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Helping your friends in need? Military Interventions and the Reliability of Defense Cooperation Agreements

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Whether a state intervenes militarily in international crises and civil wars depends on the type of relations the two states maintain. Formal alliance and defense cooperation agreements are a costly signal of assistance but not in every case can a country count on its friends. The reliability of cooperation agreements is especially important for smaller states that are dependent on support from a powerful ally. However, many alliances are not honored. Military interventions by former colonial powers need to be reassessed in light of alliance reliability and post-colonial political and economic ties. Contradictory expectations emerge if the protective power maintain close ties to both belligerents, which is especially the case for major powers that pursue broader spheres of interest.

This paper will systematically investigate the patterns of French military interventions in Africa and ask why it intervened in some former colonies but not in others. In the past, France often responded to requests for military support when asked by a protégé, while at other times, it remained inactive despite an existing defense cooperation agreement. There is variation of French interventions across countries but also for individual countries over time, such as in Chad where France intervened frequently but not in all critical situations. Relying on data from the Thorette report on French military operations abroad and the International Military Intervention dataset, we will assess the relative importance of defense cooperation agreements. Accounting for various opportunities that arise in the potential target state, such as military coups, rebellions, and international militarized disputes, we will investigate under what conditions the French government decided to send military support. A better understanding of whether France has been a reliable alliance partner or intervened selectively depending on its own geostrategic and economic interests will help explaining why it lost ground in Africa.

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No

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