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France Report

Francois Gaulme

1 | Introduction

France's traditional way of coordinating the bureaucratic implementation of government policy has been through the Prime Minister's Office (Secrétariat général du Gouvernement), which has a staff of 100. However, since the last decade, France has adopted a whole-of-government approach (WGA) that is generally referred to as the 'approche intégrée'. Indeed, the French civil service does not use the term 'whole-of-government approach', its acronym or even the official French translation from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OCDE-DAC): 'Approche à l'échelle de l'ensemble de l'administration'.

At the moment, the French 'approche intégrée' is still strictly limited to defining and implementing the national strategy for responding to external conflicts and crises in an integrated way under the banner of the so-called '3 D's' (diplomacy, defence, development). The 3D system is still strictly limited to security, development and diplomacy (i.e. peacemaking). Granted, the AFD, France's development agency, did list "support for the private sector in vulnerable contexts" as part of its WGA strategy for the 2017–2021 period (AFD 2018: 24), and when commenting specifically on the Sahel situation, President Emmanuel Macron referred to a link between climate change and armed conflicts. However, such issues are generally beyond the scope of the 'approche intégrée' system. Ministries, such those in charge of trade or environment issues, are not brought into an 'approche intégrée' process unless this is explicitly requested by the president or the 3D ministries. In this case, they would send one or two specialised agents/experts to high-level meetings at the Elysée Palace or

elsewhere, whose involvement would be kept to a necessary minimum and would not be placed on a formalised and/or permanent basis.

Macron is the first French president to have ever explicitly referred to the 3D formula, which he did in speeches delivered to the Annual French Ambassadors' Conference in 2017 and 2018. Under the highly presidential and centralised system of the France's Fifth Republic, such formal speeches are an overarching statement for developing any further governmental action in a strategic field.

For France, adopting a WGA strategy to responding to crises and conflicts in developing countries was the consequence of the decision to join the international coalition in Afghanistan following the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, DC. From the start, its involvement had a military (troop deployments in the field) and a civilian (development projects) aspect, with the latter projects being viewed as supporting further military action in the medium to long terms. Both were part of what was acknowledged in the West at the time as an 'end-state strategy' that would supposedly lead not only to a military victory as a final stage, but also (and as a final stage) to a permanent state of 'sustainable peace' featuring economic and social development under a fair, inclusive and democratic system of governance.

Emerging WGA concepts were discussed among the coalition's member states in military circles (in particular, within and around the NATO network) and among official development assistance (ODA) institutions, whether bilateral (national) or multilateral (international). The conceptual debate focused on the OECD-DAC's semi-formal efforts with specialised subsidiary bodies on conflicts and, under American and British pressure, on 'fragile states' after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Although it was not a member (and was very critical) of this new coalition, France did opt to send representatives to the forum on fragile states held in London in January 2005, which was jointly organised by the OECD and the World Bank. French development experts – originally from the AFD and subsequently also from what was then the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development – participated in an international process that led to the "10 principles for good international engagement in fragile states" that were defined by consensus and formally adopted (at the ministerial level) by the OECD-DAC members in April 2007 (OECD 2007).

The fifth of the above-mentioned principles ("Recognise the links between political, security and development objectives") led France to adopt additional WGA strategies at the national level. However, the government body directly responsible for ODA got this process off to a somewhat tentative and slow-moving start. For example, the OECD-DAC reference document of 2006 titled "Whole of Government Approaches in Fragile States" (OECD 2006) had no noticeable impact on governmental processes in France at the time. Nevertheless, in 2006, France's Ministry of Defence did ask the AFD to become a civilian element of a series of NATO-style civilian-military crisis-containment simulation exercises, such as ones involving scenarios in Afghanistan and West Africa. Then, in 2008, the establishment of the Crisis and Conflict Unit (CCC) inside the AFD's Strategy Directorate signalled that the French government had made a significant – and lasting – shift to a new conflict-sensitive approach to the country's ODA.

The word 'lasting' was stressed above because this was not France's first tentative experience with a WGA. During the 1990s, the British 'New Labour' government instituted a new policy for dealing with the kinds of civil wars in West African countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea)

that were spilling over into neighbouring countries. As part of this policy, a new 'Conflict Pool' was set up in 2001 to serve as a fund for conflict-prevention and peacebuilding projects around the world, with its budget being shared by the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Ministry of Defence. This innovation supplied a new and creative international WGA model to other Western nations. Applying such a model to a French structured response to African conflicts was contemplated once by the development assistance section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the AFD, but the project was ultimately shortlived. This was due not only to the usual administrative turf battles, but also – and mostly – to a tradition in place since the beginning of the Fifth Republic of coordinating any whole-of-government policies at the very top of the state system – i.e. at the level of the presidency.

In the end, the crucial political event that led to the adoption of a formal, geographically centred WGA system in France was the fight against terrorism in the Sahel and, specifically, the country's direct military intervention in the region in Operation Serval (January 2013 to July 2014) and Operation Barkhane (July 2014 to present). This integrated approach, or 'approche intégrée' in France's bureaucratic terminology, marked the first time that France had ever dealt with a sub-regional African problem in such a way. It was both strategically and operationally top-down in that it was strictly and personally defined and controlled by the president with the assistance of various government sections on an ad hoc basis.

2 | What policies have been developed to further policy coherence?

In its 2018 Development Co-operation Peer Review for France, the OECD-DAC noted some progress in ODA policy coherence for France since the previous review from five years earlier (OECD 2018: 30–32). In their report, the DAC reviewers, or 'examiners', (including the Netherlands and Luxembourg) also emphasised (ibid.: 31) that there is "great awareness of international developments within ministries", and cited two examples to demonstrate this: (1) the signing in June 2016 of the framework agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the AFD, and (2) the International Migration and Development Plan 2018–2022 (DGM/MEAE 2018). The report describes the latter as "the culmination of an interministerial effort involving close co-operation with local governments and civil society".

However, the DAC's positive assessment was also delivered with a clear and final caveat (ibid.), saying that "France needs to ensure that it does not subordinate development aid to issues related to security, domestic policy or regulation of migratory flows". Thus, when it comes to ODA, the DAC continues to prioritise the fighting-against-poverty dimension, even when taking 'security' issues and outcomes into account.

At the same time, on the military-security and armed-forces side, as was noted in a recent report of the UN's secretary-general on the Sahel (UN 2019: 4): "In January [2019], the Joint Force, the European Union, MINUSMA, Operation Barkhane and Malian armed forces created the Coordinating Body for Mali, which is convened on a monthly basis and serves as a framework to enhance information-sharing and coordination among the various military and security forces present in Mali."

If we except such external commitments, France's WGA policy remains strictly defined on a domestic basis by a couple of not-so-binding framework papers and, more importantly, is disseminated via formal bureaucratic instructions from the presidency throughout the whole governmental system. During our survey in preparation for this report, interviewees stressed the importance of the 'independence' of French policy vis-à-vis UN policy in Mali, for instance. As to the European Global Strategy, with its very limited operational character, it seems to have had no direct influence on France's WGA.

At present, France's WGA strategy is being defined by official documents from the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) and the AFD, but political decisions will only be taken on the presidential level. Similarly, coordinated implementation will be controlled via a series of top-down arrangements that include daily follow-up by the president with the support of his staff (i.e. diplomatic advisers and the 'chef d'état-major particulier', the military chief of staff to the French president) and with regular inter-governmental meetings formally taking place at the Elysée Palace.

The main official document on WGA related to crisis-containment is the 2018 report titled 'Prevention, Resilience and Sustainable Peace (2018–2022): A Comprehensive Approach to the Fragilization of States and Societies' (DGM/MEAE 2018). One should note, however, that this report has a deliberately vague status as a 'strategy report' rather than being the simple 'strategy' one would expect, which means it is not a fully binding policy document. In fact, on the report's back cover, it specifically acknowledges that "France's new strategy on responding to situations of fragility" was the document issued by the (prime minister-chaired) Interministerial Committee for International Co-operation and Development (CICID) on 8 February 2018, which was the first time the committee met after President Macron's election.

Since then, the president's verbal references to a 3D approach have had more policy-binding power within the French civil service and the military than administrative communications documents, such as the 'strategy report' discussed above, which are mostly aimed at the limited part of the governmental system in charge of ODA.

3 | Who are the main actors involved in cooperating in a WGA?

At present, the French actors involved in WGA are almost exclusively concerned with situations in Africa. However, this has not always been the case. For example, in 2009, a four-member 'Afpak Unit' ('Cellule Afpak') was created in Paris within the Asia Directorate of what was then called the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. The unit was tasked with overseeing daily coordination among French diplomatic, military and civilian-assistance actors in Afghanistan and Pakistan. During the international '3 C' Conference on improving results in fragile and conflict situations held in Geneva in March 2009, France formally presented this unit as a novel and efficient example of implementing a WGA policy in a context – in this case Afghanistan – in which France did not agree with the coalition's policies of using provisional reconstruction teams (PRTs) to coordinate military and civilian actions in the field.

However, since 2012 and the presidency of Francois Hollande, France's geo-strategic priorities have pivoted back from Asia and the Middle East towards Africa, especially due to the surging crises in the Sahel and the Central African Republic (CAR).

During Hollande's presidential term, inter-departmental meetings were held at the presidency every Thursday to discuss the implementation of the WGA in Africa. These formal meetings (i.e. they had an agenda and minutes were taken) were jointly chaired by the diplomatic cell (Africa section) and the deputy military chief of staff to the president. Joining them were about 25 to 30 specialised higher civil servants (i.e. at the level of a director or ministerial cabinet adviser), including representatives of the parastatal AFD and the military intelligence. The agenda for each weekly meeting included three to four items. These mostly concerned the Sahel, the CAR and other matters requiring urgent attention, but they also touched on more structural matters related to African crises. According to a former presidential aide, the political aim was to keep a tight and closed loop for decision-making. While those attending the meetings would discuss at length issues related to timing and the level of military and civilian engagement, the president alone – as the person formally in charge of foreign policy at the top – took every final decision.

Meanwhile, on a lower and more technical level, one could at the time (and might still be able to) observe in the Ministry of Defence a concentration of the strategic and operational WGA activities related to both civilian-military collaboration and strictly military efforts under the leadership of the general chief of staff (CEMA). This official also has overall responsibility for strategic conceptualisation and testing, but these tasks are managed in practice by the major-general in charge of the 'Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrines et d'expérimentations' (CICDE), a military establishment that has traditionally focused on developing and testing concepts for activities on the national or multinational levels while taking an operational prospective. In fact, this unit played a major role in developing and disseminating the 'approche intégrée' and 'end-state strategies' to the French civil service and AFD.

On the development-assistance side, one would also notice a similar separation. More general WGA conceptualisation is handled by the Democratic Governance Mission of the MEAE. And more operational-level coordination among the implementation projects run by the AFD is overseen by its Africa Directorate, which itself is supported by the in-house advisory work of the Crises and Conflict Unit (CCC).

A major change occurred at the top level of France's WGA system when Emmanuel Macron became president in May 2017. According to higher French civil servants in Paris, Macron's administration took a more 'pragmatic' approach to the country's priorities in Africa than the Hollande administration had, focusing mostly but not exclusively on the Sahel region and the immediate and growing security and immigration threats to France that has emerged since 2013.

As part of the change, the formal weekly WGA meetings on Africa of the Hollande era were replaced with on-the-spot meetings at the Elysée Palace organised by the Africa/Indian Ocean Directorate (DAOI) of the MEAE and attended by a limited but varying number of participants drawn from the administration. The meetings were and continue to be focused on the more than 4,000 French troops deployed to the entire region as parts of Operation Serval and its successor, Operation Barkhane. The missions are under a UN mandate and are supported by the 'G5 Sahel' ('G5 S'). This new regional grouping, created in 2016 on Mauritania's initiative, is made up of forces from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger, and it has both development and military objectives. The 'G5 S' surge and the deteriorating military situation in Mali and Burkina

Faso led to new coordination and a more hands-on role for French diplomats under the new president's strict personal control.

On 4 September 2017, with the president's blessing, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian appointed Jean-Marc Châtaigner, a career diplomat who had previously specialised on development and fragile-state issues, to be France's ambassador/special envoy to the Sahel for a two-year period. Directly under the minister's supervision, Châtaigner's main task was to pilot the coordination of French military and civilian action in the region, especially in connection with the 'G5 S' and the Sahel Alliance. This alliance of international donors was launched in July 2017 to enhance stability and global development in the region by financing and coordinating projects. Its members include the African Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the EU and eight of its member states.

This Sahel 'special envoy' system was confirmed in September 2019 when Christophe Bigot, the outgoing ambassador to Senegal, replaced Châtaigner at the end of his mandate. What's more, at the G7 summit held in Biarritz in August 2019, France announced that the 'G5 S' civilian-military cooperation and coordination would be extended to the coastal West African countries of Ghana, Ivory Coast and Senegal.

Under a rather complex administrative system, the Sahel special envoy – with the support of a full-time assistant, a junior desk officer from the MEAE's Africa Directorate – manages the first among a set of two coordination task forces. This first task force is a regrouping of military (Ministry of Defence), development (AFD, Alliance Sahel) and stabilisation (the MEAE's Crisis and Conflict Unit) actors with social and economic-development objectives. The second task force, controlled at the MEAE's West Africa Sub-directorate level and not by the special envoy, focuses on Mali and deals with more sensitive politico-military affairs strictly between diplomats and the military.

The two converging task forces meet every three months to review their objectives. Depending on the specific matter under consideration at the time, they may reassign – on a temporary basis and as required – specialised agents from any ministerial department and the AFD and then report the agents' findings to the upper political level (i.e. the presidency and the cabinet). The task forces are also in charge of jointly implementing the Sahel Survey ('Revue Sahel'), a roughly 10-page document produced annually on an inter-ministerial basis and then discussed and revised at the higher level of the permanent council of defence and security (CDSN) specifically for Mali that Francois Hollande created in the Elysée Palace after the January 2013 military intervention in Mali.

According to French diplomatic sources in Paris, four main 'pillars' are considered by the joint Sahel task forces: politico-military, development, inter-departmental communication and criminal trafficking. The Sahel task forces' outcomes have included joint regional mapping, joint analysis of the 3D activities, and a shared review of the different paces of implementation of diplomatic, military and humanitarian agents as well as longer-term development actors. At the field level, the joint task forces have tried to improve the working environment in the less secure zones for the humanitarian and development actors. In the 'G5 S' countries, the actions of the development task force have been placed under the authority of the French heads of diplomatic missions. Exchanges of personnel have also been facilitated. For example, since

September 2018, an AFD adviser has been assisting the major-general in charge of Operation Barkhane on development issues.

At the moment, France does not have any WGA arrangements like those for the Sahel either for the CAR or other conflicts in Central Africa or the rest of the world. With the exception of possibly broadening the 'G5 S' coordination area in West Africa, the French government will probably not give serious consideration to putting in place a more global WGA policy in the foreseeable future.

4 | How does your country operationalise a WGA?

Inherited from the Bourbon kings, perfected during the military- and emperor-centred Napoleonic system of power, and never drastically reformed since then, France's modern and strictly pyramidal formal administrative structure is still capable of smoothly implementing any kind of coordinated action directed from the highest political level under a regulated process, whatever the specific aim or subject may be.

Though limited in its scope, France's WGA policy for the Sahel is a good example of such a system's present successes as well as its limitations. The latter especially results from the lack of policymaking dialogue between the executive and parliament as well as from the difficulty of properly dealing with the predominantly informal nature of African politics, economies and societies.

According to statements by members of the 'special envoy' task force for the Sahel interviewed during the preliminary survey for this report, the actual efficiency and framing of the Sahel WGA policy reflected lessons learned from previous French WGA experiments in the Balkans (Kosovo) and Afghanistan during the two last decades. The approach, they argued, was more flexible and less bureaucratic than before in its integrated inter-departmental structures. For example, each ministerial department and the AFD were given free rein to define their own actions and needs within the broader framework of the two coordinated task forces.

To an external observer of the French system as it is operating in mid-2019, enablers of a WGA policy are to be found in two places. First, they are at the very top level of the French political system, where the presidency's influence has been strengthening under Emmanuel Macron's bold, dedicated and personalised leadership. Second, in terms of a more inclusive top-to-bottom approach, they are found among the military, whose members are generally keen to be supported by civilian development programmes in efforts to bring lasting stability to the Sahel region. On the AFC side, as a unit that has specialised on conflicts and crises since 2008, the CCC is also a structural enabler for WGA and one that is becoming increasingly important for providing topical support to operational programmes and projects.

On the other hand, disablers of a WGA are to be almost randomly located all along the cross-departmental spectrum. For example, there are many civil servants working in silos and in a very traditionally bureaucratic way who sometimes – and particularly during recent years – have been reluctant to be forced to 'mingle' with military affairs.

According to my own experience, another obstacle to implementing a WGA can be found among development practitioners at the lower and middle levels. A rather common feeling among them, either in the field or at the headquarters, is that they already have to take into account too many diligence processes when implementing ODA projects, and that they would definitely be overburdened if new WGA-related responsibilities would be added to their existing workload.

A deeper, though less visible problem is a vague but widespread desire to return to silos, so to speak – that is, to abandon coordinated strategies and go back to the traditional system of having independent ministerial departments and agencies. Indeed, this desire for less uniformity can be detected in some slight differences in vocabulary used in various strategic documents. For example, it is ‘strategy report’ for 2018 (DGM/MEAE 2018), the MEAE’s Directorate-general for Global Affairs preferred to use the political term ‘fragilité’ (fragility). On the other hand, in its strategy-framing document for the same year (AFD 2018), the AFD opted for the more economic term ‘vulnérabilité’ (vulnerability).

An additional and quite structural obstacle to fully operationalising a WGA in France is the lack of parliamentary and/or civil society involvement in actually conceptualising and implementing such an approach. This has been particularly emphasised by an official working paper commissioned by the prime minister and submitted in August 2018 by Hervé Berville, a young development practitioner of African origin who is a member of parliament from President Macron’s party (Berville 2018). Well covered by the media, military operations in the Sahel have become an object of both national pride and suspicion as well as a common topic of heated public discussion in France. However, as Berville pointed out, ODA does not enjoy widespread popular support, it is still very technical and uncoordinated, and it is not sufficiently monitored or evaluated. Furthermore, a distinctive feature of the critiques and recommendations in Berville’s report focus on European rather than strictly French solutions. For example, in the third of his 36 ‘propositions’, Berville calls for the establishment of a new European commissioner in charge of the “Europe-Africa partnership”. The Berville Report was briefly mentioned and praised by President Macron in the speech he delivered to French ambassadors at the Elysée Palace on 27 August 2018. A new law on development assistance is on the (very packed) 2019 agenda of the parliament, and there is growing pressure to review immigration and ODA policies on both the national and EU levels. However, it is unlikely that any new WGA structures will emerge in France in the near future.

5 | Conclusions

Since the turn of the 21st century, France has certainly made progress in terms of developing its WGA strategy for mitigating crises and conflict situations in less developed countries, mostly in the former French colonial territories of West Africa now referred to as the Sahel. Still, the government’s current WGA system is incomplete, loosely implemented and concentrated at the top, and it has a shallow conceptual and procedural grounding within the various departmental structures.

Given these circumstances, the external observer is led to question the hypothesis that a WGA which is regulated in a manner that is more formalised and thus more independent of the respective actors will be more likely to give rise to synergies and reduce or avoid any friction

losses. However, France's experiences with its national 'approche intégrée' version of a WGA seems to argue against this hypothesis. Indeed, the country has been able to smoothly implement responses to crises and conflicts using a policy that is exclusively managed from the top by a highly restricted group of political decision-makers rather than through a cross-governmental consensus among middle-rank civil servants and military officers who are supposed to produce a regulated WGA restricted to the '3 D's' (diplomacy, defence, development) and supported by procedural documents with binding stipulations regarding actions.

Regarding France's rationale for adopting its 'approche intégrée,' it would seem that the aim is more geared towards making the decision-making process as tight and streamlined as possible for the president, who is head of both the civilian state and the army, than towards institutionalising a formal set of administrative practices. In support of this argument, one can point to the non-compulsory nature of the 2018 CICDE WGA handbook of practical regulations for military officers in the theatre of war as well as its quite limited influence outside defence circles. One can also detect in places a strong reluctance to accept the technocratic jargon associated with the debate around WGAs. For example, one senior diplomat interviewed for this report stressed that he was proud to play his part in a traditional and broadly defined 'approche intégrée', but that he would strongly reject any WGA instructions in the form of what he compared to "novlangue", the French translation of 'newspeak', the term George Orwell used in his 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for what the Cambridge Dictionary defines as a "language used by politicians and government officials that is intentionally difficult to understand and does not mean what it seems to mean and is therefore likely to confuse or deceive people."

Such a non-bureaucratic and politically dominated option is particularly visible in France's WGA practice in several contrasting features of the whole system. This first and most striking one is that, since the process of forming permanent WGA structures was started in the last decade, they have been limited to the Ministry of Defence (with its CICDE) and the AFD (with its CCC), both of which are small units and no more than in-house think tanks. Tellingly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has never considered establishing an analogous body.

One should note that a group of civil servants and military officials did give thought to the possibility of introducing 3D 'conflict pools' like those of the British (discussed above). Nevertheless, despite increasing external security threats, nothing concrete has come of this in the political or administrative contexts of France under the last four presidents. Under President Macron, the one and only effective and wider-ranging WGA arrangement has been the joint Sahel task forces, a temporary and strictly ad hoc arrangement, as was the more informal Africa network under Hollande's presidency.

Another indication that France's WGA structure is not fully mature is the fact that there continues to be a strong separation between the country's diplomatic/military sphere and the development-assistance sector, as their various agents have unequal access to classified intelligence and/or scripted 'diplomatic notes' (NDIs).

A persistent and dominant feature is that France's WGA strategy tends to be presented as being fundamentally more pragmatic than conceptual both at home (by its actors and the political and administrative classes in Paris) and abroad. The persistence of this attitude

regardless of the party in power (in addition to budgetary restrictions) might explain the disconnect between developing a WGA strategy and actually implementing it. For example, although a large set of goals have been clearly identified (especially for the Sahel and West Africa), the human resources specifically allocated to coordinating the implementation of these goals along the whole process have been extremely limited. In fact, as mentioned above, there are only 20 to 30 people permanently tasked with WGA-related issues in all the ministerial departments and the AFD. What's more, the presidential diplomatic team, which is in charge of ensuring the coherence of upper-level decision-making together with the military advisers in the president's 'maison militaire', is notoriously understaffed.

Finally, another limit to an effective WGA in France is the fact that parliament is kept out of the decision-making loop. This major feature of the Fifth Republic's system is a legacy of the 'monarque républicain' style of governance of General De Gaulle. Such an attitude persists to this day. As one interviewee pointed out when discussing the specific issue of (the lack of) cooperation or coordination with parliament: "This is not our culture."

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