responsibility to his audience, to the United Nations and United Nations security as he argues that “we need to take our responsibility”. This responsibility he believes is to make sure that “we can intervene” that “Africa can intervene”, he stresses that Africa will have the “key to its security” only if “we” (the UN) “provide international legality” (Hollande, 2012c). Hollande is determined, France will “support every initiative”, “do everything it can logistically” and concludes “the time has come” for international community to once again “take its responsibility” (Hollande, 2012c). This call for the international community to act will be translated into the resolution 2071, voted unanimously by the United Nations security council, it opens the way for the deployment of an international, military force.

France positioning becomes clearer, in this ‘first’ mobilizing stage, it has played a facilitating role in mobilizing the international community around the Malian, laying the groundwork, for an international military intervention. France argues that it will continue to play a facilitating role as

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well as it will provide logistical assistance. Nevertheless, both to domestic and international audience, the French government assures and insists, France “will not intervene militarily” (Hollande, 2012c), leaving this responsibility to African nations. The following section will investigate how France the official discourse has evolved following the start of intervention Serval.

5.2.2 Mobilization following the start of the intervention

The second phase of mobilization intervened after France launched operation Serval in January 2013. Thanks to the constitutional setting of the French Republic, François Hollande and its government did not have to bring the official reasons and goals of the operation until four days after it started. This section will analyse the speech acts that intend to justify the decision to deploy troops.

The previous phase analysed how France strived to mobilize the international community. This mobilization has resulted in the vote of UNSC resolutions that allow for international military operations in Mali. The resolutions responded to France’s “demand” (Hollande, 2012c) to provide a strong legal framework for African countries to intervene. Potentially opening for France to send its military too, despite the French government official reluctance to this idea. France caution vanished when on the 10th of January the president of Mali by interim, formulated an official request of intervention to François Hollande and France. This letter followed the taking of the city of Kona by the terrorist forces. The UNSC resolutions and this letter provide a strong legal backing to the operation, nevertheless when a military operation lasts more than four months, the French parliament is required to vote on its continuation or cessation. The French government was logically required to mobilize the parliament behind the operation. Throughout their speeches, ministers once again vilified the terrorists while their advance into southern Mali has repeatedly been qualified as “an aggression” (Ayrault, 2013b; Ayrault, 2013c; Fabius, 2013a). The use of such term echoes a military vocabulary and consequently may call for military countermeasures. Ministers stressed the urgency to act, in order to justify the unilateral decision to launch operation Serval Le Drian (2013) argues, that “given the urgency” there was no time to “open negotiations on a potential coalition”, reinforcing the idea that the decision was impulsive, that the French government desire to remain a facilitator was pushed to the very end. In the first stage of

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mobilization, France played an essential role in ascribing responsibility to the international community as well as to itself. In the second stage, French officials become more passive, France is said to have intervened “at the request of the Malian president” (Ayrault, 2013b), this shifts the table in a way that portrays France as an helpful friend, cutting with the virile “demands” of president Hollande (2012c), to gather the UN security council behind the issue in September. Fabius argues that “France has no interests to intervene” (2013a). The first phase of mobilization observed that the speeches of Francois Hollande at the 67th session of the United Nations General Assembly (Hollande, 2012a; Hollande, 2012c), played a key role in mobilizing the international audience to take extraordinary measures for Mali. The French securitizing moves triggered the establishment of means that made an international intervention possible. The second phase of mobilization highlighted how the French government presented its involvement in a much less ‘active’ light. As such, Operation Serval is merely presented as a necessary response to help an endangered friendly nation given the urgency of the situation.

Though the two phases of mobilization have distinct rhetoric, they are not opposed. Indeed, the active mobilization of the international community to produce resolution allowing military intervention in Mali has paved the way for France to justify and legitimize its military involvement subsequently to its parliament. Thus, the stage of mobilization can be seen as doubly successful for the French government and its securitizing efforts. The well-embeddedness of international institutions is one of the key constituents of the next stage and shall therefore be discussed further.

5.3 Stage of desecuritization

The final stage of the sequential model, the stage of desecuritization, observes how the securitizing actor will strive to normalize and give a certain degree of routine to the emergency measures that have been enacted. With this final stage the securitizing actor will have to adapt its speech acts considerably, evidenced by its three facilitating conditions: the securitizing actor declares the measures as successful and downplays its future involvement (VII); and the securitizing actor stresses a return to normality and institutionalization of the issue (VIII). In order to better identify

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the desecuritizing dynamics in the material, three coding categories have been established: Success/Peace and Stability / Return to normality.

The concluding remarks of the previous stage identified elements of desecuritization present in the same speeches as the mobilization. This is yet another indication that, applied to the specific case of this study, the divisions between the different stages of the sequential model of securitization are blurred. This is due to do the early institutionalization of the conflict as well as the constitutional setting of France that allows the executive power to launch military operations without the consent of its parliament prior to the start of the operation.

Institutionalization is identified as one of the facilitating conditions for the stage of desecuritization to take place. As the mobilization stage has revealed, the institutionalization of France's involvement in Mali and Sahel started months before the eventual operation in January 2013, herein institutionalization defines the routinization of the intervention but also its well-embeddedness in institutional settings, particularly provided by the United Nations. Le Drian is not shy to express France efforts and responsibility in passing the UNSC resolutions for Mali. He claims, "it took France's initiative of mobilization" (Le Drian, 2013a); "the minister of foreign affairs had to take the necessary initiatives" (ibid) on the resolution that allows for international intervention. These speech acts reveal that France takes a lot, if not all, of the credit for the mobilization of the United Nations to tackle the security issue. Ensuring that France could operate with the blessing of the United Nations security council has been a key in legitimizing the well-funded nature of the intervention to the French parliament. When addressing the national assembly, in the early days of operation Serval, Ayrault maintains that France operates "within the limits" of the charter of the United Nation" (Ayrault, 2013b), France has "the support of the international community" (ibid). Fabius goes further and claims that "the opportunity and legality" (Fabius, 2013a) of the operation is "uncontested" (ibid), and African states are "unanimously relieved" (ibid), this is a strong claim to make, it is virtually impossible to insure of its veracity, however it frames the idea that France's intervention is universally accepted, thus further legitimizing it.

When a securitization move has for one of its outcomes the deployment of troops on foreign territory, observers will be particularly prone to observe whether the deployment does indeed bring more security than insecurity. It is therefore important for security actors to present indications of success. In the early stage of France involvement, features of military success were exposed "We

stopped the offensive” (Ayrault, 2013b), “we intervened and avoided the collapse of the Malian state” (Ayrault, 2013c), Serval is qualified as “the reconquest of Mali by our forces” (Fabius, 2013b). The French prime minister, through its speech act, seeks to portray Serval as a vector of national pride “a success which should make every French person proud” (Ayrault, 2013e). The operation it is not only a success for the impact it has had on Mali but also because it has “increased France’s influence”, continuing by arguing that countries capable of such operations “can be counted on one hand’s fingers” (Ayrault et al., 2013). Associated with this evidence of success are claims of the normalization of the situation. This normalization is identifiable in the themes mentioned by the French government, it is one of France’s repeated goal to “bring back political stability to the country” (Ayrault, 2013b; Fabius, 2013a; Le Drian, 2013c). Along with the re-politicization of Mali comes the “re-establishment of stable democratic institutions” (Ayrault, 2013b) and the “perspective of development” for “Mali and all this particularly poor region of Africa” (ibid), identifying political and development goals shifts from the exceptionality of military discourse to a much more ‘normal’ one. Finally, as the “process is not over” (Ayrault, 2013 e), and there needs to be a “containment of the terrorist threat” to “consolidate the successes” (ibid). In the day that preceded the vote of the parliaments on the continuation of operation Serval, Ayrault, Fabius and Le Drian addressed the Senate jointly and claimed that “the entirety” of the Malian territory was believed to be “liberated”, and terrorism only “residual” (Ayrault et al., 2013).

In the weeks that followed the start of operation Serval, the peacekeeping missions AFISMA⁸ and later of the MINUSMA, were implemented, traducing an additional process of institutionalization. It is argued that these operations, though different in nature to operation Serval will “progressively take over” France’s military control of northern Mali (Ayrault, 2013e), the French government seeks to downplay its involvement, arguing it “has not vocation to last in time” (Ayrault, 2013 d). In September 2013, eight months after the start of the operation, Francois Hollande claimed in front of the United nations General Assembly that “today positive results are recognized” and Mali has “recovered its national integrity” (Hollande, 2013). In September 2014, merely a month after Barkhane replaced operation Serval, President Hollande did not mention the situation of Mali or Sahel in his address to the assembly (Hollande, 2014). A striking illustration that the French

⁸ African-led International Support Mission to Mali.

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intervention, at least in the eyes of the French government has become normal. It is additionally fair to say that France had then already acquired the necessary legitimacy to deal with the situation.

5.4 Findings

The facilitating conditions listed by the theoretical framework were all evidenced in this studied, it is therefore reasonable to argue that securitization theory and its developments has proven to be a relevant tool to address the puzzle of this research. There were, however, some limitations. They are primarily explained by the nature of the French intervention. Indeed, as operation Serval was appointed without the formal support of the French parliament, the French government did not have to ‘mobilize’ before it could implement extraordinary measures.

6. Conclusion

This research aimed to provide a better understanding of the processes behind the legitimization of military interventions. With a focus on how the French government successfully legitimized its interventions in Mali and Sahel. This thesis argued that applying a framework of Securitization theory to this puzzle could help in uncovering keen mechanisms of legitimization, and asked the following research question: How can securitization theory help in understanding the legitimization of the French interventions in Sahel?

A first step has therefore been to review how previous literature has approached similar research. Revealing that the original account of the securitization theory, though insightful and extremely replicable, needed additional developments to study the matter at hand. In this regard, the accounts of Paul Roe (2008) and Hubert Zimmermann (2017) have been especially beneficial.

A theoretical framework has been developed and argues that in the successful legitimization of a military intervention, lies a sequential process, where three stages are observable, the stages of identification; mobilization; and desecuritization. This model claims that while an audience may

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accept an issue as a security threat it may disagree over the use of extraordinary measures against it. Furthermore, it argues that the scope of what is understood as a successful securitization within military interventions should be extended. Rather than considering the implementation of the said extraordinary measures as a successful process of securitization, this framework includes subsequent efforts to transfer the intervention back into the sphere of normality. Thus, a successful securitization is concluded when a sending state has acquired the necessary legitimacy to deal with the situation and its military engagement has become stable.

The application of the theoretical framework has been supported by the qualitative content analysis methodology. The material selected for the analysis centred exclusively on speeches that were uttered by five distinct members of the French government, in front of the French parliament and the United Nations General Assembly. To extract data, the qualitative content analysis operationalised the theoretical framework into coding categories.

The analysis revealed that the chosen theoretical and methodological tools were adapted to study the puzzle of this thesis. It highlighted the processes of discursive legitimation that were employed by the French government to legitimize its actions. In the months that led to the deployment of its forces, France actively mobilized the international community to intervene, while after its deployment it considerably tuned down and normalized its involvement.

The theoretical framework and methodology employed have proven to be relevant, and importantly they are certainly adapted to future research that seeks to examine the discursive legitimization of military interventions. It is a framework that is broad enough to convene many different cases, while it simultaneously provides clear guidelines and variables.

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