



Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali / MINUSMA

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Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

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Abstract

Until 2016, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was a relatively successful peace operation. It managed to improve stability in Northern Mali, decrease the number of civilians killed in the conflict, and allow large numbers of displaced persons to return home. MINUSMA also supported the organisation of the 2013 elections and assisted the peace process culminating in the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, also known as the Algiers Agreement. Many of these achievements are still standing and are particularly impressive considering the size of the country, the logistical challenges, the hostile security environment, and, in spite of a \$1 billion budget, the relatively limited resources for implementing its mandate.

However, since 2016, MINUSMA's effectiveness in terms of stabilisation and the protection of civilians (PoC) has decreased. Violence has increased as jihadist groups have been attacking MINUSMA, the Forces Armées Maliennes (FAMA), and the Algiers Agreement signatories. As a consequence, MINUSMA has sustained an extraordinary number of fatalities compared to other recent UN peace operations. In addition to the challenging situation in the North, Central Mali has destabilised significantly, particularly since 2016. In the regions of Mopti and Segou, the growing presence of and attacks carried out by jihadist groups have triggered the further retreat of an already relatively absent state. Jihadist activities and retaliation by government forces have stoked the proliferation of self-defence militias and a vicious cycle of inter-communal violence that has reached unprecedented levels. MINUSMA has only been mandated to help the Malian Government address the situation since June 2018, but has never received adequate resources to be effective.

The EPON research team conducted 66 interviews with MINUSMA and other international officials, Malian officials, civil society representatives, and researchers; organised focus group meetings with civil society in Bamako, Gao and Mopti; and conducted literature and document research. The team found that MINUSMA is facing much criticism. Interviewees and focus group meeting participants feel the Mission is no longer able to improve peace and stability in Mali, and they readily described MINUSMA's shortcomings. At the same time, there is consensus that, in the absence of MINUSMA, the security situation in Mali, and perhaps even the whole region, would likely deteriorate significantly.

Strategic policy dilemmas

Currently, MINUSMA finds itself at a crossroads. It needs time to succeed, but this is also valuable time Mali does not have at this moment. In the meantime, civilians suffer from attacks, while the US particularly is losing interest in supporting a costly UN peace operation that is not able to deliver quick results. MINUSMA might regain momentum for the stabilisation of Mali, and the broader Sahel region, if strategic choices are made on a number of policy dilemmas. On the other hand, if the UN Security Council makes budget-driven choices, and continues to desire more without adequate resourcing, the results may be disastrous. Some of the main strategic policy dilemmas the Mission faces are described below.

To decentralise the Mission, or not? Although originally large parts of MINUSMA's civilian component were meant to be deployed in the field, logistical and security reasons have prevented this from happening. Currently, large parts of the civilian component are concentrated in Bamako. This has as an advantage easier communication with the central government, and it facilitates the institution-building side of the mandate. At the same time, one of the main problems is that the majority of the Malian population does not see the major benefits of MINUSMA operations.

To concentrate on the North, the Centre, or both? Originally, MINUSMA was set up to deal with the conflict in the North. MINUSMA's 2019 mandate renewal has focused more attention on the Centre and particularly on the PoC, while the Mission's tasks for the North remained the same. With roughly the same resources, attention paid to the central regions may be at the cost of gains made in the North. This raises the question as to whether the Security Council has not made MINUSMA's mandate more unrealistic.

To link with the government, or not? MINUSMA's current strategic aim is to restore and extend state authority throughout Mali's national territory. This task, like MINUSMA's supportive role for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (JF-G5S), is at times at odds with the Mission's tasks within the context of the implementation of the Algiers Agreement. In the central and northern regions, the challenge is that support for the national government and its security sector is required to overcome one structural cause of instability in Mali – state weakness.

However, in the absence of sufficient human rights due diligence, legitimacy and inclusivity, it may further contribute to another cause of instability.

To support counter-terrorism and stabilisation, or go back to basics? Current counter-terrorism efforts conducted in Mali are highly problematic as they have further fuelled local conflicts. The limited support for the government, its poor human rights and governance record, and its reported use of ethnic proxy militias who are responsible for committing atrocities against the civilian population make it an awkward partner for MINUSMA. At the same time, returning to political tasks alone may risk further destabilisation of the country and potentially the whole Sahel-West African region.

Acronyms

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
AfDB	African Development Bank
ISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AFS	African Standby Force
AMISOM	AU Mission in Somalia
AQIM	Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb
ASIFU	All-Source Information Fusion Unit
ATT	Amadou Toumani Touré (former President of Mali)
AU	African Union
CAG	Compliant Armed Group
CASEVAC	Casualty Evacuation
CIC	Center on International Cooperation
CMA	Coordination of Azawad Movements (the Coordination)
CMFPR	Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Fronts for the Resistance
CN-DDR	National Commission for Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration
CPA	Coalition of Azawad People
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDR	Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPON	Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network
ESA	Extension of State Authority
EUCAP Sahel Mali	EU CSDP Mission in Mali
EUTM	EU Training Mission
FAMA	Malian Armed Forces
FIB	Force Intervention Brigade
FPU	Formed Police Unit
G5 Sahel	Group of Five for the Sahel (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso)
GATIA	Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-defence Group
HCUA	High Council for the Unity of Azawad
HRDDP	Human Rights Due Diligence Policy
IBK	Ibrahim Boubacar Keita
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
JF-G5S	Joint Force of the G5 Sahel
JNIM	Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin
MAA	Arab Movement of Azawad
MEDEVAC	Medical Evacuation
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MISAHHEL	AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MOC	Operational Coordination Mechanism
MONUSCO	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MSA	Movement for the Salvation of Azawad
MUJAO	Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NUPI	Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
NYU	New York University
ODA	Official Development Aid
PCC	Police-Contributing Country
PoC	Protection of Civilians
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
PSIRC	Plan to Re-establish Security in Central Mali
QIP	Quick Impact Project
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
SCR	Security Council Resolution (UN)
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TAG	Terrorist Armed Group
TCC	Troop-Contributing Country
TRC	Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission
UNMIL	UN Mission in Liberia
UNMISS	UN Mission in South Sudan
UNOCI	UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
UNOM	UN Office in Mali
UNPOL	UN Police
UNSOM	UN Mission in Somalia
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
WPS	Women Peace and Security

I. Introduction

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management, but their effectiveness often remains the subject of confusion and debate in both the policy and academic communities. Various international organisations, including the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify the effectiveness and impact of their peace operations. In response, several initiatives have been developed to improve the ability of these organisations to assess their peacekeepers' performance. However, there remains a distinct lack of independent, research-based information about the effectiveness of these operations.

To address this gap, in 2017, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with more than 40 research institutions, peacekeeping training centres, and think tanks from across the globe, established the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON). The network aims to undertake collaborative research into the effectiveness of specific peace operations using a shared methodology across case studies.

This report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is one of the first pilot case studies (together with the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) conducted by the EPON network. It aims to produce a comprehensive picture of MINUSMA's overall effectiveness and impact. It does so by evaluating MINUSMA using a framework explicitly designed to facilitate comparative analysis across missions. The framework has and will be applied in previous and subsequent EPON case studies. In particular, it examines the extent to which MINUSMA

achieved its strategic objectives and what impact, if any, the Mission had on broader political and security dynamics in Mali.

The analysis includes a substantive focus on eight key dimensions of activities that are important in most contemporary peace operations. The first dimension “protection and stabilisation” looks at the strategic impact of the Mission, while the seven other dimensions are explanatory in character. These seven subsequent dimensions are: adopt a people-centred focus; enhance the legitimacy and credibility of the mission with international and local audiences; ensure the ‘primacy of politics’; encourage an appropriate degree of national and local ownership; actively implement the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda; promote constructive international support; and ensure coherence both within missions and across their various international and local partnerships. The better a mission performs on these seven dimensions, the more likely it is to be effective in the area of protection and stabilisation.

In order to provide a thorough assessment of MINUSMA’s effectiveness and impact, and with the aim of generating findings and recommendations on areas for improvement, this report is organised as follows:

- Section II summarises the EPON analytical framework as well as the principal research questions and methodology used in this study.
- Section III provides a brief historical and contextual conflict analysis of Mali, an overview of international engagement with the country, and an assessment of where MINUSMA fits within these broader efforts. It also presents some country-specific data related to trends in conflict dynamics, governance, development, displacement and corruption in Mali. This information is relevant for understanding the context in which MINUSMA was deployed and the extent to which the Mission’s activities have influenced Mali’s conflict dynamics and systems of governance.
- Section IV summarises the evolution of MINUSMA’s mandate and gives a concise account of the actions undertaken by the Mission’s military, police and civilian components. It describes the political process, especially the implementation of the Algiers Agreement, and outlines the major debates and challenges currently facing the Mission.
- Section V then turns to assessing the impact of MINUSMA’s activities. It does so by looking at the effect the Mission has had on protection and stabilisation. It focuses in particular on (1) violence reduction, and (2) the restoration and extension of state authority and the rule of law.
- Sections VI to XII summarise the analysis and findings on MINUSMA’s effectiveness and impact across seven dimensions, namely, a people-centred approach, legitimacy and credibility, political primacy, national and local ownership, women, peace and security, international support, and coherence and partnerships.

- Section XIII summarises the overall findings of the study on MINUSMA's effectiveness at the strategic and operational levels.
- Section XIV concludes with strategic policy options that are on the table for the continuation of the Mission.

II. Framework and Methodology

The EPON network aims to analyse the effectiveness of specific contemporary peace operations, especially a mission's strategic-level effects on the political process and armed conflict dynamics in the host country. EPON aims to have multinational research teams comprised of members of the network study several AU, EU, UN and other peace operations each year.

In recognition of the inherent difficulties in measuring impact in conflict settings, EPON uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse the best possible data available, as well as to inform the analysis with the knowledge, understanding and interpretations of those carrying out peace operations and those most affected by them.

EPON has developed a methodological framework to generate knowledge on two central questions: first, whether a mission has achieved its mandated tasks and the extent to which there is consensus about this among various stakeholders; and, second, the extent to which the Mission had a positive impact on broader political and security dynamics in the host state and/or regional conflict system.¹ Defined in this way, the EPON framework is focused on addressing two principal research questions (see Figure 1):

1. How far is there congruence between a mission's mandate, its resources and capabilities, and its actual activities?

¹ Theoretical and Methodological Framework for the 2018 Pilot Studies (unpublished document, EPON, May 2018).

2. What effect have the mission's activities had on the political and security situation in the host country and/or regional conflict system, especially for the people most affected by the crisis?

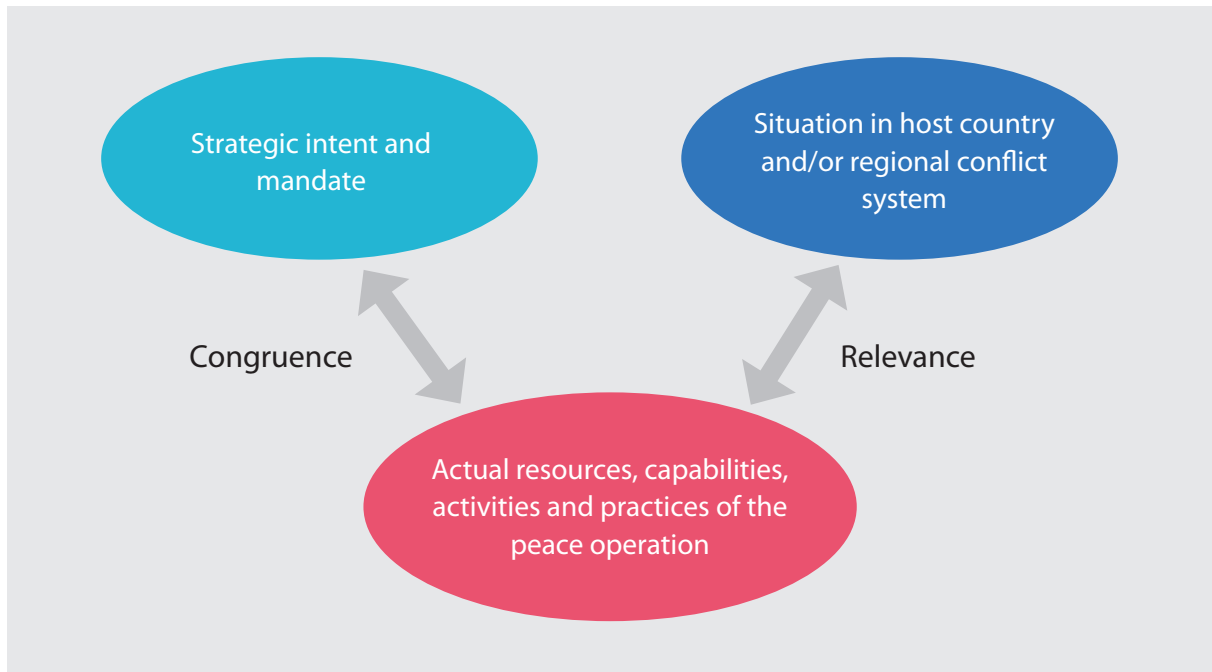


Figure 1: EPON Analytical Framework

Assessing *congruence* entails analysing the actual resources, capabilities, activities and practices of a peace operation across various substantive fields (e.g., stabilisation, civilian protection, security sector reform, and facilitating humanitarian relief) and to what extent they match the intentions and objectives expressed in the mission's strategic documents (and those of the organisation(s) that authorised it). The degree of congruence between intent and execution would shed light on how far the operation was able to fulfil its mandated tasks, within the context of the resources and capabilities at its disposal.

Assessing *relevance* entails analysing the impact a peace operation's activities have on the political and security situation in the host country and/or regional conflict system, and the people who are most affected by the conflict. The aim is to enhance understanding of a peace operation's ability to influence the behaviour of key stakeholders as well as its effect on critical conflict drivers.

Applying this framework to the pilot case study of MINUSMA required understanding to what extent the Mission has achieved its mandated tasks and how far its activities have influenced armed conflict and political dynamics in Mali. This generated three subsidiary research questions:

- What are MINUSMA's most important mandated goals and strategic objectives?

- Does MINUSMA have the necessary resources and relevant capabilities to implement its mandated goals and strategic objectives?
- What activities have MINUSMA undertaken to implement its mandated goals and strategic objectives?

Of course, this does not capture the entire environment that affects MINUSMA's mandate implementation. Geopolitical tensions may drive Security Council dynamics with implications for peacekeeping mandates, while issues like internal dynamics within other countries in the region may affect the climate surrounding the Mission's work. While the EPON report cannot comprehensively account for all of these, it does attempt to capture a broad range of factors that affect the ability of the Mission to implement its mandate. For this purpose, EPON considers eight dimensions that can help to shed light on the factors that influence the effectiveness of the peacekeeping operation in Mali.

1. Protection and stabilisation
2. People-centred approach
3. Legitimacy and credibility
4. Political primacy
5. National and local ownership
6. Women, peace and security (WPS)
7. International support
8. Coherence and partnerships

In this study, the overview of the Mission and the first dimension examine the effects of the Mission and answer a fourth subsidiary research question:

- What impact did MINUSMA's activities have on the political and security situation in Mali, and how did these activities influence the behaviour of key stakeholders or affect critical conflict drivers?

The study answers these research questions by assessing the impact the Mission has had on: (1) the political process, particularly implementation of the Algiers Agreement; (2) violence reduction; and (3) the restoration and extension of state authority and the rule of law throughout the national territory.

The other seven dimensions allow EPON to take a more comprehensive view, examining how the approaches and activities of the Mission may have both a short- and long-term impact,

often with very different effects. Taken together, these lines of inquiry allow for an assessment of both the relevance and the congruence of the work of the Mission.

Finally, all these external and internal issues need to be addressed within a broader understanding of the overall limited effect a peacekeeping operation can have on any conflict system. Primary agency lies with the national and local actors. In addition, neighbouring states and other countries often have direct interests and significant leverage in shaping the conflict. Dozens of other actors are involved, including multilateral and bilateral players, such as France, China and the United States (US); non-governmental, humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors; a wide variety of other peace operations deployed by regional organisations; many of the UN's own funds, agencies and programmes; and international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Many of these actors' initiatives, for instance, in Security Sector Reform (SSR), will have a significant impact on the work of MINUSMA. The private sector, especially firms in the extractive industries, is likely to have a significant impact on the situation in the country, as does organised crime, illicit financial flows, and capital flight. The contribution of MINUSMA thus has to be understood in the context of the larger conflict system and the many actors engaged in trying to influence it. It is obviously challenging to attribute specific effects to a UN peacekeeping mission when so many other actors within that same space are driven by a myriad of goals and objectives.

The multinational team of seven persons that conducted this research travelled in different groups twice to Mali. Three researchers visited Bamako from 2 to 6 July 2018, followed by a group of six from 5 to 15 September 2018. During the second visit, in addition to visiting Bamako, the group split in two, with one visiting Gao and the other going to Mopti. Further research was undertaken in February and March 2019 by a consultant who conducted interviews with Malian national authorities and organisations.

Three focus group meetings were organised in Bamako, Gao and Mopti, with in total 48 participants. In total, 66 semi-structured interviews were held with 102 key stakeholders.

The report is based on desk research analysing relevant primary and secondary sources, as well as field research in Mali based primarily on interviews and focus group discussions. Three focus group meetings were organised in Bamako, Gao and Mopti, with in total 48 participants. Participants in Bamako originated from all over the country, while in Mopti and Gao participants came from these regions. In total, 66 semi-structured interviews were held with 102 key stakeholders, including:

- Representatives of national authorities in the host state Mali.
- Representatives of local and international civil society organisations (CSOs).

- Civilian, military and police personnel of the peace operation, including senior leadership and senior managers and representatives of its troop- and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs).
- Representatives of international and regional organisations and missions engaged in the theatre of operations including the:
 - Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS),
 - French Operation Barkhane,
 - AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHHEL),
 - EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali),
 - EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali), and
 - Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (JF-G5S).
- External partners of the Mission, multilateral and bilateral.

The interviews and focus group meetings were carried out with the explicit consent of the subjects on a not-for-attribution basis in order to encourage frank discussion and meet ethical research guidelines. The limits of this work should be taken into account. The two visits to the peacekeeping mission were relatively brief. There were limits in terms of capturing the perceptions of all key stakeholder communities and of drawing conclusions largely based on a relatively small number of interviews and an analysis of primary and secondary documents.

Lastly, public opinion survey results on relevant questions of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's *Mali Metre*, which were held throughout Mali, were used to complement the research with perspectives from the recipients on the ground. These were compiled by a researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), allowing trends to be analysed and to triangulate the views expressed in the focus groups. Other quantitative data in the report was compiled by researchers at New York University's Center on International Cooperation (CIC) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

III. Context and Historical Background

Introduction

In 2012, a series of extraordinary events triggered the near-collapse of the state in Mali – a country hailed as an African beacon for democracy. The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) rebels took up arms against the Malian Government in January 2012, constituting the fourth Tuareg rebel uprising since independence. The MNLA had been boosted with renewed capabilities in the form of hardened Tuareg fighters, weaponry and stockpiles from Libya, following the fall of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

Angered by the ineffective response of the state to the rebellion, rank and file soldiers within the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) led a coup d'état, deposing President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), who had been in power since 2002. Taking advantage of the interim breakdown of state authority, the Tuareg rebels struck a pragmatic alliance with prominent Al Qaeda-affiliated Islamist armed groups, who had developed a well-entrenched foothold in the region. These included Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).

The rebel-Islamist alliance rapidly conquered the three northern regions of Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao by 1 April 2012. On 6 April, the MNLA declared the “Republic of Azawad”. Following a dispute between the MNLA and the Islamist insurgents, the MNLA was ousted from major towns, paving the way for the Islamist occupation of the North, some two-thirds of Mali’s national territory, between April 2012 and January 2013. During this time, the Islamists sought

to set up their own administration and imposed Sharia law on the population. As the Islamist insurgents moved southwards towards Bamako, international alarm bells sounded. Following their takeover of Konna in Central Mali, close to the military airport in Sévaré, the Malian Government called upon the French to intervene militarily. In January 2013, the French Operation Serval along with a Chadian contingent from the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) intervened, neutralising and dispersing the Islamist insurgents from major urban centres.

In 2012, a series of extraordinary events triggered the near-collapse of the state in Mali – a country hailed as an African beacon for democracy.

It was in this context, following the rehatting of AFISMA, that MINUSMA was established. The Malian State faced serious challenges on all fronts. State authority had all but collapsed in the North and parts of Central Mali. The government was under pressure to contain a growing Islamist insurgency that had been dispersed, but which had only been resolutely dealt with on the surface. It also had to re-commence political negotiations with a disunified, disparate Tuareg rebel movement and once again find a solution to the northern conflict.

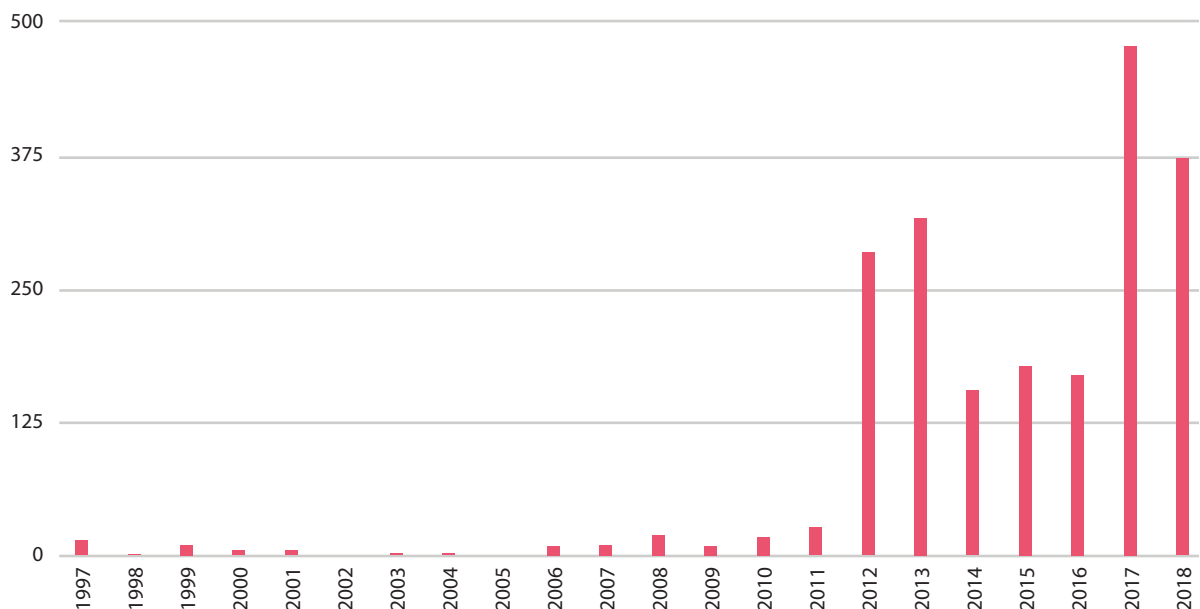


Figure 2: ACLED conflict events in Mali 1997-2018

The conflict has evolved considerably since MINUSMA was deployed in 2013. The majority of interlocutors interviewed for this study agreed that security has deteriorated. As Figure 2 shows, levels of violence surged following the 2012-2013 crisis, simmered down briefly in 2014, but have been on the rise again, especially since 2016 and 2017.

According to ACLED data, 2018 was the most violent year recorded since the 2012-2013 crisis.² Attacks against MINUSMA, the FAMA, international forces, and civilians have been on the rise from 2016. The Islamist insurgency in the North remains influential and has spread to Central Mali. Central Mali is now gripped by insecurity, and inter-communal violence has reached unprecedented levels. This escalation in violence has caused the humanitarian situation to worsen. In 2018, 3.2 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, 70% of which were in the Mopti and Segou regions.³

This section provides an overview of the root causes of the conflict and focuses particularly on the dynamics of the conflict and how they have evolved in the period of MINUSMA's deployment from 2013 to 2019. The crisis is multi-dimensional and includes several layers of interlinked micro-conflicts that play out on multiple levels. Micro-conflicts have degenerated into national-level crises, have diffused across Mali's boundaries to neighbouring countries, and are at the same time connected to transnational issues, such as global Islamist insurgencies and organised criminality. Instead of providing a comprehensive overview of all of these conflicts, we focus on those which have been directly relevant to MINUSMA, impacting or constraining the implementation of its mandate. The next section begins by providing an overview of Mali's context of fragility, and the long-term underlying crisis of governance which continues to impact on stability in the country. The chapter then turns to the crisis in the North, the conflict which brought MINUSMA into Mali in the first place. Finally, the chapter discusses the escalating insecurity in Central Mali.

A fragile context

Poverty and inequality

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world, and relative to the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, it faces huge development challenges, ranking 182 out of 189 on the 2018 Human Development Index.⁴ It has the fourth highest population growth rate on the continent, as women give birth to six children on average.⁵ Young people make up more than 50% of the population. Levels of education are very low. Almost 60% of the population over six have no education, while in regions such as Mopti, Timbuktu, Kidal, 80% of the population has not gone to school at all.⁶ Due to its economic vulnerability, Mali is one of the most aid-dependent countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, something which has fuelled the country's fragility. Between 1996 and 2005,

2 ACLED, "ACLED 2018: The Year in Review," ACLED: Madison, 11 January 2019, https://www.acleddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ACLED-2018-The-Year-in-Review_Final_Pub-1-1.pdf.

3 OCHA, "Mali: Acute and urgent humanitarian needs in the centre require immediate actions," OCHA, Bamako, 1 July 2019, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PR%20Mali%20-%20June%202019_translation_.pdf.

4 UNDP, "Human Development Indicators," 2018, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MLI>.

5 World Bank, "Fertility rate, total (births per women): Mali," World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=ML>.

6 World Bank, "Geography of Poverty in Mali," Bamako: World Bank, 23 April 2015, p. xix.

three quarters of the special investment budget and 27.6% of the state's general budget were derived from foreign aid.⁷

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world, and relative to the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, it faces huge development challenges.

Poverty is widespread but varies according to region.⁸ The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which measures three dimensions of poverty (health, education and living standards), reveals a sharp rural-urban divide as well as regional differences: 69.7% of the rural population live in “severe poverty,” compared to 16.5% in the urban areas. “Severe poverty” rates are highest in the central and northern regions.⁹ The economy relies mainly on subsistence agriculture (40% of GDP), making it vulnerable to irregular rainfall and flooding. Mali is susceptible to droughts, the worst of which occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, devastating the pastoral economy in particular. Ongoing insecurity in the North and central regions of Segou and Mopti prevent the free movement of people and goods, which further disrupts local livelihoods and access to basic services. The combined effect of poverty, food insecurity and rising levels of violence has made rural citizens extremely vulnerable. In 2019, around 400,000 are projected to be severely food insecure.¹⁰

Underlying crisis of governance and legitimacy of the state

There is broad consensus that dysfunctional governance precipitated the 2012 crisis¹¹ and continues to plague Mali's reconstruction.¹² While Mali had earned the reputation of a democratic success story, this had in fact been “a façade for institutional weakness and mismanagement.”¹³ Since independence from France in 1960, Mali was ruled by autocratic regimes for three decades: first by the socialist, nation-building president Modibo Keita (1960–68), who installed a

7 Isaline Bergamaschi, “The fall of a donor darling: The role of aid in Mali's crisis,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 52(3): 347–378, 2014.

8 World Bank, “Geography of Poverty in Mali.”

9 Timbuktu (74.5%), followed by Mopti (77.2%), Gao (69.0%), Ségou (64.4%), Sikasso (58.4%), Koulikoro (57.1%), Kayes (56.8%), and Bamako (7.9%). For reasons unknown to us, the region of Kidal was not included in the analysis. OPHI and University of Oxford, “Global MPI Country Briefing 2018: Mali (Sub-Saharan Africa),” Oxford: OPHI, University of Oxford, 2018, p. 6.

10 FAO, “Mali: Humanitarian Response Plan 2019,” FAO: Bamako, January 2019, <http://www.fao.org/3/ca3211en/CA3211EN.pdf>.

11 Catriona Craven-Matthews and Pierre Englebert, “A Potemkin state in the Sahel? The empirical and the fictional in Malian state reconstruction,” *African Security*, 11(1): 1–31, 2018.

12 Ibid; Jaimie Bleck, Abdoulaye Dembele and Sidiki Guindo, “Malian crisis and the lingering problem of good governance,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 5(1): 15, 2016.

13 Morten Bøås and Liv Elin Torheim, “The trouble in Mali – Corruption, collusion, resistance,” *Third World Quarterly*, 34(7): 1281, 2013, quoted in Jennifer C. Seely, “A political analysis of decentralisation: Coopting the Tuareg threat in Mali,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 39(3): 506, 2001.

one-party state, and then by General Moussa Traoré (1968-1991), who overthrew Keita and established an authoritarian, military regime. It was only in 1992, after Traoré was deposed by a military coup, that multi-party elections took place for the first time, resulting in the election of Alpha Oumar Konaré (1992-2002). This ushered in a period of democratisation and hope for many Malians. Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) (2002-2012) was the second democratically elected Malian president, until his deposition in the 2012 coup.

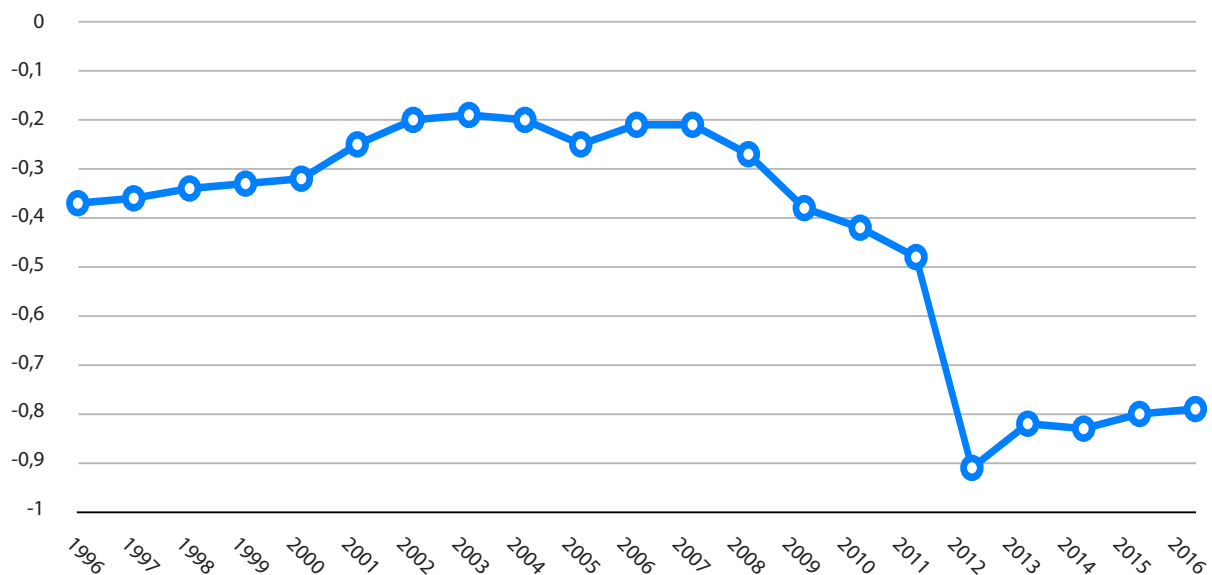


Figure 3: World Governance Indicators Mali average

As Figure 3 shows, governance indicators improved modestly under Konaré, then plateaued during ATT's first term in office, and declined after 2007 during his second term.¹⁴ Under ATT, patronage networks flourished, the rule of law weakened, and a culture of impunity was cultivated, while corruption increased and spread unchecked to all institutions of the state, including the army. Rule by consensus, which critics argue translated into the co-optation of political opposition, effectively undercut the regular checks and balances of constitutional rule.¹⁵ This fuelled pervasive public dissatisfaction with the political elites. In the years between 2002 and 2012, Afro-barometer surveys show that respondents' satisfaction with democracy dropped by half, from 63% to 31%.¹⁶

14 These include World Bank indicators which measure Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption. They also include indicators from the Fragile State Index, Freedom House – Political Rights and Civil Liberties, and the Polity IV scores.

15 Bruce Whitehouse, "Good riddance, ATT?" Bridges from Bamako, <https://bridgesfrombamako.com/2012/03/25/good-riddance-att>.

16 Massa Coulibaly and Michael Bratton, "Crisis in Mali: Ambivalent popular attitudes on the way forward," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(2), Art. 31, 2013.

Under ATT, the issue of corruption soared to the top of the political agenda. This was in part due to reports which demonstrated the complicity of state officials with illicit trafficking, in particular in drugs, and terrorist networks in the North that had flourished in the context of a precarious governance system.¹⁷ By 2012, almost half of those surveyed believed that “all” or “most” government officials were “involved in corruption.”¹⁸ Following the near-collapse of state authority in 2012 under Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK), who was elected in the 2013 presidential elections, governance indicators have improved slightly, but have not returned to the levels of the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Figure 3).

Distrust of and corruption in public institutions

Corruption was viewed by several MINUSMA officials to be a major issue but something which the Mission has little manoeuvring space to put squarely on the table.¹⁹ Figure 4 indicates the largely stagnant popular perception of corruption between 2003 and 2017. However, as one MINUSMA official noted, “you can only fight corruption if you have legitimate institutions. But for the time being, few are legitimate.”²⁰

There is broad consensus that dysfunctional governance precipitated the 2012 crisis and continues to plague Mali’s reconstruction.

According to Transparency International’s 2018 ranking, Mali ranks 120 out of 180 countries and scores 32 out of 100, where the scale ranges from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).²¹ High-level corruption and state resource embezzlement have been a feature of several Malian administrations, chipping away at the legitimacy of the state.²² IBK who ascended to power on an anti-corruption platform is purported to have lost €100m through fraud and bad management in 2015.²³ Corruption is considered to be prevalent in bureaucracy, administration and service delivery, as well as key sectors like the judiciary, where bribery in the courts is commonplace.

17 Wolfram Lacher, “Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region,” Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2012, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/sahel_sahara.pdf.

18 Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi and Michael Bratton, “Why public opinion should be used to measure political risk in Africa,” *The Conversation*, 15 July 2015, <https://theconversation.com/why-public-opinion-should-be-used-to-measure-political-risk-in-africa-44437>.

19 Interviews with international officials, Bamako, September 2018.

20 Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako.

21 Transparency International, Index 2018, https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018?gclid=CjwKCAiA767jBRBqEiwAG-dAOr-BSOPDB7iBXNqSDQUI-2pO9x7ygdzZTjUWREDP0shFpo_wwEx5IoBoC6f8QAvD_BwE.

22 Thomas Shipley, *Mali: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption*, U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2017, <https://www.u4.no/publications/mali-overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption>.

23 Ibid, p. 6. The IMF, followed by the World Bank, France and other donors, suspended programmes to Mali in 2014 following concerns over the purchase of a presidential jet outside the regular budget. See, e.g., <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozabs-mali-imf-idAFKCN0JG0CV20141202>.

It seeps into the daily lives of Malians, including in the public sector, such as education, justice and the police. It has become normal for individuals to pay their way through the system.

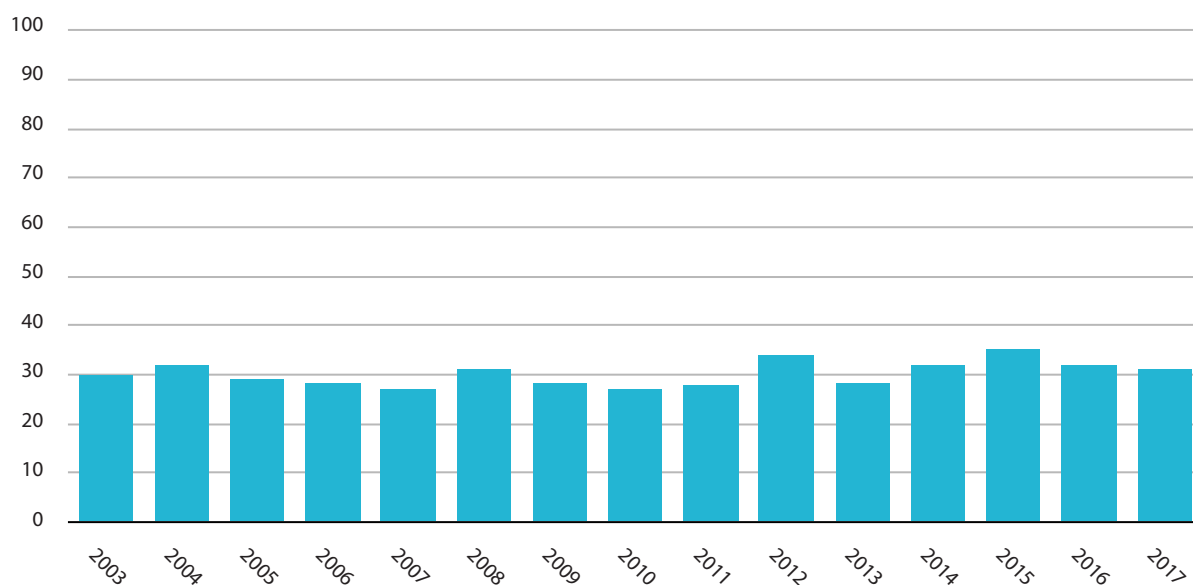


Figure 4: Corruption Perceptions Index Score in Mali

Clientelism continues to constitute the bedrock of Malian politics,²⁴ and state institutions remain subordinate to patronage networks. The judiciary is not independent of the executive system, and access to equal justice is not a reality for the vast majority of Malians.²⁵ The crisis of governance has been exploited by several non-state actors, notably Islamist insurgents in areas long-neglected by the central state.

An absent state authority

The state struggles to project power over its vast territory, an area double the size of France. State presence beyond urban centres and towns is low, which is problematic given that over 70% of the population lives in rural areas.²⁶ According to data from the French Foreign Ministry, the Malian Government only controls 20.5% of its territory, including with support from MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane (the follow-up mission to Operation Serval).²⁷ As of

24 Morten Bøås and Boubacar Ba, “Mali: A political economy analysis,” NUPI Report, Oslo: NUPI, November 2017, https://nupi.brage.unit.no/nupi-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2468085/NUPI_rapport_Mali_Ba_B%25C3%25B8%25C3%25A5s.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y.

25 USAID, “Democracy, human rights, and governance assessment of Mali, public version,” Vermont: Tetra Tech, June 2014, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Mali_2014DRG%20Assessment_public_FINAL.pdf.

26 World Bank, “Geography of Poverty in Mali,” p. viii.

27 Craven-Matthews and Englebert, “A Potempkin state in the Sahel,” p. 14.

2019, civil administrators' presence in Northern and Central Mali is between 29% and 31%.²⁸ Decentralisation efforts initiated in 1992 and catalysed by Tuareg demands for greater autonomy intended to devolve power away from Bamako, and to improve governance legitimacy and efficiency in the regions. This has largely been hampered by poor implementation due to bureaucratic resistance from the central state and inadequate resourcing.

It has become normal for individuals to pay their way through the system.

Following the crisis in the North in 2012, and escalating insecurity in Central Mali from 2015, the state retreated further. This has created conducive conditions for non-state actors to proliferate and provide alternative modes of local governance. Moreover, in regions where security forces are deployed, they are viewed as a force for insecurity, rather than security. Some of the international actors interviewed for this study asserted that a major problem was the non-Republican constitution of the army, which is not representative of the country's diverse ethnic population, but dominated by Bambara from the South.²⁹

The crises of the North

Tuareg resistance and rebellion

The first dimension of the Malian crisis is the cyclical conflict between various Tuareg rebel movements and the Malian State. This, along with various micro-conflicts between northern communities and the Malian State, was the context that MINUSMA was initially called upon to stabilise. It was meant to do so by supporting the peace negotiations and subsequent implementation of the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, also known as the Algiers Agreement, between the government, the armed groups allied to it which are collaborating in the Plateforme, and the Tuareg rebels who are cooperating in the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA, also referred to as "the Coordination") (see Table 1).

The Tuareg, a semi-nomadic people living across the Sahel-Saharan region, have historically resisted the Malian State. They constitute a minority ethnic group mainly inhabiting the North of Mali (about 7.7% of the population).³⁰ However, in sparsely populated Northern Mali, they represent 1.3 million people, around 33% of the population, with Peul (Fulani), Songhai, and

28 UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali," S/2019/454, New York: UN, 31 May 2019.

29 Interview with OCHA official, 6 July 2018, Bamako.

30 "Minority rights, Mali, minorities and indigenous peoples." Available from: <https://minorityrights.org/country/mali>. About 10% of Mali's population resides in Northern Mali, including several ethnic groups such as Tuareg, Arabs, Fulani and Songhay.

Bambara constituting 63%, and Arabs 4% in a society marred by deep social divisions.³¹ The Tuareg consider themselves distinct from “the southerners” in language, lifestyle and heritage.³² Historically, they were influential in Northern Mali, but this was reversed under the French colonial system and made permanent under the postcolonial state when they became a minority to be ruled by a distant central authority in Bamako.³³

The state struggles to project power over its vast territory, an area double the size of France.

One of the root causes of the conflict in the North is the decline in relative power of the Tuareg over time, and the perceived economic and political marginalisation of Northern Mali.³⁴ Grievances have been aggravated by the serious failure of the Malian Government to implement any durable solutions to the conflict. The government has applied a mixture of different strategies to deal with Tuareg resistance, including divide-and-rule tactics, co-optation of elites, military control, repression, and peace agreements.

When the MNLA took up arms in 2012, it marked the fourth rebellion since independence. Prior to this, rebellions were launched between 1962 and 1964, 1990 and 1996, and 2006 and 2009. The first rebellion of 1962–1964 was small in scale and not well-organised or equipped. It was brutally quashed by the state, fuelling fresh grievances. A new rebellion was launched between 1990 and 1996. Several peace efforts were initiated in 1991 (Tamanrasset Agreement) and again in 1992 (National Pact), but low-level conflict ensued until 1996 when the “Flame of Peace” national reconciliation ceremony brought the war to an end. However, the failure to implement the terms of the agreement, mounting tensions, and personal rivalries spurred another short-lived rebellion in 2006. This led to another peace deal signed in Algeria in 2006, seeking to grant the North more political autonomy and development funds.³⁵ However, in keeping with previous agreements, few provisions were implemented and violence continued until 2009.

31 Grégory Chauzal and Thibault van Damme, “The roots of Mali’s conflict,” CRU Report, Amsterdam: Clingendael, p. 36, March 2015, https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2015/the_roots_of_malis_conflict/2_rebellion_and_fragmentation_in_northern_mali; Bruce Whitehouse, “Understanding Mali’s ‘Tuareg problem,’” Bridges from Bamako, 25 February 2013, <https://bridgesfrombamako.com/2013/02/25/understanding-malis-tuareg-problem>.

32 Boås and Torheim, “The trouble in Mali – Corruption, collusion, resistance,” quoted in Seely, “A political analysis of decentralisation: Coopting the Tuareg threat in Mali.”

33 Ibid, 1280–1281.

34 Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, “The ‘Tuareg question’ in Mali today,” Parakou: LASDEL, December 2012, <http://www.bu.edu/wara/files/2013/06/mali-the-Tuareg-question.pdf>; Chauzal and van Damme, “The roots of Mali’s conflict”, p. 36; Stephanie Pezard and Michael Shurkin, “Achieving peace in Northern Mali: Past agreements, local conflicts and the prospects for a durable settlement,” Research report, RAND: Santa Monica, 2015, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR892/RAND_RR892.pdf.

35 Nicolas Desgrais, Yvan Guichaoua and Andrew Lebovich, “Unity is the exception. Alliance formation and de-formation among armed actors in Northern Mali,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 29(4): 659, 2018.

Internal power struggles within and between communities in the North

Underlying the major conflict cleavage often presented as a North-South divide are deep internal divisions and power struggles between and within communities in the North which continue to fuel low-intensity armed violence. Intrinsic to these dynamics are intra-Tuareg tensions, which several Mali scholars assert are as critical to understanding continued insecurity in Mali as the conflict between the Tuareg and the state.³⁶ The Tuareg are not a unified bloc; they are divided into numerous sub-groups by caste. Rebel movements have tended to disintegrate into smaller factions due to disagreements over the future constellation of Tuareg society, or the political demands of the rebellions. Fissures have resulted from clan rivalries, individual or group interests driven by “big men”.³⁷

One of the root causes of the conflict in the North is the perceived economic and political marginalisation of Northern Mali.

This has made it difficult for the Tuareg rebel movements to mobilise around one common identity. A few upper-caste leaders of elite clans within the Kel Adagh confederation, in which the dominant noble clans are the Ifoghas, have spearheaded rebellions.³⁸ The perceived domination of the Ifoghas set in motion a process of tribal splitting since the 1990s. One such long-standing rivalry is between the noble clans of the Ifoghas and the subordinate vassal clans of the Imghad – who contest Ifoghas domination. The MNLA was, for a brief period, able to rally disparate groups under one common banner,³⁹ but this unity quickly disintegrated following the establishment of Ansar Dine by Iyad Ag Ghali, which divided the Ifoghas between separatists and Islamists.⁴⁰

Inter-group power struggles are another key feature of the northern conflict. Clashes have occurred for generations because of cattle-raiding, conflicts over natural resources between pastoralists and sedentary groups and, more recently, over lucrative trafficking routes. The Songhay and Peul communities have resisted Tuareg claims for independence and have been frustrated

36 Bøås and Torheim, “The trouble in Mali – Corruption, collusion, resistance,” p. 1285.

37 Morten Bøås, “Castles in the sand: Informal networks and power brokers in the Northern Mali periphery,” in Mats Utas (Ed.), *African Conflicts and Informal Power: Big Men and Networks*. London and New York: Zed Books, pp 191–136, 2012. Tuareg clan rivalries include those among the Ifoghas, Idnans and Imghads, as well as the Kel-Antasar and Chaman-Amas. For the Arabs, they include those among the Kountas, Berabiche and Lemhar. See Arthur Boutellis and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, *A Process in Search of Peace: Lessons from the Malian Peace Agreement*, New York: International Peace Institute, p. 29.

38 French policies contributed to the dominance of the Kel Adagh, who allied with them to combat their competitor, the Iwellemmeden confederation. See Pezard and Shurkin, “Achieving peace in Northern Mali,” p. 8.

39 Baz Lecocq and Georg Klute, “Tuareg separatism in Mali,” *International Journal*, 68(3): 430, September 2013.

40 Chauzal and van Damme, “The roots of Mali’s conflict”; de Sardan, “The ‘Tuareg question’ in Mali today.”

by their monopolisation of northern grievances. But divisions between northern groups have also been fuelled by Bamako's policies towards them. This has involved divide-and-rule tactics and co-option of some elites over others to tame and weaken the North, and chiefly to disband any notion of a united Tuareg front capable of challenging the state.⁴¹

Inter-group power struggles are another key feature of the northern conflict.

Several northern self-defence militias, some of which are now part of the pro-government Plateforme coalition, have become signatories to the Algiers Agreement, in order to advance their group interests (see Table 1). For example, to counteract banditry and protection from attacks by Tuareg and Arabs during the 1990s, sedentary populations (mainly Songhai) developed self-defence militias: the Ganda Koy (Masters of the Land) and the Ganda Iso (Sons of the Land). These have been used as proxies by the Malian State and are activated when inter- and intra-group rivalries emerge, or to quell Tuareg rebellions, such as in the most recent 2012-2013 crisis. They later formed the Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Fronts for the Resistance (CMFPR), which is part of the Plateforme coalition to advance their interests, and as a counterweight to the CMA, which comprises mainly Tuareg and Arabs from the MNLA, High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA), and Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA).

Armed groups: Blurring, splintering, and fragmentation

The above description already shows a confusing and fragmented landscape. It is difficult, if not impossible, to neatly delineate armed actors in Northern Mali into definitive categories. Since 2012, non-state armed actors have proliferated, ranging from rebels and Islamist insurgents to criminal bandits and self-defence militias. The boundaries between them are murky, and many of them reportedly switch hats regularly. Experts depict armed groups in Mali as “flexians” who use “fluid alliances and adapt themselves to the ever-changing circumstances in the terrain in which they operate.”⁴² The multiplicity of actors and interests, rapidly shifting alliances, as well as fragmentation and splintering of armed groups, have resulted in significant challenges for MINUSMA.

To facilitate talks between the rebel groups and pro-government militias, two coalitions were created: the CMA coalition, and the Plateforme coalition, constituting the “signatory” armed groups. This was an effort to steer the conflict “away from clan rivalries to focus on political grievances.”⁴³ As Table 1 shows, the CMA consists mainly of secular, separatist Tuareg armed

41 Chauzal and van Damme, “The roots of Mali’s conflict,” pp 36-42; Pezard and Shurkin, “Achieving peace in Northern Mali.”

42 Bøås and Ba, “Mali: A political economy analysis,” p. 24.

43 Boutellis and Zahar, *A Process in Search of Peace*, p. 29.

groups that took up arms against the government in 2012. The Plateforme coalition consists of groups which claim to represent some of the Tuareg, Arab and Songhai segments of the population not represented by the CMA, as well as pro-government groups with stakes in the North. Plateforme armed groups are deemed to be pro-government militias.

The multiplicity of actors and interests, rapidly shifting alliances, as well as fragmentation and splintering of armed groups, have resulted in significant challenges for MINUSMA.

The peace accords have had to deal with diverse local and often contradictory demands. While both sides are meant to represent “northern” interests, they lack a common agenda and diverge between how the North should be administered – through autonomy, federalism, or decentralisation.⁴⁴ The major distinction is that the CMA movements have tended towards self-determination, including the possibility of breaking away from the Malian State, while the Plateforme has sought to resolve their grievances within the unitary state. Beyond this, it is widely held that both coalitions largely defend their own interests rather than those of the population.⁴⁵

Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA)	Plateforme
National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)	Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Fronts for the Resistance I (CMFPR-I)
High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA)	CPA faction 1
Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA-CMA)	MAA-Plateforme
Coalition of Azawad People (CPA-I)	Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-defence Group (GATIA)
Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Fronts for the Resistance II (CMFPR-II)	

Table 1: Coalitions of armed groups when the Algiers Agreement was signed in 2015⁴⁶

Splintering along clan lines and the formation of new armed factions within both coalitions has been a key trend during MINUSMA’s deployment, complicating the implementation of

⁴⁴ Chauzal and van Damme, “The roots of Mali’s conflict,” p. 36.

⁴⁵ Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September, Bamako.

⁴⁶ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali,” S/2015/426, UN: New York, p. 1, 11 June 2015.

the Algiers Agreement, as well as conflict resolution.⁴⁷ Moreover, blurred lines between different groups render categories, like compliant armed groups (CAGs) and terrorist armed groups (TAGs), such as used by some in MINUSMA, artificial.⁴⁸ For example, some suspect that there is collusion and that there are links between signatories of the Algiers Agreement and Islamist insurgents.⁴⁹ As one interviewee explained, “When we sit around the table and have those discussions, we can separate, those who are TAGs, those who are non-terrorist... but on the ground it is a different story.”⁵⁰

Blurred lines between different groups render categories, like compliant armed groups (CAGs) and terrorist armed groups (TAGs), artificial.

Islamist militancy and insurgencies

The growing prominence of Islamist insurgents, or jihadists, is another key conflict driver, which continues to destabilise Mali and the region. The involvement of the Islamists connected to transnational Salafist movements, like Al Qaeda, transformed Mali’s national and local conflicts into a global one.⁵¹ These actors exert considerable influence on conflict dynamics in Mali and pose a direct challenge to the state. Despite officially being excluded from the 2015 Algiers Agreement, one MINUSMA official noted, “Whatever we do, the terrorist groups will be the masters on the ground.”⁵² These groups have also seriously challenged MINUSMA’s mandate implementation by attacking peacekeepers on an unprecedented scale, especially from 2014/2015 onwards.

The growing prominence of Islamist insurgents, or jihadists, is another key conflict driver.

The Islamist insurgencies do not represent unified, cohesive groups and, given the proliferation of non-state armed actors, it is difficult to determine who is who. It is helpful to think of them as overlapping networks of decentralised “katibas” (battalions), who take directives from “big men”.⁵³ Since the late 2000s, Islamist insurgents have gained an increasingly strong

47 Lecocq and Klute, “Tuareg separatism in Mali”; Boutellis and Zahar, *A Process in Search of Peace*, p. 11.

48 Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako.

49 Interviews with international officials, September 2018, Bamako.

50 Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako.

51 Bøås and Torheim, “The trouble in Mali – Corruption, collusion, resistance.”

52 Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako.

53 Massa Bøås, “Crime, coping and resistance in the Mali-Sahel periphery,” *African Security*, 8(4): 299-319, 2015; Morten Bøås, Kari M Osland and Henriette Ullavik Erstad, *Islamic Insurgents in the MENA Region. Global Threat or Regional*

foothold in Mali, when AQIM, an Al Qaeda affiliated group with roots in the Algerian Civil War, became increasingly integrated into Northern Mali. AQIM sought to strengthen its revenues by kidnapping foreigners for ransom and through involvement in large-scale trafficking networks.⁵⁴ Other key antagonists involved in the 2012 occupation were Ansar Dine, a predominantly Tuareg (Ifoghas) group led by Iyad Ag Ghali, MUJAO, and Al-Mourabitoun.⁵⁵ The March 2017 merger of the regional antagonists AQIM, Ansar Dine, Al-Mourabitoun, and Katiba Macina forming the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, JNIM), was a turning point because it demonstrated a willingness to enhance coordination and collaboration. New actors, like the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), established in May 2015, have also fuelled armed violence in north-eastern Mali, and along the Nigerien border, while Ansarul Islam is active along Mali's border with Burkina Faso.

Since 2015, the Islamist insurgency has spread to the central regions of Mopti and Ségou, as well as border zones with Burkina Faso and Niger. The retreat of the state following the events of 2012, and then following the campaign of targeted anti-state violence in Central Mali in 2015, has enabled Islamist insurgents to increase their influence. In addition to coercing the local population, they provide some crude governance in areas long-neglected by the state to gain acceptance and legitimacy from the local population.⁵⁶ The Malian Islamist insurgents have not typically used indiscriminate large-scale violence against civilians, as seen by other Islamist insurgent groups, such as in Somalia or Nigeria.

Since 2015, the Islamist insurgency has spread to the central regions of Mopti and Ségou, as well as border zones with Burkina Faso and Niger.

The Islamists present a challenge to the international community in Mali because, unlike the CMA and Plateforme coalitions of rebel groups, they refuse to accept a solution that is commensurate with preserving the secular sovereign State of Mali. The political agendas of these insurgencies are often difficult to surmise, but range from re-establishing the Macina Empire, or “Dina” in Central Mali (Katiba Macina), or creating a Sharia state in Mali (Ansar Dine), to ridding North Africa of Western influence and overthrowing “apostate” governments (AQIM),

Menace? NUPI Working Paper, 884. NUPI: Oslo, 25 January 2019.

54 Wolfram Lacher and Guido Steinberg, “Spreading local roots: AQIM and its offshoots in the Sahara,” in Guido Steinberg and Annette Weber (eds.), *Jihadism in Africa, Local Causes, Regional Expansion, International Alliances*. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs RP 5, 2015, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2015_RP05_sbg_web.pdf.

55 During the takeover of Northern Mali, AQIM controlled Timbuktu, Ansar Dine controlled Kidal, and MUJAO controlled Gao, Menaka and other nearby towns. See Elisabeth Sköns, “The implementation of the peace process in Mali: A complex case of peacebuilding,” in *SIPRI Yearbook 2016: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, Stockholm: SIPRI, p. 162, 2016, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/The-implementation-of-the-peace-process-in-Mali.pdf>.

56 Natasja Rupesinghe and Morten Bøås, *Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Central Mali*, Oslo: NUPI.

or creating a stateless caliphate across the region (MUJAO). JNIM appears to have both national (Malian) and regional (Sahelian) goals.⁵⁷

The modus operandi of these groups has involved directly attacking Malian troops, MINUSMA, and other international forces. This is a trend which has been escalating, particularly since 2014/2015. It intensified further in 2018, with 237 terror attacks documented by the UN, up from 226 in 2017, and 183 in 2016.⁵⁸ Since the formation of JNIM, attacks have become more organised and sophisticated. Since 2018, JNIM's activities have increased substantially, and a shift can be observed to more direct civilian targeting,⁵⁹ as well as an uptick in remote violence.⁶⁰ The number of improvised explosive device (IED) and landmine attacks has escalated since 2017.⁶¹

Organised crime is interlinked with and fuels conflict dynamics.

Counter-terrorism operations have escalated inter-communal conflict in Menaka and Gao, in north-eastern Mali. Since February 2018, Operation Barkhane, the FAMA, and Nigerien military, aided by a coalition of Plateform signatory groups, particularly the GATIA and Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA),⁶² have launched a coordinated counter-terror offensive against militants belonging to the ISGS. These operations have inflamed existing conflicts between the Daoussak and Tuareg, Daoussak and Iboguiltane, and the Daoussak and Tuareg tribes and the Peul.⁶³

57 Bøås, Osland and Erstad, *Islamic Insurgents in the MENA Region*.

58 UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali," S/2018/273, New York: UN, 29 March 2018.

59 In 2018, 71 instances of civilian targeting were recorded (29% of all violent events the group was involved in), compared to 11 in 2017 (11% of the violent events the group was involved in). See ACLED, "JNIM: A Rising Threat to Stability in the Sahel," Madison: ACLED, 2019., <https://www.acleddata.com/2019/02/01/jnim-a-rising-threat-to-stability-in-the-sahel>.

60 Roudabeh Kishi and Melissa Pavlik, *ACLED 2018: The Year in Review*, Madison: ACLED, 11 January 2019, https://www.acleddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ACLED-2018-The-Year-in-Review_Final_Pub-1-1.pdf.

61 Interview with MINUSMA official, 14 September 2018, Bamako.

62 MSA was founded by former members of several pro-Azawad groups, but is allied to GATIA and other Plateforme groups. See Calib Weiss, "Tuareg alliance reports more clashes with Islamic State-loyal militants," *Long War Journal*, 3 April 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/04/tuareg-alliance-reports-more-clashes-with-islamic-state-loyal-militants.php>.

63 UN, "Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali," S/2018/581, New York: UN, 9 August 2018, p. 17.

Illicit networks and organised crime

Another key aspect of the conflict is the prevalence of organised crime and competition over illicit trafficking and trade routes, often referred to as Mali's "hidden crisis."⁶⁴ While it is not officially part of MINUSMA's mandate, it seeps into several key aspects, notably the implementation of the Algiers Agreement. Organised crime is interlinked with and fuels conflict dynamics. Representatives from Malian civil society at focus group meetings consider that organised crime is a critical factor fuelling daily insecurity, but something which has not been adequately addressed.⁶⁵ Trafficking was discussed behind the scenes in both Ouagadougou (June 2013) and Algiers (2014–2015) but was deliberately left out of the Algiers Agreement.⁶⁶

Since the mid-2000s, the informal ancient trade routes of the trans-Sahara, which have been an integral source of revenue and livelihoods in the economically isolated north,⁶⁷ have been revitalised with new, illicit, and more profitable commerce such as trade in narcotics, weaponry, and humans (who are both trafficked and smuggled as migrants), making Northern Mali a key transit point in West Africa.⁶⁸ As one MINUSMA official noted, "trafficking is the backbone of the economy in the North."⁶⁹ More importantly, it has become a coping strategy against bleak prospects for the North becoming an engine of economic growth and job creation. These networks flourished largely unchecked under the regime of ATT when armed groups involved in trafficking came to exercise a kind of "para-sovereignty".⁷⁰ While Mali's strategic importance as a transit point for narcotics trafficking has decreased over the past decade,⁷¹ levels of violence generated by the trade are unparalleled in the sub-region.⁷²

Organised crime gives rise to conflict and violence in several ways. First, as a recent International Crisis Group (ICG, 2018) report shows, armed groups sustain their operations from profits of organised crime. They may be involved as transporters or organisers of human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, or profit from these networks through illicit taxes and security fees.⁷³ Several interviewees asserted that it is an open secret that few groups, including signatories to the

64 Global Initiative Network, "Illicit trafficking and instability in Mali: Past, present and future, part of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime series on Governance, Democracy and State Fragility," January 2014, <http://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Illicit-Trafficking-and-Instability-in-Mali-Past-present-and-future.pdf>.

65 Civil society focus group meeting, 10 September 2018, Mopti.

66 MINUSMA was, on the other hand, part of facilitating two important local-level initiatives, the two peace processes in October 2015, Anéfis 1, and October 2017, Anéfis 2. See ICG, *Drug Trafficking, Violence and Politics in Northern Mali*, Africa report no. 267, Brussels: ICG, 13 December 2018, p. 17.

67 International Alert, "Organised crime in Mali: Why it matters for a peaceful transition from conflict," Policy Brief, International Alert: Bamako, September 2016, pp 1–2.

68 UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). *World Drug Report*. New York: UNODC, May 2013, pp 34, 56, https://www.unodc.org/doc/wdr2013/World_Drug_Report_2013.pdf.

69 Interview with MINUSMA official, 6 July 2018, Bamako.

70 Chauzal and van Damme, "The roots of Mali's conflict," p. 14.

71 See UN, "Final report of the Panel of Experts," 2018, p. 30.

72 ICG, *Drug Trafficking, Violence and Politics in Northern Mali*.

73 Ibid, p. 34.

Algiers Agreement, stay away from involvement in organised crime.⁷⁴ Due to increasing violent attacks on convoys, these are now often protected by armed groups, making the drug trade more militarised.⁷⁵ Signatory groups have, for instance, been involved in protecting the passage of drug convoys.⁷⁶ Second, the stakes to control these lucrative illicit businesses are high, and competition has given rise to clashes between armed groups,⁷⁷ including signatories to the Algiers Agreement.⁷⁸ It has also led to attacks against Malian State authorities, MINUSMA and other international forces.⁷⁹ On the whole, clashes remain largely localised, unless the dispute is over a strategic axis, or involves a senior leader.⁸⁰ Finally, trafficking propagates local political, intra- and inter-communal rivalries.⁸¹ All in all, conflicts are kept alive and violence is sustained because key actors continue to profit. There are no incentives for demobilising, because there are no security guarantees that can otherwise protect economic and commercial interests.

Escalating insecurity in Central Mali

What began as a conflict in the North has now engulfed Central Mali, particularly the regions of Mopti and Ségou. As Figure 5 shows, the majority of violent incidents broken down by region, between 2015–2018 have occurred in Mopti. The destabilisation of Central Mali has raised serious concerns since contrasting the North it is even more ethnically diverse, home to groups including Peul, Tuareg, Moor, Bambara, Dogon, Songhai, Malinke and Bozo and populous (with a population of about 5.6 million). Moreover, Central Mali is vital for the formal economy, in contrast to the North, which is largely arid and lucrative because of an illicit trafficking economy.⁸²

74 Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako.

75 ICG, *Drug Trafficking, Violence and Politics in Northern Mali*.

76 UN, “Final report of the Panel of Experts,” 2018, p. 33.

77 International Alert, “Organised Crime in Mali,” pp 1–2.

78 UN, “Final report of the Panel of Experts,” 2018, p. 30.

79 Ibid.

80 Examples include the clashes between 2013–2015 aimed at controlling hubs such as In Khalil, Tabankort, Ber and Lerneb. Ibid, pp 15–16.

81 These include, but are not limited to, conflicts between the two Arab tribes of the Tilemsi valley, the Mechdouf and Lamhar, between the “noble” and “vassal” Arab tribes, as well as between the Ifogha and Imghad. Drug trafficking has permitted “vassal” tribes to gain newfound power by rising through the ranks of drug trafficking networks. This enables them to establish local authority, thereby eroding the authority of the “nobles”. See Bøås, “Crime, coping and resistance in the Mali-Sahel periphery.”

82 Rupesinghe and Bøås, *Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Central Mali*.

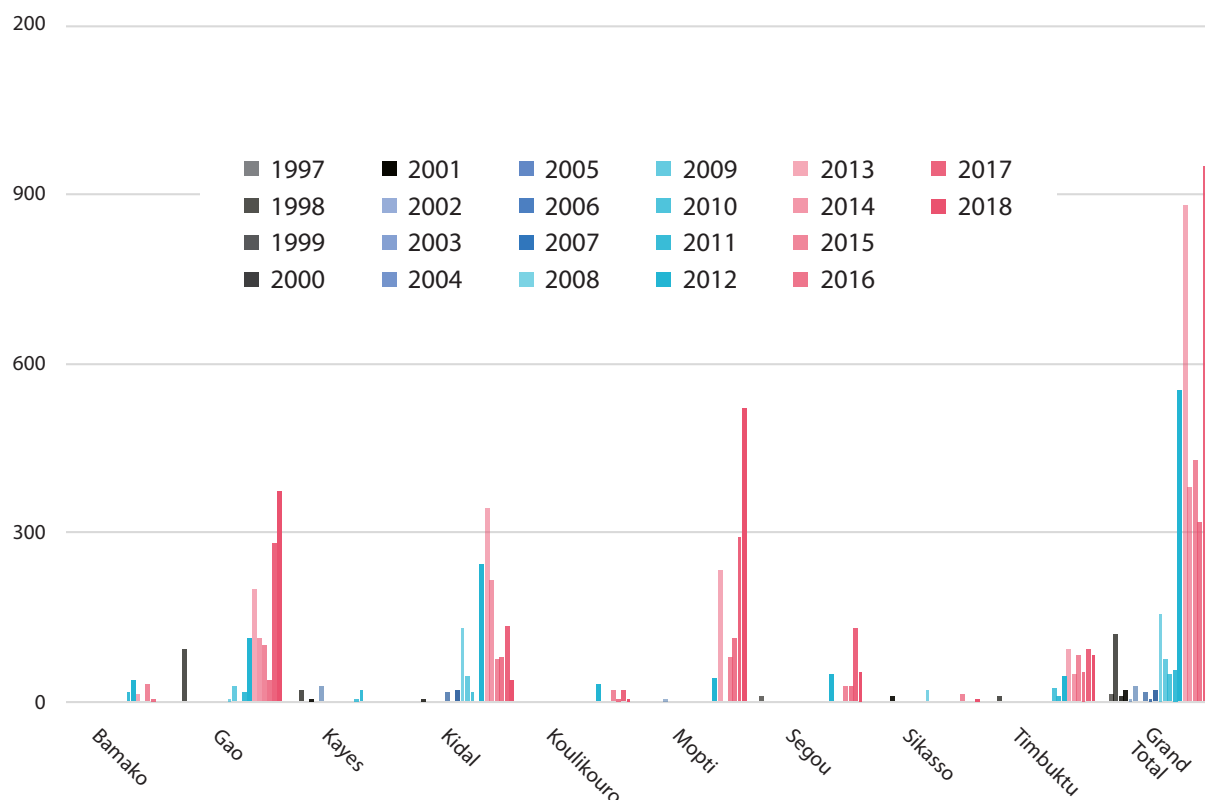


Figure 5: ACLED conflict events by region in Mali, 1997 to June 2017

This rise in violence is the result of a combination of factors, including the increased entrenchment of radical Islamist groups, the counter-mobilisation of self-defence militias and ensuing inter-communal violence. The escalation in violence has severely aggravated security and created new waves of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. The number of people fleeing violence has increased almost four-fold in Mopti and Ségou, from 18 000 to 70 000 between May 2018 and May 2019. This accounts for 58% IDPs in Mali which as of June 2019 stands at 120,000.⁸³ Out of the 716 school closures due to insecurity,⁸⁴ Mopti region has been most affected with 62% of its schools having closed.⁸⁵ This is mainly due to threats or attacks from radical Islamist groups.

⁸³ OCHA, “Mali: Acute and urgent humanitarian needs in the centre require immediate actions.”

⁸⁴ UNICEF, “Mali Humanitarian Situation,” 31 October 2018, https://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_Mali_Humanitarian_Situation_Report_Oct_2018.pdf. Since May 2017, however, 146 schools that were closed have now reopened, see p. 3.

⁸⁵ This was reported by the education cluster as of October 2018. UNICEF, “Humanitarian Action for Children: Mali,” UNICEF, 8 January 2019. <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/mali.html#7>.

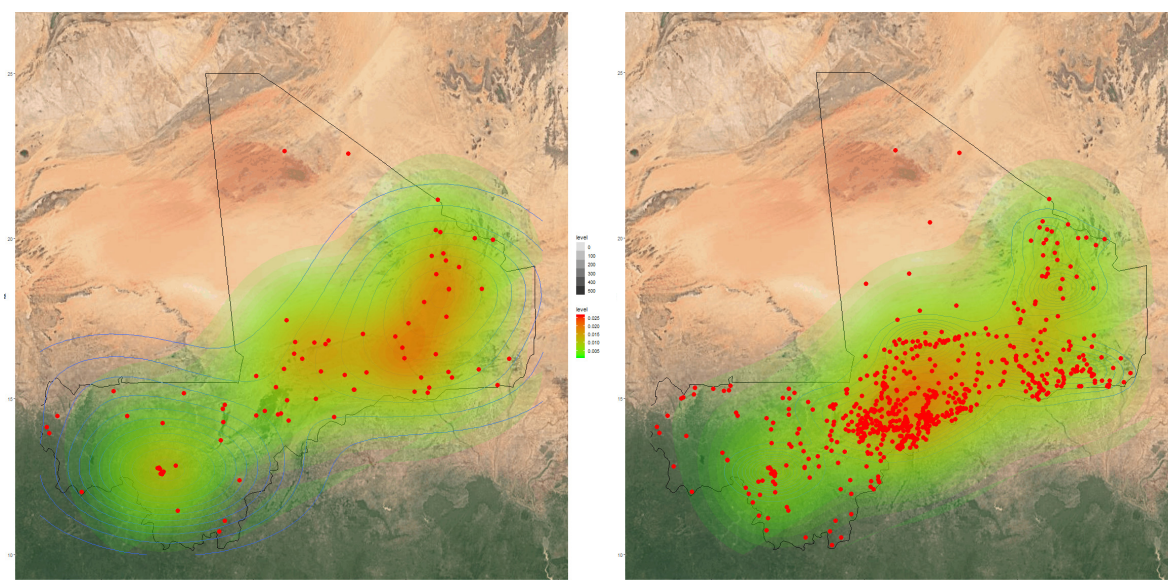


Figure 6: Conflict events, 2010-2015 and 2015-2018 (ACLED)

Conflicts in central Malian regions are not new (see Figure 6). These have tended to erupt due to local rights-based disputes over resources. The most common type of dispute could be over the demarcation of land, rights to land, water use, or damage to crops caused by a herder's passage. These conflicts have worsened over time due to climate and demographic pressures. They have also been badly managed, due to the overlapping customary and statutory systems that exist to resolve such disputes. Moreover, the justice system is perceived to be highly corrupt and ineffective.⁸⁶

The number of people fleeing violence has increased almost four-fold in Mopti and Ségou, from 18 000 to 70 000 between May 2018 and May 2019.

These latent communal conflicts have intensified both in frequency and scale due to the entrenchment of radical Islamist groups in Central Mali since 2015. The retreat of the state, which was triggered by a violent anti-state campaign launched by Islamist insurgents, opened up room for these actors to gain a foothold in rural areas, and especially in the flooded zones of Mopti which can only be accessed by boat. Islamist insurgencies, most notably, the Katiba Macina have appropriated grievances over government predation and corruption and exploited inter and intra-communal cleavages to recruit among predominantly the Peul community.⁸⁷ Government

⁸⁶ Rupesinghe and Boås, *Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Central Mali*.

⁸⁷ Ibid; Anca-Elena Ursu, "Under the gun: resource conflicts and embattled traditional authorities in Central Mali," Amsterdam: Clingendael, July 2018, <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/under-the-gun>.

counter-terror operations involving large-scale arrests and targeting of the Peul community have contributed to the swelling of Islamist groups' ranks.⁸⁸

Latent communal conflicts have intensified both in frequency and scale due to the entrenchment of radical Islamist groups in Central Mali since 2015.

Increased activities and the expansion of groups like the Katiba Macina have led to a counter-mobilisation of self-proclaimed self-defence groups among Dogon, Bambara and Peul communities. These groups claim they have had to take up arms due to the limited presence of the state, which has not been able to protect them against attacks and pillages.⁸⁹ Concerns have been raised about Bamako's role in supporting self-defence militias like the Da Na Amassagou through training and equipment.⁹⁰ This is a coalition of Dogon self-defence groups, consisting of Dozos which are traditional hunting societies originating from Mande-speaking ethnic groups from Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Burkina Faso.⁹¹ Easy access to arms and weaponry has also made communities more militarized and clashes deadlier.⁹² This has resulted in vicious cycles of retaliatory violence along communal lines between particularly Peul and Dogon communities on a scale and frequency not before seen in the region. Large-scale massacres, pillaging, burning of villages and frequent clashes have been documented on all sides.⁹³ The bloodiest incident to date occurred in the Fulani village of Ogossagou and Welingara in Mopti where at least 153 were killed. These attacks were allegedly carried out by the Da Na Amassagou militia, though they deny any involvement. Since then, violence has been continuing in a downward spiral, informed by the logic of retaliation and revenge. On 18 June 2019, at least 41 were killed in two predominantly Dogon villages by 'unidentified armed men' on motorbikes.⁹⁴ The conflict is becoming increasingly ethnicised with a growing risk of mass killings and atrocities committed along ethnic lines.⁹⁵

Inter-communal conflict has also escalated in Menaka, in north-eastern Mali. Since February 2018, Operation Barkhane, the FAMA and Nigerien military, aided by a coalition of armed

88 Rupesinghe and Bøås, *Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Central Mali*.

89 Human Rights Watch, *We Used to Be Brothers: Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali*, New York: Human Rights Watch, December 2018, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/mali1218_web.pdf.

90 Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako; see also Human Rights Watch, *We Used to Be Brothers*.

91 Human Rights Watch, *We Used to Be Brothers*, pp 26-28.

92 Ibid, p. 1.

93 Ibid.

94 Al Jazeera, "Gunmen 'kill dozens' in attack on two villages in central Mali," Al Jazeera, 18 June 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/gunmen-kill-dozens-attack-villages-central-mali-190618180758531.html>.

95 Ibrahim Yahaya Ibrahim and Mollie Zapata, "Regions at risk: Preventing mass atrocities in Mali," Early Warning Country Report, Washington: Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, April 2018; Richard Reeve, *Mali on the Brink: Insights from local peacebuilders on the causes of violent conflict and the prospects for peace*, London: Peace Direct, July 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/P772-PD-Mali-LVP-Report-ENG_WEB.pdf.

actors, the GATIA and MSA (part of the Plateforme signatory coalition),⁹⁶ have launched a co-ordinated counter-terror offensive against militants belonging to the ISGS in Gao and Menaka in the north-east. These operations have inflamed existing conflicts between the Daoussak and Tuareg, Daoussak and Iboguiltane, and the Daoussak Tuareg tribes and the Fulani.⁹⁷ In April and early May 2018, six massacres occurred on the Mali-Niger border.⁹⁸

Regional and international dynamics of the conflict

The crisis in Mali was partly triggered by regional dynamics and events. The short-term trigger was first and foremost the fall of the Qaddafi regime in February 2011, which resulted in an influx of weapons and well-equipped and war-trained Tuareg fighters from Libya to Northern Mali. This transformed a hitherto disorganised network of dissident Tuareg rebels into an organised rebellion. Second, the growing prominence of Al Qaeda-linked militants, such as AQIM which originated from the Algerian Civil War, and trafficking networks made the local conflict in Mali transnational in scope. Islamist insurgencies and inter-communal conflicts have spilt over to neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso, which have similar ethnic constellations on their border zones, making the conflict in Mali one which has serious regional repercussions.

Mali has become a geopolitical playing field, not only for regional powers like Algeria and Morocco, but it also preoccupies the agenda of several Western powers, notably France, the US, and Germany. Divergent interests and agendas of a plethora of regional and international actors hamper rather than helps stabilise Mali. For regional actors, the key problem is finding the best framework and means through which to cooperate. The two main criticisms of international actors are that they have framed the conflict too narrowly – as a “war on terrorism” – and that their involvement in Mali is aimed at securing their national security and economic interests and less about protecting Malian citizens and fostering sustainable peace.

Regional geopolitical rivalries

Algeria, which considers Mali and the Sahel to be its sphere of influence, has always played an important role in the North. It has intervened politically, rather than on a military basis. It positioned itself as the traditional mediator in Malian peace processes in the 1990s (Tamanrasset, National Pact) and in 2006 (Algiers Accord), and was named chief mediator in the Algiers peace process, which culminated into the Algiers Agreement in 2015. It also presides over the

96 MSA was founded by former members of several pro-Azawad groups, but is allied to GATIA and other Plateforme groups.

97 UN, “Final report of the Panel of Experts,” 2018, p. 17.

98 ACLED, “From the Mali-Niger borderlands to rural Gao – Tactical and geographical shifts of violence,” Madison: ACLED, 2018, <https://www.acleddata.com/2018/06/06/from-the-mali-niger-borderlands-to-rural-gao-tactical-and-geographical-shifts-of-violence>.

Algiers Agreement Follow-Up Committee and co-chairs the subcommittees – which are the key international structures supporting its implementation.

The crisis in Mali was partly triggered by regional dynamics and events.

Algeria has vested interests in and links to Northern Mali. First, it hosts a considerable Tuareg population, and ever since Qaddafi started promoting Tuareg nationalism and separatism, it sought to stem sentiments of irredentism from reaching its own soil.⁹⁹ Second, Algeria sees Northern Mali as its “backyard”. Socially and economically they are connected through trade, particularly in Kidal.¹⁰⁰ Third, it has used Northern Mali as an arena to exert its influence in the region and to curb the power of its key regional rivals, Libya and Morocco. Finally, it vehemently opposes foreign (and especially Western and French) interference in its sphere of influence.¹⁰¹

Yet, while Algeria is broadly conceived of as the natural regional leader to stabilise Mali, it has disappointed key regional and international stakeholders due to its unwillingness to take more robust action on the security-military front. Algeria is the undisputed military might in the region and has among the most superior intelligence capabilities on the continent, yet it has refused to intervene militarily.¹⁰² There is an expectation that Algeria should play a bigger role in this regard since AQIM’s membership is mostly Algerian and originated from the Civil War. Algiers, on the other hand, has accused the Malian Government of intelligence leaks, of refusing to share crucial intelligence on terrorist groups, and of having ties with Mali’s main Islamist leader – Iyad Ag Ghali.¹⁰³

Rivalries and mutual distrust between Algeria and Morocco have for a long time been an obstacle to regional cooperation,¹⁰⁴ largely due to their historical dispute over the Western Sahara issue.¹⁰⁵ Regional arrangements are hampered by this rivalry and are largely not functional enough to execute a concerted policy to stabilise Mali or combat violent extremism and terrorism at large.¹⁰⁶ Both compete for power and influence in the Sahel and block each other’s

99 Boutellis and Zahar, *A Process in Search of Peace*, p. 9.

100 Wolfram Lacher, “The Malian crisis and the challenge of regional security cooperation,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(2): 18, 2013, pp 1-5, 3.

101 Anouar Boukhars, “The paranoid neighbor: Algeria and the conflict in Mali,” Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2012.

102 Ibid; Anouar Boukhars, “Reassessing the power of regional security providers: the case of Algeria and Morocco,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 55: 2.

103 Lacher, “The Malian crisis and the challenge of regional security cooperation.”

104 Marina Caparini, “The Mali crisis and responses by regional actors,” NUPI Working Paper 849, Oslo: NUPI, 2015; Lacher, “The Malian crisis and the challenge of regional security cooperation,” pp 1-5, 3.

105 Algeria actively supports the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro (POLISARIO).

106 Bøås and Ba, “Mali: A political economy analysis,” p. 27.

initiatives in the region, creating an unpredictable context.¹⁰⁷ As Islamist insurgents and illicit networks have taken hold in Northern Mali progressively since the 2000s, little was concretely achieved by way of a regional response to the issue.¹⁰⁸

Morocco has increasingly ramped up its engagement in Mali and the Sahel, mainly through exercising its soft power.¹⁰⁹ It is positioning itself as a “regional religious mediator” and exporter of a tolerant and moderate form of Malikite Islam (the same form of Islam practised by the majority in Mali).¹¹⁰ Morocco aims to be a counter-force to the Wahhabi and Salafist ideologies exported from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. It has invested in religious scholarships and education programmes for Malian students, and the training of Malian imams.

Rifts and rivalries in the regional response became visible early on in the response to the crisis.

Rifts and rivalries in the regional response became visible early on in the response to the crisis. Both Algeria and Mauritania, who are not members of ECOWAS, opposed the idea of an ECOWAS military intervention, which was supported by France.¹¹¹ Rabat backed France. Algiers instead pursued a political strategy to mediate between key elements of the Tuareg nobility in the MNLA and Ansar Dine, which eventually failed to stem the advance of the Islamist insurgency.¹¹² France and the EU have not been able to develop cooperation with Algeria, and have instead focused on strengthening economic and security cooperation with weaker Sahelian countries.¹¹³

The spread of conflict to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger eventually led to the creation of an alternative regional platform, which side-lined the AU and ECOWAS,¹¹⁴ the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) sub-regional arrangement, consisting of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso. Subsequently, in 2017, the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (JF-G5S) was established. The G5 Sahel is heavily supported by France and the EU and is seen as constituting part of France’s exit strategy for its military Operation Barkhane in Mali and the Sahel.

107 Djallil Lounnas and Nizar Messaril, “Algeria-Morocco relations and their impact on the Maghrebi Regional System,” MENARA Working Papers 20, Barcelona: Menara, October 2018, p. 11.

108 Lacher, “The Malian crisis and the challenge of regional security cooperation,” p. 2.

109 Boukhars, “Reassessing the power of regional security providers: The case of Algeria and Morocco,” p. 2.

110 Vish Sakthivel, “Morocco’s move in Mali,” *Foreign Affairs*, 14 January 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2014-01-14/moroccos-move-mali>.

111 Ibid, p. 7.

112 Boukhars, “The paranoid neighbor: Algeria and the conflict in Mali.”

113 Ibid, p. 12.

114 Karlsrud Rupesinghe and Denis M. Tull, “Tangled up in glue: Multilateral crisis responses in Mali,” in John Karlsrud and Yf Reykers (Eds), *Multinational Rapid Response Mechanisms: From Institutional Proliferation to Institutional Exploitation*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp 133-155, 2019.

International actors

France is undoubtedly the most important actor operating in Mali. Not only is Mali a former colony, it is a key theatre for the fight against Islamist “terrorists” in the Sahel. Broadly speaking, France’s initial goals were twofold: to halt the Islamist insurgency’s advance, and restore Mali’s territorial integrity.¹¹⁵ While many welcomed France’s initial military intervention, ordinary Malians, Malian elites, and international stakeholders widely perceive France as harbouring long-term economic interests in the region. Moreover, while counter-terror operations by Barkhane are seen as indispensable to help prevent the collapse of the government, these actions are increasingly criticised for not prioritising the lives of Malian citizens. Moreover, France’s strategy is highly militarised. Although attention for development is increasing, critics argue that, in absence of attention for governance, the strategy is not going to be successful. Another key source of tension is that France refuses to open dialogue with Islamist leaders – particularly Iyad Ag Ghali and Hamadoun Kouffa. Malians are, in general, highly suspicious of France’s activities in the country, and these sentiments have only worsened during the course of 2018–2019 as violence against civilians has flared up.¹¹⁶

The US, as a key ally of France, shared the French concern that Mali could become a hub and safe haven for Islamist terrorism.¹¹⁷ Early on, the US vowed to support France and provided Operation Serval with airlift and logistical support, but since then, the US administration has shied away from any military engagement. Nevertheless, while the US has purported a “light footprint” strategy in Africa, the Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Niger) constitutes a key geographical sphere of its counter-terrorism theatre in Africa. It has a significant military presence in Niger (five military/security “sites”, including a drone base), and special forces are active, which came to light following the killing of three American soldiers by the ISGS.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, following the Trump administration’s clampdown on peacekeeping budgets globally, the US has become the primary voice in the Security Council advocating for a “major drawdown” of MINUSMA, requesting options for the Mission’s significant adaptation before the June 2019 mandate renewal.¹¹⁹ Eventually, however, it accepted the latest mandate renewal in which the Mission was not significantly changed.

115 Christopher S. Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qa’ida in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016; Bruce Whitehouse, “How did Mali get here?” Part 4: Geopolitical explanations, Bridges from Bamako, 16 May 2017, <https://bridgesfrombamako.com/2017/05/16/how-did-mali-get-here-part-4>.

116 On 5 April 2019 in Bamako, a protest was organised and led by the Islamic preacher Imam Mahmoud Dicko to demand the resignation of the Prime Minister and President following the massacre at Ogossagou on 23 March 2019, but also the departure of foreign forces occupying Mali. See, e.g., Reuters, “Thousands rally in Mali to protest ethnic violence,” Reuters, 5 April 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security-protests/thousands-rally-in-mali-to-protest-ethnic-violence-idUSKCN1RH26K>.

117 US Government, “The Crisis in Mali: US Interests and the International Response,” Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives. Washington DC: US Government, 14 February 2013, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg78949/html/CHRG-113hhrg78949.htm>.

118 Nick Turse, “U.S. Military says it has a ‘light footprint’ in Africa. These documents show a vast network of bases,” *The Intercept*, 1 December 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/12/01/u-s-military-says-it-has-a-light-footprint-in-africa-these-documents-show-a-vast-network-of-bases>.

119 France24, “US seeks drawdown of UN peacekeeping force in Mali,” France24, 23 March 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190329-us-seeks-drawdown-un-peacekeeping-force-mali>.

The third strategic partner in Mali is the EU which, since 2012, has ramped up its engagement in the Sahel region as a means of preventing instability in its “extended neighbourhood”. Nevertheless, critics would argue that France (with support from Germany) remains the key agenda-setter and “lead nation”, even behind EU engagements.¹²⁰ The EU is also the key donor, after France, to the JF-G5S, in line with its broad policy of bolstering regional organisations in Africa. Moreover, the regional dimensions of Mali’s crisis – most notably stemming refugee flows from Mali towards Europe – has been at the forefront of the EU’s security agenda. Initially, the EU’s overall approach in Mali has been within the realm of capacity-building: EUCAP Sahel trains and equips the Malian police, while EUTM trains the FAMA. However, this has expanded to include support to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), intensifying cooperation and support of the JF-G5S, and support to decentralisation.¹²¹

Donor engagement

In addition to international and regional organisations, Mali receives support from the World Bank, the IMF, and the African Development Bank (AfDB) as well as bilateral donors. Prior to the conflict in 2012, Mali was heralded as a “donor darling”, and received large amounts of development assistance.¹²² Following the crisis, donor engagement dwindled, and returned to 2011 levels, but did not continue to increase annually as it had done in the pre-conflict period. Following the crisis, more aid was channelled into supporting non-governmental organisations (NGOs), multilateral institutions (like UN agencies), and the humanitarian sector, but overall, official development aid (ODA) has been directed fairly consistently towards the public sector.¹²³ Between 2011 and 2015, US\$5.8 billion was provided to Mali. The lion’s share was provided by the US (19%), EU institutions (15%), and the World Bank (12%). France is Mali’s most important bilateral donor, with ODA rising from €30 to 124 million between 2012 and 2015.¹²⁴

120 Ingo Peters, Enver Ferhatovic, Rabea Heinemann, Susan Bergner, and Sofia Marie Sturm, *Lessons to be learned from the EU crisis response in the extended neighbourhood: EU Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali*. Berlin: Freie Universität, September 2018, http://www.eunpack.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09_D7.9_Article%20on%20lessons%20learned%20from%20EU%20crisis%20response%20in%20the%20extended%20neighbourhood.pdf.

121 Ibid, p. 14.

122 For example, between 2002-2012, ODA increased from US\$610.35 million to US\$1.14 billion, including a spike in aid in 2006 of US\$2.92 billion. See NORAD, “Country Evaluation Brief Mali,” Report 6, Evaluation Department, Oslo: NORAD, April 2018, p. 16, <https://norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2018/country-evaluation-brief-mali>.

123 Ibid, p. 17.

124 Oxfam, *Mobilising Domestic Resources to help Mali’s poorest populations: The role of French Development Aid*. Paris and Bamako: Oxfam, December 2017, https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bn-mobilising-domestic-resources-mali-061217-en.pdf.

IV. The Peace Operation¹²⁵

MINUSMA's prehistory

The ECOWAS was initially in the lead on the situation in Mali. On 27 March 2012, it suspended Mali after a coup, vowed to “take all necessary measures to re-establish constitutional order in Mali”, and ordered the 3,000-strong ECOWAS Standby Force to be on high alert.¹²⁶ In April 2012, it authorised the immediate deployment of the ECOWAS Standby Force. However, while ECOWAS and the AU prepared to intervene, there were severe challenges related to the planning and financing of the operation. The AU Peace and Security Council asked the UN Security Council to endorse the ECOWAS Force, and requested a “support package funded by UN-assessed contributions.”¹²⁷ While the situation steadily worsened during 2012, there was little agreement and even less action on who should intervene in the crisis.

After considerable foot-dragging, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2085 on 20 December 2012, authorising the AFISMA.¹²⁸ In the meantime, the ownership of the Mission shifted away from ECOWAS, as AFISMA was an African led-operation, jointly ECOWAS and AU. However, as the AU lacked planning and logistical capacity, and as there was not enough financing available, the AU deployment of AFISMA was slow. It was only expected

125 Parts of this section build on annual overviews published before in the SIPRI Yearbook 2018: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013-2019.

126 ECOWAS, “Final Communiqué,” 27 March, Abuja: Economic Community of West African States, p. 6.

127 AU, “Communiqué,” PSC/PR/COMM (CCCXXIII), Addis Ababa: AU, 12 June 2012, p. 3.

128 UN, S/RES/2085, New York: UN, 20 December 2012.

to reach full strength by September 2013.¹²⁹ Shortly after the UN Security Council resolution, however, the situation deteriorated further, with Islamist and Tuareg groups seizing control of several key towns and progressing south towards Bamako. On 10 January 2013, when Islamist and Tuareg forces captured the strategic town of Konna in Central Mali, putting at risk the nearby Sévaré Military Airport, which was vital to any future intervention, France pushed the Security Council to reiterate the call for assistance to the Malian Government.¹³⁰ Subsequently, with logistical and intelligence support from the USA and other allies, France deployed Opération Serval in mid-January.¹³¹ The first troops of AFISMA arrived a week later on 18 January, followed quickly by Chadian and other troops. AFISMA cooperated closely with Operation Serval in the fight against the Islamist groups. The Chadian troops were particularly active and received praise for their willingness to attack and “endure high casualties.”¹³²

With logistical and intelligence support from the USA and other allies, France deployed Opération Serval.

Within three weeks of the start of Operation Serval, Malian and French forces had recaptured the three main cities in Northern Mali (Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu), encountering little resistance. By March 2013, control was regained in most of Northern Mali, while the Islamists sought refuge in the mountains, fled across the border, or blended with the local population. While the African diplomatic community was largely positive about Operation Serval, there was also a sense of frustration at still having to rely on external actors for such an intervention, despite the investment in the African Standby Force (ASF). Observers also criticised the EU, France and the USA for mobilising logistical capacity to set up Operation Serval instead of using the resources to help meet AFISMA’s logistical challenges.¹³³

The establishment of MINUSMA

By the beginning of February 2013, 3,000 troops from West African countries had been deployed to AFISMA. Nonetheless, France and the USA called on the UN Security Council to quickly replace AFISMA with a UN operation.¹³⁴ On 7 March, the AU Peace and Security Council decided to support the proposal on the conditions that: (a) the UN mission would have a “robust” peace-enforcement mandate; (b) the UN would consult with the AU, ECOWAS and

129 Security Council Report, “February 2013 Monthly Forecast,” 31 January 2013, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2013-02/mali_4.php.

130 UN Security Council, “Security Council press statement on Mali,” Press Release, SC/10878, 10 January 2013.

131 Thomas G. Weiss and Martin Welz, “The UN and the African Union in Mali and beyond: A shotgun wedding?” *International Affairs*, 90(4): 897, 2014.

132 Ibid.

133 ICG, “Mali: Security, Dialogue and Meaningful Reform,” Africa Report no. 201, ICG: Brussels, 11 April 2013, p. 13.

134 Al Arabiya, “US, France agree on need to set up UN Mali force,” Al Arabiya, 5 February 2013.

Mali, and appoint the head of AFISMA, Pierre Buyoya, to lead the new mission; and (c) the UN would raise financial and logistical support for AFISMA and provide a “central role” for the AU and ECOWAS.¹³⁵ At the end of March, the Malian Government and the president of the ECOWAS Commission also requested the transformation of AFISMA into a UN operation.¹³⁶

On 25 April, when the Malian Government, with the help of Operation Serval and AFISMA, had regained control over much of its territory, the UN Security Council mandated MINUSMA, comprised of 11,200 military personnel (including a rapid response battalion) and 1,440 police personnel.¹³⁷ The new operation incorporated troops from AFISMA. However, as some of these troops did not meet UN standards in terms of equipment and training, they were given a four-month grace period in which to upgrade their training and equipment.¹³⁸ The new Mission also incorporated the structures and responsibilities of the UN Office in Mali (UNOM), which had been established in December 2012. On 1 July 2013, authority was transferred from AFISMA to MINUSMA. The phased deployment of MINUSMA was made dependent on the progress of the international forces in fighting groups designated by the Security Council as terrorist forces.¹³⁹

On 1 July 2013, authority was transferred from AFISMA to MINUSMA.

The UN Security Council resolution establishing MINUSMA contained two aspects that would remain key to its mandate throughout the following years. First, stabilisation and supporting the restoration and extension of state authority, initially in the North, and since 2018 also in the central regions of the country. The Security Council mandated the “stabilisation of key population centres and support for the reestablishment of State authority throughout the country.” This included deterring threats, actively preventing the return of armed elements, and assisting the rebuilding of the Malian security sector. The second core task was supporting and implementing a political process, which later became the Algiers Agreement. Support would initially be provided for the implementation of the transitional road map adopted by the Malian National Assembly on 29 January, including assistance for the national political dialogue and the 2013 electoral processes. Less prominent aspects of MINUSMA’s mandate at its establishment were the protection of civilians (PoC) and UN personnel; promotion and protection of human rights (including the deployment of human rights observers); supporting humanitarian

135 AU Peace and Security Council, 358th Ministerial Meeting, “Communiqué,” PSC/PR/COMM (CCCLVIII), 7 March 2013.

136 UN Security Council, Letter dated 25 February 2013 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2013/113, 26 February 2013; UN Security Council, Letter dated 16 April 2013 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2013/231, 16 April 2013.

137 UN Security Council Resolution 2100, 25 April 2013.

138 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali,” S/2013/582, New York: UN, 1 October 2013.

139 UN Security Council Resolution 2100.

assistance and the preservation and protection of cultural and historical sites; and assisting in bringing to justice, either in Mali or through the International Criminal Court (ICC), those guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹⁴⁰

The AU expressed its “concern that Africa was not appropriately consulted in the drafting and consultation process” leading to MINUSMA.

On the same day that the UN Security Council mandated MINUSMA, the AU expressed its “concern that Africa was not appropriately consulted in the drafting and consultation process” leading to MINUSMA, and stressed that this was “not in consonance with the spirit of partnership that the AU and the United Nations have been striving to promote for many years.”¹⁴¹ The disagreement between the AU and the UN stemmed primarily from the fact that the UN Security Council was unwilling to agree to the preconditions set out by the AU and ECOWAS, and that it therefore effectively side-lined both organisations.¹⁴²

African regional organisations and the UN also disagreed over MINUSMA’s robustness and role in counter-terrorism.

African regional organisations and the UN also disagreed over MINUSMA’s robustness and role in counter-terrorism. In contrast to the AU’s conditions for supporting the transformation, which included reference to “a robust mandate”, and offensive operations against armed groups, several members of the UN Security Council – including Argentina, Guatemala, Pakistan and Russia – sought to limit the robustness of MINUSMA’s mandate.¹⁴³ These countries had also pushed for the reaffirmation of the basic principles of peacekeeping in the mandate. Some observers argued that, by limiting the robustness of MINUSMA, these countries were seeking to restrict the use of force by UN operations. MONUSCO’s Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) was established one month before. The FIB had been authorised on an exceptional basis, and they did not want to establish yet another similar operation risking that would set a further precedent.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Ibid (note 34), para. 16.

¹⁴¹ AU Peace and Security Council, 371st Ministerial Meeting, “Communiqué,” PSC/PR/COMM (CCCLXXI), 25 April 2013.

¹⁴² Arthur Boutellis and Paul D. Williams, “Disagreements over Mali could sour more than the upcoming African Union celebration,” IPI Global Observatory, 15 May 2013, <http://www.theglobalobservatory.org/analysis/502-disagreements-over-mali-could-sour-more-than-the-upcoming-african-union-celebration.html>.

¹⁴³ AU Peace and Security Council, 371st Ministerial Meeting, “Communiqué,” PSC/PR/COMM (CCCLXXI), 25 April 2013.

¹⁴⁴ What’s in Blue, “Resolution establishing a UN mission in Mali,” 24 April 2013, <http://www.whatsinblue.org/2013/04/resolution-establishing-a-un-mission-in-mali.php>.

	Political mandate	Security mandate	Strength and features
2013-2015			
UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2100 (April 2013)	Support the implementation of the transitional road map, including the national political dialogue and electoral process.	Stabilisation of key population centres and support for the re-establishment of state authority and administration throughout the country.	<p>11,200 military personnel and 1,440 police personnel.</p> <p>Dedicated intelligence analysis cell – the All-Source Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU), staffed by Western member states.</p> <p>Authorised French forces to use all necessary means to intervene in support of MINUSMA.</p>
SCR 2164 (June 2014)	Continue to lead in the political negotiations.	Stressed the need for deployment of troops to the North.	Provided benchmarks for the Mission.
SCR 2227 (June 2015)	Support the implementation of the Algiers Agreement.	Support, monitor and supervise the ceasefire.	40 additional military personnel to monitor and supervise the ceasefire.
2015-2017			
SCR 2295 (June 2016)	No significant changes.	<p>Refocus towards the Centre sought, implemented with the deployment of a Senegalese Quick Reaction Force (QRF).</p> <p>Increasingly focus on self-protection as attacks were becoming more frequent.</p>	<p>Inclusion of Counter-IED teams.</p> <p>13,289 military personnel and 1,920 police personnel.</p>

SCR 2364 (June 2017)	No significant changes.	"To anticipate and deter threats and to take robust and active steps to counter asymmetric attacks against civilians or United Nations personnel."	Requests coordination and exchange of intelligence and liaison officers with the JF-G5S and French forces – technical agreement signed on 23 February 2018.
2017-2019			
SCR 2391 (December 2017)			Provision of operational and logistical support to the JF-G5S on Malian territory, in compliance with the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP).
SCR 2423 (June 2018)	Conclude a "Pact for Peace".	Support restoration of state authority in the Centre.	<p>Merger of the ASIFU with the UN military U2 intelligence cell, discontinuation of the ASIFU.</p> <p>Requests support for the JF-G5S to be in strict compliance with the HRDDP.</p>

Table 2: A brief overview of the UN Security Council mandates for MINUSMA*Source: UN Security Council resolutions*

MINUSMA would generate European interest and result in contributions unprecedented in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa since the mid-1990s, including aviation units, intelligence and special forces. This also resulted in pressure from European TCCs to update UN peacekeeping practices, including, for instance, the use of intelligence, to be able to face contemporary threats of violent extremism and terrorism. Despite the increase in European interests, two-thirds of MINUSMA's uniformed personnel were African and originated from Western and Central Africa, partly as a result of the rehatting of AFISMA TCCs (see Figure 7).¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the leadership of the UN invested particular effort to onboarding troops from European member states, as they were expected to bring both required high-end or mobile capabilities, as well as political capital to MINUSMA. A major challenge of the European contributions to MINUSMA was that they did not sufficiently integrate into the rest of the Mission.

¹⁴⁵ The troops originated from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

They were frequently seen as a “mission within a mission,” effectively turning MINUSMA in a “two-pace mission.”¹⁴⁶

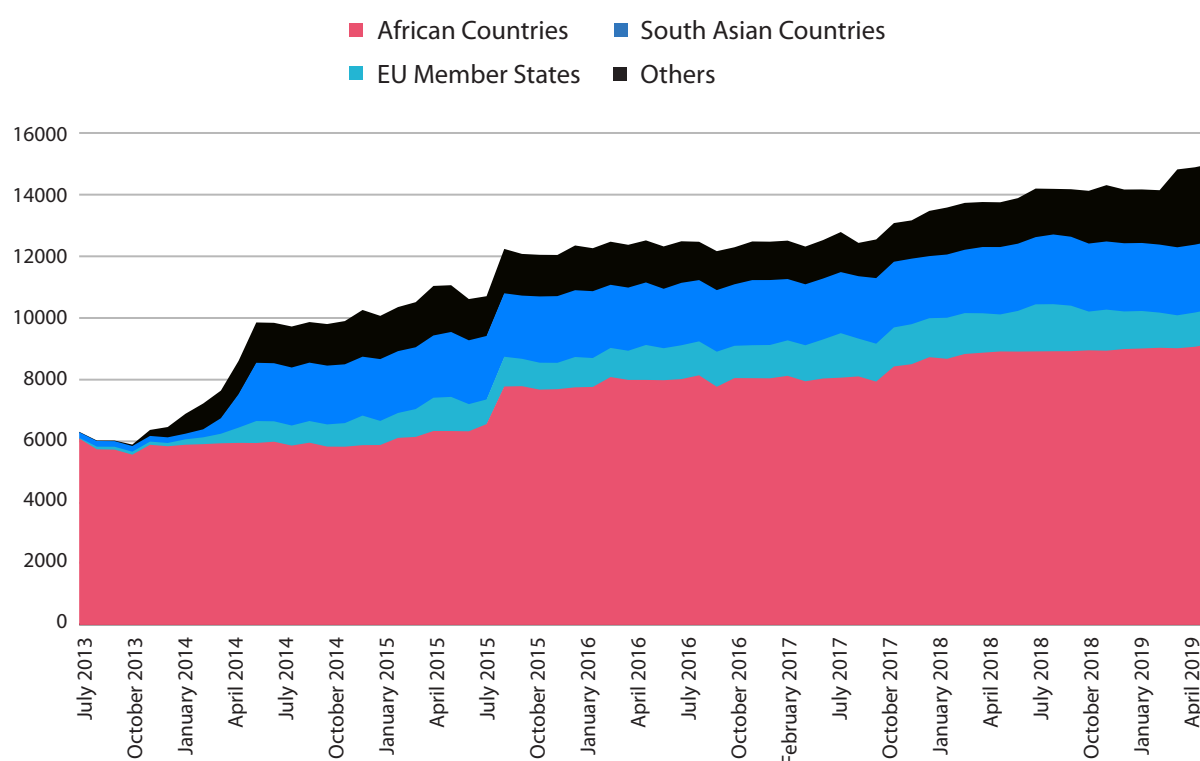


Figure 7: Contributions of uniformed personnel to MINUSMA by region, 2013-2019

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database

An experiment in the Sahel (2013-2015)

The first success of MINUSMA was that it contributed successfully to re-establishing the constitutional order and to the security stabilisation around urban centres. Despite the continuing insurgency, two peaceful rounds of presidential elections were organised in July and August 2013, with legislative elections held in November and December 2013. On 4 September, the transitional authority was successfully ended when Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) was sworn in as president.¹⁴⁷

During this initial phase, after establishment, much energy was dedicated by MINUSMA to establishing bases and a presence throughout Mali. The Mission faced important capability gaps and force generation was slow (see Figure 8 and 9). It did not engage armed groups and

¹⁴⁶ Interview with MINUSMA official, 18 November 2015, Bamako.

¹⁴⁷ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali,” S/2013/582; UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali,” S/2014/1, New York: UN, 2 January 2014.

terrorist organisations, despite requests from the Malian Government, but deployed in rural areas where civilians were at risk.¹⁴⁸ As the government had largely withdrawn from Northern Mali and Operation Serval had also withdrawn and reconfigured, MINUSMA became the prime target for IEDs, mines, suicide bombers, and rocket and mortar attacks.¹⁴⁹ A number of civilian UN personnel were also among the victims of attacks that took place in Southern Mali, most notably in the central town of Sevaré and in the capital, Bamako¹⁵⁰ (see Figure 10). Major General Jean Bosco Kazura, MINUSMA's Force Commander, stated that "MINUSMA is in a terrorist-fighting situation without an anti-terrorist mandate or adequate training, equipment, logistics or intelligence to deal with such a situation."¹⁵¹

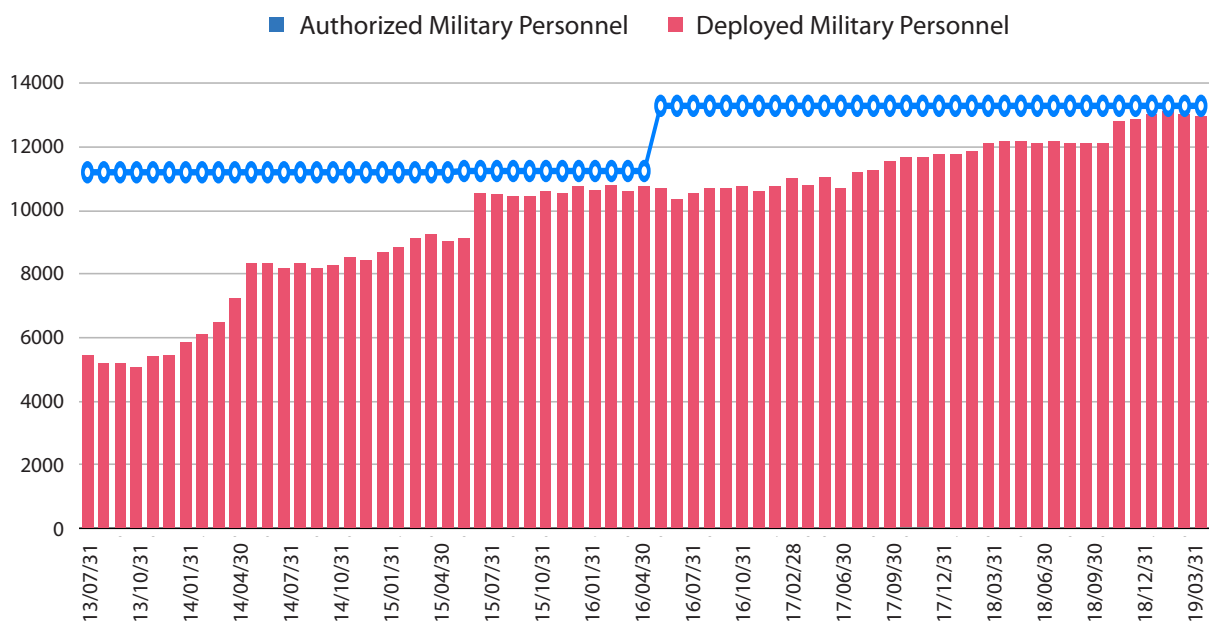


Figure 8: MINUSMA authorised and deployed military personnel, 2013-2019

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database

148 UN Security Council Resolution 2164, 25 June 2014; Daniel Flynn, "Mali urges aggressive overhaul of UN peacekeeping mission," Reuters, 25 June 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/25/us-mali-un-idUSKBN0F01CL20140625>.

149 UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali," S/2014/692, 22 September 2014.

150 UN Security Council, Reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, S/2015/426, 11 June 2015; S/2015/732, 22 September 2015; S/2015/1030, 24 December 2015.

151 UN Security Council, 7275th meeting, S/PV.7275, 9 October 2014.

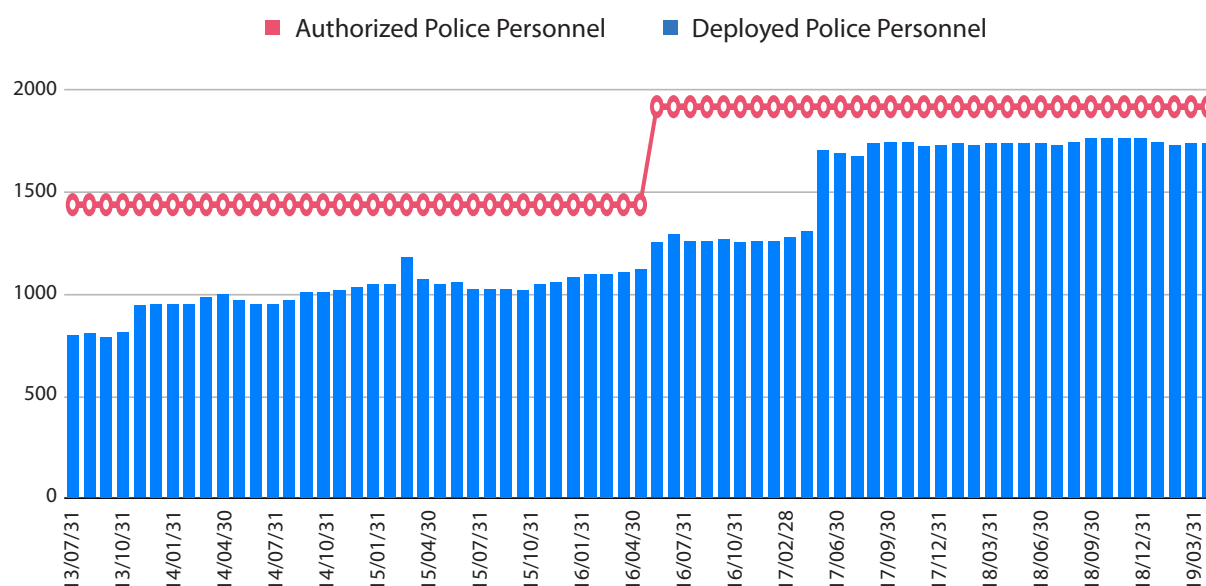


Figure 9: MINUSMA authorised and deployed police personnel, 2013-2019

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database

“MINUSMA is in a terrorist-fighting situation without an anti-terrorist mandate or adequate training, equipment, logistics or intelligence to deal with such a situation.”

The Mission also faced decreasing support from the local population, who felt that UN forces were not doing enough to support the Malian armed forces and to prevent armed groups from targeting civilians. Protests, several of which turned violent, were organised against MINUSMA and Operation Serval across the country, including Gao and Ménaka – questioning their impartiality and calling for their withdrawal.¹⁵² Another challenge to MINUSMA's popular support had its origins in sexual exploitation and abuse. In September 2013, after a dispute over pay, at least four MINUSMA soldiers from Chad left their base and raped at least one woman in Gao.¹⁵³ Previously, in June, the UN had placed Chad under special scrutiny in order to ensure that it would not deploy child soldiers to MINUSMA.¹⁵⁴ In order to address the limited support among the local population, the Security Council strengthened MINUSMA's mandate in 2016 to include developing an effective communication strategy and setting up MINUSMA's

152 Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), “Civilians in Northern Mali in Need of Protection,” NRC Briefing Paper, 19 June 2014, http://www.nrc.no/arch/_img/9179335.pdf; UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali,” S/2014/1 (note 155); UN News Centre, “Mali: UN Mission to investigate deadly protests against compound,” 28 January 2015, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49935#.VOdVWou4kW1>.

153 “UN's MINUSMA troops ‘sexually assaulted Mali woman,’” BBC News, 26 September 2013.

154 Louis Charbonneau and Michelle Nichols, “UN peacekeeping operations in Mali to begin on July 1,” Reuters, 25 June 2013.

“Radio Mikado” in the hope that this would increase awareness and understanding of its mandate and activities.¹⁵⁵

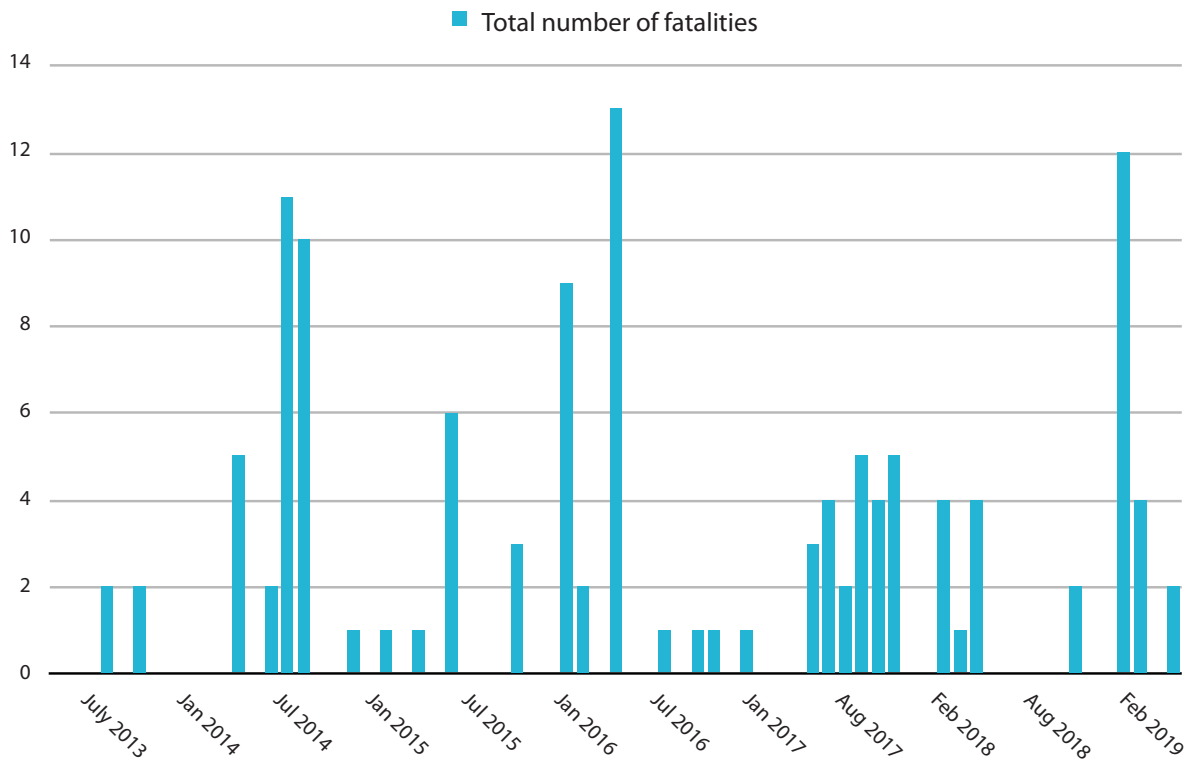


Figure 10: Fatalities in MINUSMA due to malicious attacks, 2013-2019

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database

In the meantime, MINUSMA also supported the Algiers peace process, which had been started in January 2014 by Algeria, by initiating exploratory discussions with the armed movements in Northern Mali. This would eventually lead to the Algiers Agreement, which was signed by the Government of Mali and the Plateforme on 1 March 2015, and after some foot-dragging, by the CMA on 20 June 2015, signalling the start of a new phase.¹⁵⁶

2015-2018: Slow implementation of the Algiers Agreement and increasing risks

Soon after the signing of the Algiers Agreement, MINUSMA assumed additional responsibilities for supporting the implementation of the peace accord on which it is based and for monitoring the ceasefires. The UN Security Council assigned 40 military observers to the Mission

¹⁵⁵ UN Security Council Resolution 2295, 29 June 2016.

¹⁵⁶ Boutellis and Zahar, *A Process in Search of Peace*.

for this purpose.¹⁵⁷ Although MINUSMA did not report significant ceasefire violations during the remainder of 2015, progress in the implementation of the Algiers Agreement was slow. The nomination and deployment of interim authorities were delayed, and the establishment of service delivery in Northern Mali lagged.¹⁵⁸ In 2016, while the interim administration in the North of Mali continued to be delayed, the Agreement would also be frequently violated by the Plateforme and CMA armed groups.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, terrorist and criminal activities expanded further into Central and Southern Mali and inter-communal violence intensified in Central Mali.

MINUSMA also supported the Algiers peace process.

The deployment into an ongoing counter-terrorism theatre was extremely challenging for MINUSMA and it made the Mission the deadliest of all current UN peace operations (see Figures 11 and 12). Since inception, the Security Council and UN Secretariat had been torn on the issue of whether MINUSMA should have a more robust mandate to fight terrorist threats, or if it is simply above and beyond the types of threats that UN peace operations realistically should be able to face.¹⁶⁰ Nonetheless, to prove responsive to the complex security environment and asymmetric threats, the UN Security Council pushed for increasingly robust mandates for the Mission, asking the Mission in its 2016 mandate to engage in “direct operations” against “serious and credible threats”. The renewed mandate paid additional attention to countering asymmetric threats to the safety and security of MINUSMA personnel. The Security Council requested MINUSMA to move to a more proactive and robust posture. Without the necessary means to implement its mandate, however, the continuing lack of key capabilities remained a serious challenge for MINUSMA. In order to reach full operational capability, the Council requested the UN Secretary-General to speed up force generation, while TCCs and PCCs were asked to speed up the procurement and deployment of the required equipment to Mali, as well as the personnel trained to use it.¹⁶¹ The Council also asked the Secretary-General and the UN member states to improve MINUSMA’s intelligence capacity, training and equipment to counter IEDs; military capabilities to protect its logistical supply lines, casualty and medical evacuation capabilities; and safety and security facilities and arrangements.¹⁶²

157 UN Security Council Resolution 2227, 29 June 2015.

158 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali,” S/2016/1137, New York: UN, 30 December 2016.

159 UN Security Council, Presidential Statement 16, 3 November 2016; Institute for Security Studies, “A new African force for Mali,” Peace and Security Council Report, 5 September 2016, <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/situation-analysis/a-new-african-force-for-mali>.

160 This introspection started already when UN SCR 2100 was developed and has continued ever since, e.g., with an informal interactive dialogue in the UN Security Council on 10 November 2014.

161 UN Security Council Resolution 2295, 29 June 2016.

162 Ibid.

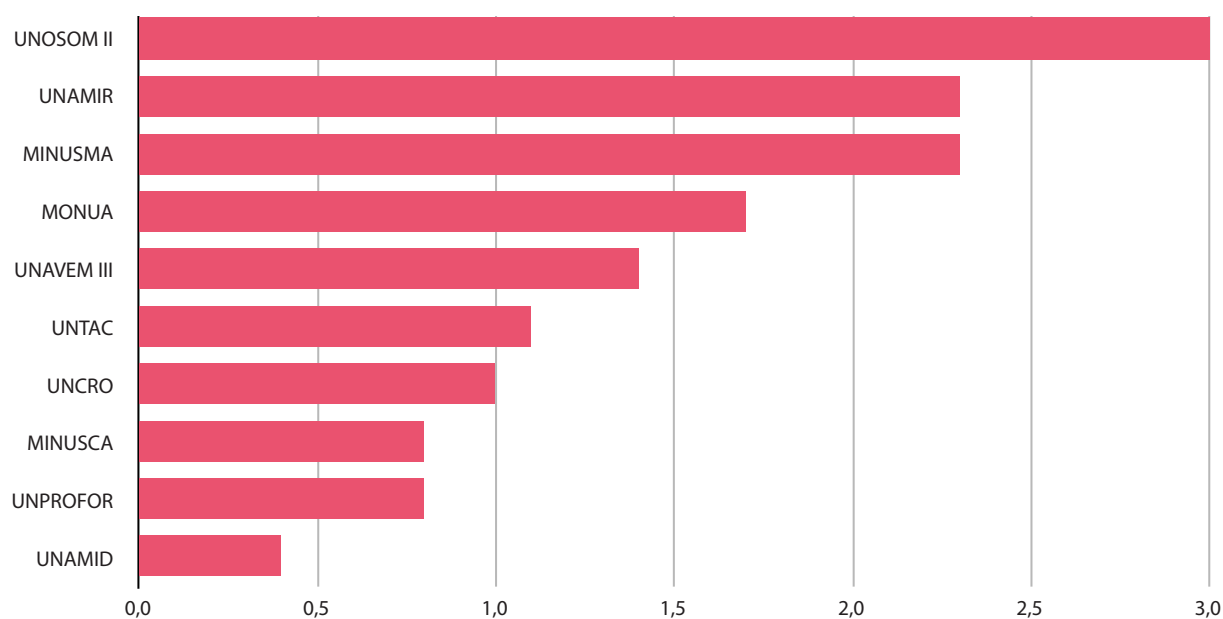


Figure 11: Fatality ratios for UN peacekeeping operations overall due to hostile acts (average annual hostile deaths per 1,000 uniformed personnel deployed)

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database

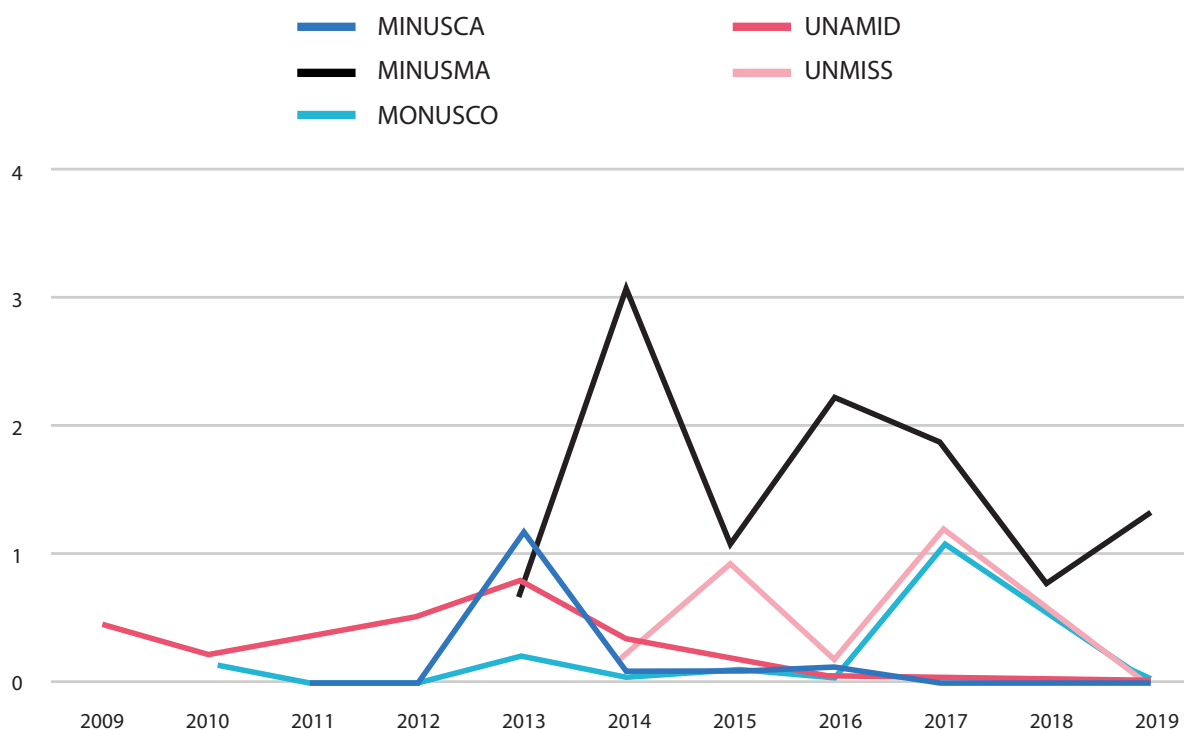


Figure 12: Fatality ratios for relevant UN peacekeeping operations due to hostile acts, 2009-2019 (average annual hostile deaths per 1,000 uniformed personnel deployed)

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database

Without the necessary means to implement its mandate, however, the continuing lack of key capabilities remained a serious challenge for MINUSMA.

The security situation also affected the implementation of the Algiers Agreement. A central part of the agreement was the cantonment and demobilisation of armed groups. The agreement envisaged the Operational Coordination Mechanism (MOC) to be set up hosting a mix of Plateform, CMA and FAMA troops. On 18 January 2017, the MOC in Gao was attacked, resulting in 54 people killed and more than 100 wounded.¹⁶³ Al-Mourabitoun, a terrorist group affiliated to AQIM, claimed to be behind the attack.¹⁶⁴ This attack significantly slowed down the establishment of the MOC and created further delays.

2018: Moving towards Central Mali, supporting the G5 Sahel, and the way forward

Already in 2015–2016, commentators and MINUSMA personnel had been aware of increasing tensions in Central Mali. Given the hesitancy among some Security Council members to further expand MINUSMA's mandate and hence increase the costs, and particularly given the resistance of the Malian Government that saw the situation in Central Mali as a national challenge that it could solve without international interference, MINUSMA was not able to shift resources to prevent communal violence in the Centre from escalating.¹⁶⁵ In 2016, the Security Council decided to transfer the quick reaction forces (QRF) from the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), as well as the aviation unit that supported it, to MINUSMA. The aim was to support both MINUSMA and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) after UNOCI's closure and the mandate expansion to include the centre of the country. This provided opportunities by increasing MINUSMA's authorised strength to 15 209 uniformed personnel (13 289 military and 1 920 police).¹⁶⁶

However, MINUSMA continued to be afflicted by a lack of key capabilities for operating in complex security environments (see Figures 8 and 9). As a consequence, the asymmetric threats from frequent hostile attacks persisted. An extraordinary force generation conference on 22–23 May 2017 led to a variety of pledges to fill the capability gaps. The UN Security Council

163 UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali," S/2017/271, New York: UN, 30 March 2017.

164 Ibrahim Maiga, "Peace in Mali: one step forward, two steps back," Institute for Security Studies, 1 February 2017, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/peace-in-mali-one-step-forward-two-steps-back>.

165 See, e.g., Arthur Boutellis, "Can the UN stabilize Mali? Towards a UN Stabilization Doctrine," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4(1): 1–16; ICG, "Central Mali: An uprising in the making?" ICG, 6 July 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/central-mali-uprising-making>.

166 UN Security Council Resolution 2295, 29 June 2016.

asked the Secretary-General to consider long-term rotation schemes for critical capabilities and innovative partnerships between equipment-contributing countries, TCCs and PCCs, as new options for enhancing MINUSMA's capabilities. At MINUSMA's annual mandate renewal in June 2017, the Security Council maintained its tasks.¹⁶⁷ However, it would take until 2018 for the deployment of UNOCI's QRF to Ségou, Mali.

Given the hesitancy among some Security Council members to further expand MINUSMA's mandate, and particularly given the resistance of the Malian Government, MINUSMA was not able to shift resources to prevent communal violence in the Centre from escalating.

In response to the continuing instability in 2016, the AU Peace and Security Council considered sending an AU intervention force to fight jihadist groups as part of MINUSMA, comparable to the FIB in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).¹⁶⁸ To mitigate the situation, the UN Security Council increasingly accommodated the demands of Mali, its neighbours, and the AU. On 6 February 2017, the G5 Sahel set up the JF-G5S to fight terrorism and organised crime in the territory of its member states – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.¹⁶⁹ On 13 April, the AU Peace and Security Council endorsed the strategic concept and authorised a 5,000-strong Mission. The Mission was to have military, police and civilian components, and the latter two were to deal with human rights and PoC in particular. The JF-G5S mandate was to: (a) combat terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking, with the aim of creating a more secure environment in the Sahel region by eradicating “terrorist armed groups” (TAGs) and organised criminal groups; (b) contribute to the restoration of state authority and the return of displaced persons and refugees; (c) facilitate humanitarian assistance; and (d) assist development efforts.¹⁷⁰

The Secretary-General recommended that the Security Council approve the deployment of the JF-G5S and authorise him to look into financial and other modalities for support.¹⁷¹ The JF-G5S was of particular importance to France, as part of its strategy to reduce the pressure on its overstretched armed forces deployed in operations such as Barkhane. France was, therefore, willing to push hard against the USA, which was resistant to any potential UN financial or other

167 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali,” S/2017/478, New York: UN, 6 June 2017; UN Security Council Resolution 2364, 29 June 2017.

168 UN Security Council, Presidential Statement 16, 3 November 2016; Institute for Security Studies, “A new African force for Mali.”

169 G5 Sahel, Permanent Secretariat, Resolution 00-01/2017, “Relative à la création d’une force conjointe du G5 Sahel” [Resolution on the creation of a joint G5 Sahel force], 6 February 2017.

170 AU Peace and Security Council, Communiqué, 679th meeting, PSC/PR/COMM (DCLXXIX), 13 April 2017.

171 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali,” S/2017/478, 6 June 2017.

support as it sought to reduce the UN peacekeeping budget, but perhaps could not be seen to be vetoing a counter-terrorism force.¹⁷² Eventually, the Security Council welcomed – rather than authorised (as France had wanted but the USA had opposed) – the deployment of the JF-G5S, encouraged bilateral and non-UN funding, and agreed to review the Mission after four months.¹⁷³ The Security Council also requested MINUSMA to coordinate with the JF-G5S through information and intelligence sharing, among other things.¹⁷⁴

After four months, the Security Council decided that the JF-G5S was contributing to the stability of Mali and, as such, to the fulfilment of MINUSMA's mandate. Therefore, the Security Council requested MINUSMA to provide operational and logistical support to the JF-G5S on Malian territory until it became self-reliant. This included the provision of medical and casualty evacuation (MEDEVAC and CASEVAC), access to water, rations and fuel, and use of engineers to assist with the preparation of operational bases in Mali. Moreover, given that military operations like JF-G5S run the risk of having adverse effects if they do not fully respect human rights, the support guaranteed a compliance framework based on the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) on UN support to non-UN security forces.¹⁷⁵

The Security Council requested MINUSMA to provide operational and logistical support to the JF-G5S on Malian territory until it became self-reliant.

MINUSMA provided limited operational and logistical support to JF-G5S operations between May and June 2018.¹⁷⁶ The UN, EU and G5 Sahel had reached a technical agreement on this in February 2018.¹⁷⁷ However, the JF-G5S requested support from MINUSMA only nine times, and it suspended operations after a terrorist attack on its headquarters in Sevaré, Mali, on 29 June 2018.¹⁷⁸ In addition to providing operational and logistical support to the JF-G5S, MINUSMA also investigated allegations of serious human rights violations perpetrated by it.¹⁷⁹ An investigation by MINUSMA into an incident in May 2018 in Mopti, Central Mali, concluded that Malian soldiers, under the command of the JF-G5S, had “summarily and/or arbitrarily executed 12 civilians at the Boulkessy cattle market” in retaliation for the death of a fellow soldier in an earlier

172 Colum Lynch, “Trump weighs vetoing France’s African anti-terrorism plan,” *Foreign Policy*, 13 June 2017; Michelle Nichols, “US wary of French push for UN to back Sahel force: Diplomats,” *Reuters*, 6 June 2017.

173 UN Security Council Resolution 2359, 21 June 2017.

174 UN Security Council Resolution 2364, 29 June 2017.

175 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel,” S/2017/869, 16 October 2017; UN Security Council Resolution 2391, 8 December 2017.

176 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel,” S/2018/1006, 12 November 2018.

177 Ibid; UN Security Council Resolution 2391, 8 December 2017, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2391\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2391(2017)).

178 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel,” S/2018/1006, 12 November 2018.

179 Ibid, para. 31.

attack.¹⁸⁰ After the deployment of the JF-G5S, the idea of deploying a FIB within MINUSMA dropped off the agenda. By the end of 2017, however, MINUSMA had still only attained 88.3% of its authorised strength (11 698 military and 1725 police personnel) (see Figures 8 and 9).

It was against this backdrop, in the first quarter of 2018, that MINUSMA's independent strategic review took place, led by Ellen Margrethe Løj. The results would eventually be too politically sensitive to publish but consisted of a number of scenarios. The analysis was summarised by the Secretary-General as follows:

[T]he proximity of MINUSMA, and its support role and cooperation with security actors, including counter-terrorism actors, had contributed to the perception that the Mission was engaging in counter-terrorism actions... that MINUSMA faced a dilemma between the need to reform and reconstitute the Malian defence and security forces and simultaneously support the existing forces in addressing the current situation of instability.

Also, the Mission would be too much focused on the safety and security of personnel at the cost of operational reach. According to the review, "On average, 80% of the resources of the MINUSMA force were being employed to provide pockets of security covering a radius of 5 to 20 kilometres, protecting major population centres in the north."¹⁸¹

The weight of the burden of fatalities is not evenly distributed among personnel contributors.

It recommended that the Mission should refocus on its political role, support of the peace process and stabilisation, and develop a pact for peace between the government, the Security Council, the UN and international partners, and supporting a national dialogue. The MINUSMA force created space for the civilian component of the Mission to deliver on its mandated tasks. Within the same uniformed personnel ceilings, this would require an adjusted military and police footprint of the Mission in the North, but also across the whole country to support an increased civilian presence in the centre of the country, in particular with the aim of protecting civilians.¹⁸²

The recommendations were taken up by the Mission leadership who "developed an integrated strategy for the centre, based on five pillars: political engagement; security and stabilisation; mediation, social cohesion and reconciliation; human rights and protection; and strategic

180 Bate Felix and Aaron Ross, "UN says Malian forces executed 12 civilians at a market," Reuters, 26 June 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mali-security-un/un-says-malian-forces-executed-12-civilians-at-a-market-idUKKBN1JM2LA>.

181 UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali," S/2018/541, New York: UN, 6 June 2018.

182 Ibid.

partnerships and communications.”¹⁸³ The Pact for Peace was signed by the government and the UN on 15 October 2018 and was intended to serve as an accountability tool against which the UN Security Council expected to witness significant progress in the implementation of the Algiers Agreement. Subsequently, there was a noticeable acceleration of the DDR of combatants at the end of 2018, “with more than 1,600 individuals agreeing to lay down their weapons in cantonments in northern Mali” in November and December.¹⁸⁴

Although 2018 witnessed a decrease in fatalities, 2019 became the worst year on record, with ten Chadian peacekeepers killed in a single attack in January, when AQIM was very close to overrunning the UN base in Aguelhok in Northern Mali.¹⁸⁵ The fact that MINUSMA had already in mid-2019 suffered almost double the number of fatalities due to malicious attacks compared to the previous year, though still less than in 2017, underlined the severity of the situation. At the same time, as Figure 13 below shows, it is important to underline that although MINUSMA faces a very challenging security environment, the weight of the burden of fatalities is not evenly distributed among personnel contributors for a variety of reasons. In fact, most fatalities due to hostile acts are concentrated within a limited number of countries. This can partly be explained by the fact that TCCs are more vulnerable when implementing certain tasks, such as combat and convoy protection, or in certain regions, but it also highlights that fatality ratios are likely to be decreased by assisting a limited number of TCCs through the provision of training and capabilities.

183 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali,” S/2018/1174, New York: UN, 28 December 2018.

184 Security Council Report, “January 2019 Monthly Forecast,” Security Council Report, 27 December 2018, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2019-01/mali-2.php>.

185 BBC, “Mali: Ten UN peacekeepers killed in ‘jihadist’ attack,” 20 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46941711>.

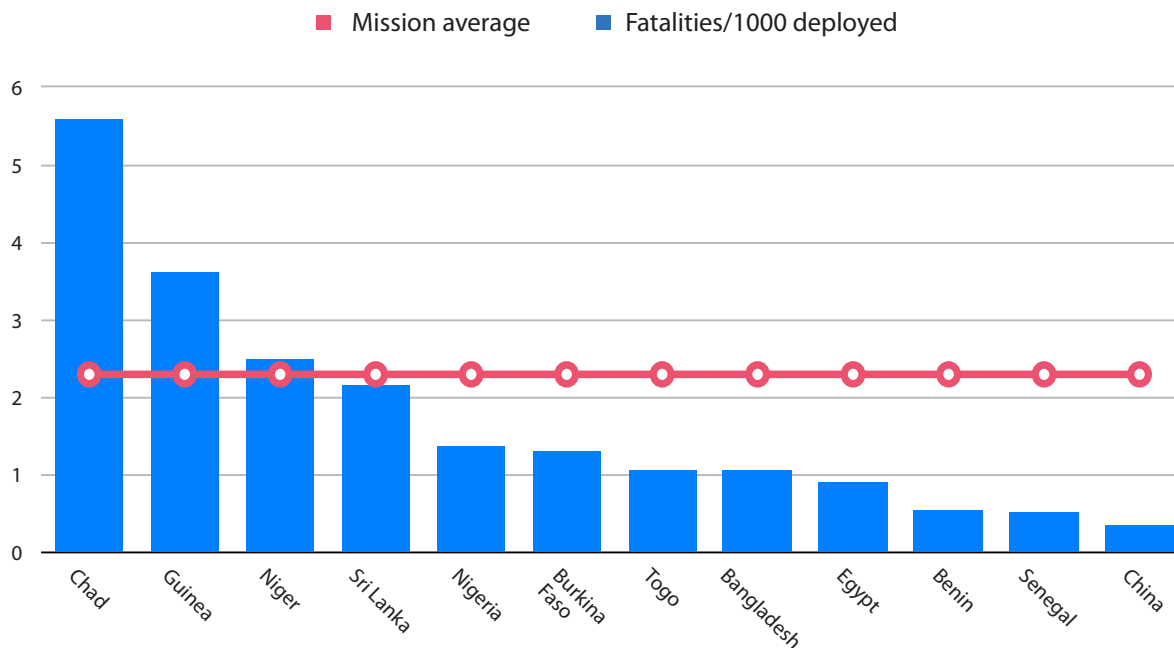


Figure 13: Fatality ratios in MINUSMA by country of origin, 2013-2019, average hostile deaths per 1,000 uniformed personnel deployed

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database

In his report to the Security Council for the 2019 mandate renewal, the Secretary-General recommended no major changes with regard to the nature of the MINUSMA mandate or the Mission's overall strength. However, he did advise a reconfiguration of some of the existing units and the deployment of additional capacities with the aim of further adjusting the MINUSMA footprint in the Centre, and the creation of a mobile quick reaction capability to strengthen PoC efforts and support the return of the state. This would require the redeployment of 650 military personnel to the Mopti region and the handover of the MINUSMA camp in Diabaly to Malian armed forces by early 2020, as well as the redeployment of a Formed Police Unit (FPU) from Bamako to the Centre.¹⁸⁶ UN Security Council Resolution 2480 renewed MINUSMA's mandate, not significantly changing its tasks nor its set up. However, without adding additional resources, the Mission was tasked with a second strategic priority. Next to supporting the implementation of the Algiers Agreement, its second strategic priority became the facilitation of the "implementation of a comprehensive politically-led Malian strategy to protect civilians, reduce intercommunal violence, and re-establish State authority, State presence and basic social services in Central Mali."¹⁸⁷ Some analysts have warned, however, that redeployment away from the North would allow for renewed instability and the potential for Islamists to take control of northern areas again.

¹⁸⁶ UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General: Situation in Mali," S/2019/454, 31 May 2019.

¹⁸⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2480, 28 June 2019.

V. Protection and Stabilisation

In addition to the political process, which was included in the previous section on developments in the Mission, MINUSMA's second main mandated task is protection and stabilisation. Regular UN PoC efforts have been complemented in MINUSMA's mandate by stabilisation tasks. Initially, this was formulated in MINUSMA's 2013 Mandate as "stabilization of key population centres and support for the reestablishment of State authority throughout the country,"¹⁸⁸ but was reformulated by 2018 into "the gradual restoration and extension of State authority and services", and "in support of the Malian authorities, to stabilize the key population centres and other areas where civilians are at risk, notably in the Centre and North of Mali."¹⁸⁹

MINUSMA's PoC and stabilisation mandate is exceptional in the sense that it involves dealing with asymmetric threats.

MINUSMA's PoC and stabilisation mandate is exceptional in the sense that it involves dealing with asymmetric threats, including "to anticipate, deter and counter threats, including asymmetric threats", "to take robust and active steps to protect civilians", and "to prevent the return of armed elements to those areas, engaging in direct operations pursuant only to serious and credible threats."¹⁹⁰ The Mission is also exceptional in that it has a designated Stabilization and Recovery section that manages substantial funds for quick impact projects (QIPs), supporting political and security structures, as well as more long-term peacebuilding efforts. In collaboration

¹⁸⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 2100, 25 April 2013.

¹⁸⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 2423, 28 June 2018

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

with partners, this section aims to build the prerequisites required for the implementation of the Algiers Agreement.¹⁹¹

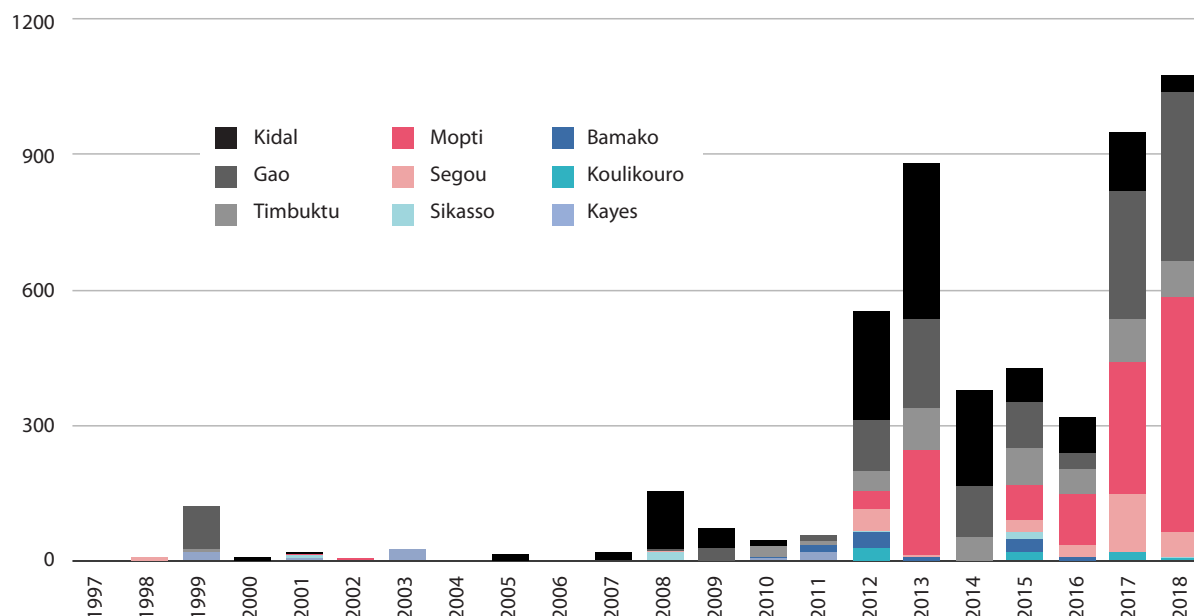


Figure 14: Conflict-related deaths in Mali by year and region, 1997 to July 2018

Source: ACLED

Progress

Initially, MINUSMA appears to have had a clearly stabilising effect on the security situation in Mali. As shown by the trends in Figure 14, after the deployment of the Mission, violence as measured in conflict-related deaths, decreased significantly throughout the country. MINUSMA's stabilising effect is also shown by the return of IDPs and refugees. Although the return to Gao and Timbuktu already started just before the rehatting of AFISMA, the presence of MINUSMA gave further confidence to displaced people (see Figure 15).¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako.

¹⁹² Civil society focus group meeting, 11 September 2018, Gao; Commission Mouvement de Populations, "Rapport sur les mouvements de populations," 16 October 2014, <https://mali.iom.int/sites/default/files/CMP%20reports/Rapport%20CMP%20octobre%202014.pdf>.

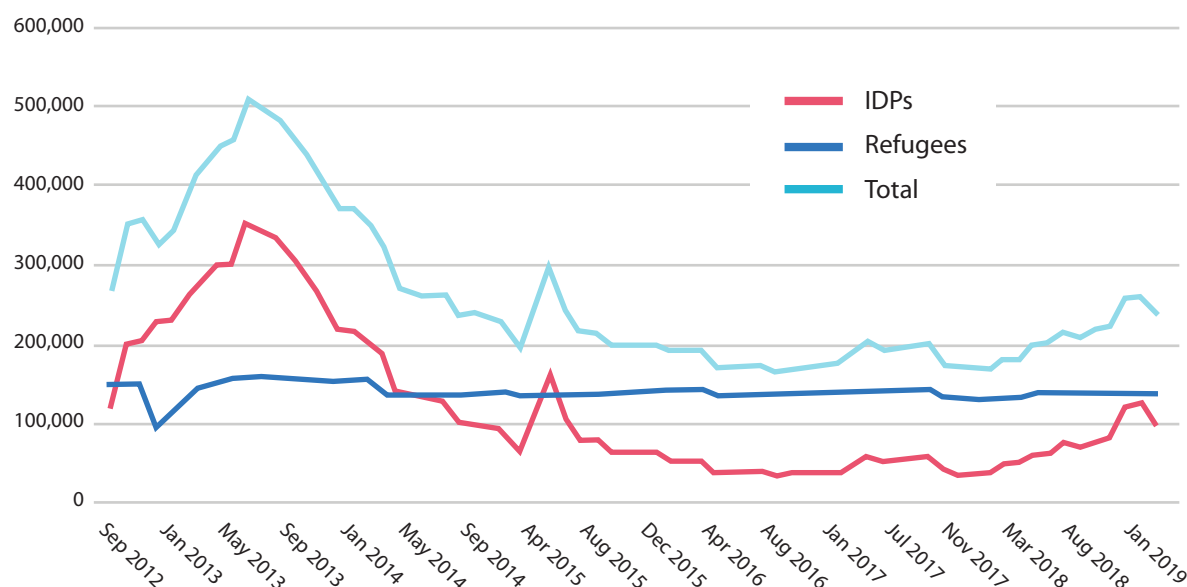


Figure 15: Number of IDPs and refugees, September 2012 to March 2019

Source: Commission Mouvement de Populations

However, in spite of its robust mandate, MINUSMA's presence and actions have not brought "sustainable peace" to Mali. While MINUSMA's abating effect continued in the North into 2017, after the signing of the Algiers Agreement in 2015, the situation in the central Mopti and Segou regions has deteriorated sharply (see Figure 14). Moreover, since 2017, violence has increased again in the North.¹⁹³ This is evident in the renewed increase in displaced persons. Early in May 2019, 106,164 people were displaced inside Mali,¹⁹⁴ up from some 33,000 in June 2016.¹⁹⁵ The largest source of displacement is the Centre, with more than 60,000 IDPs in the Mopti (45,660) and Ségou (15,201) regions.¹⁹⁶

Initially, MINUSMA appears to have had a clearly stabilising effect on the security situation in Mali.

In terms of the restoration and extension of state authority, over time some progress was made, particularly in the North, while in the central regions the state has, in fact, largely retreated. Early in May 2019, only some 31% of civil administrators were present at their duty stations in Northern and Central Mali. Moreover, the population's satisfaction with the government, while initially increasing in most regions after the deployment of MINUSMA, decreased almost everywhere after the Algiers Agreement (see Figure 16). Figure 17 depicts the regional average

¹⁹³ ACLED data.

¹⁹⁴ UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General: Situation in Mali," S/2019/454, 31 May 2019.

¹⁹⁵ Commission Mouvement de Populations, "Rapport sur les mouvements de populations," 8 September 2016.

¹⁹⁶ UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General: Situation in Mali," S/2019/454, 31 May 2019.

percentages, showing that this trend was relatively similar in the North, Centre and South of the country. Only Kidal appears to be a notable outlier.

After the signing of the Algiers Agreement in 2015, the situation in the central Mopti and Segou regions has deteriorated sharply.

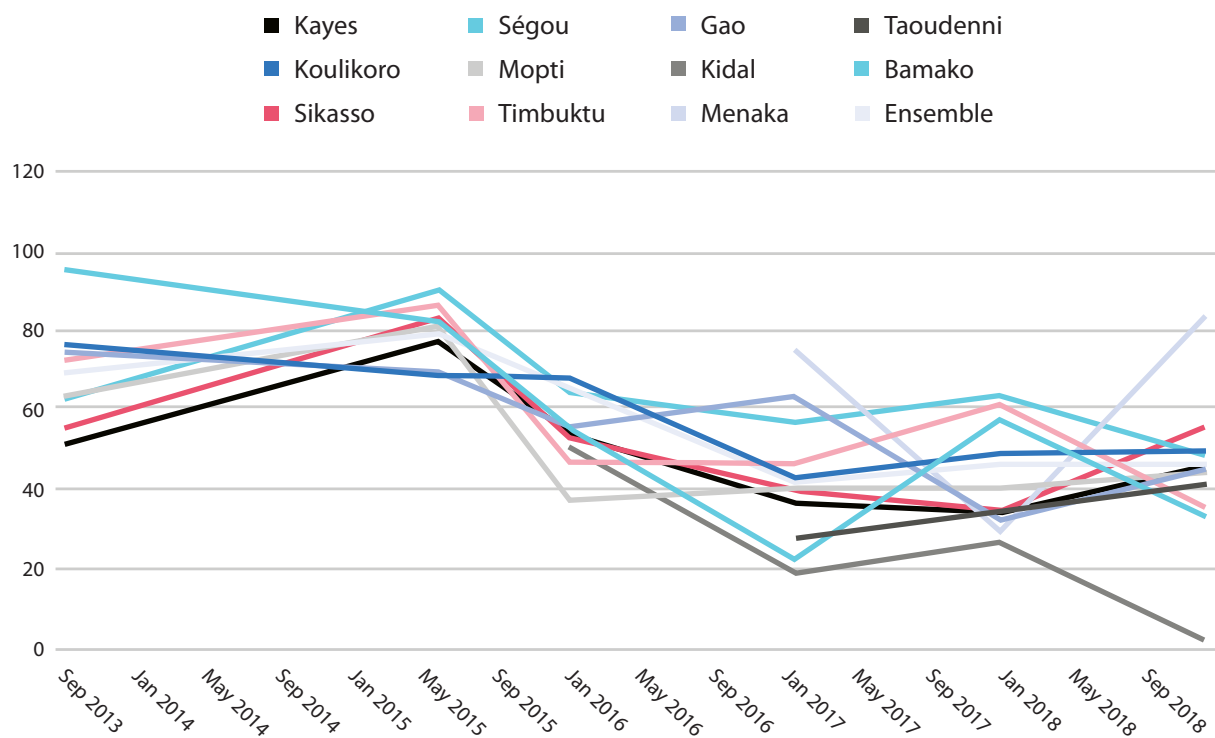


Figure 16: Satisfaction with the Malian Government per region, September 2013 to October 2018¹⁹⁷

Source: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, *Mali Metres 1-10*

¹⁹⁷ The abbreviation ENS in this figure refers to the Mali country average.

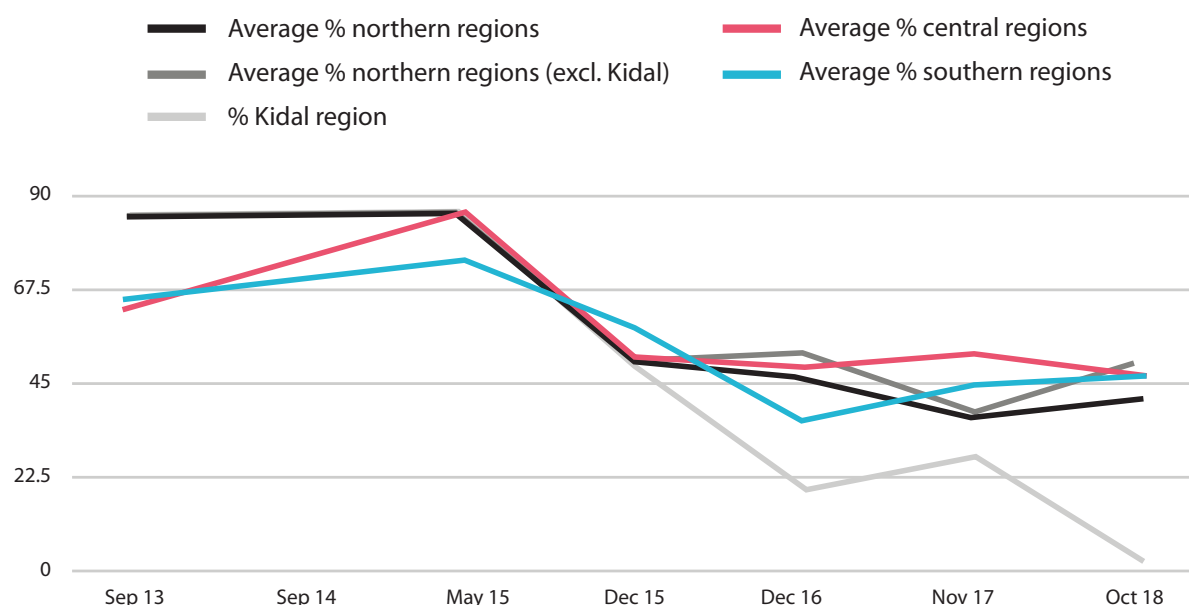


Figure 17: Satisfaction with the Malian Government, average for Northern, Central and Southern regions, September 2013 to October 2018

Source: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, *Mali Metres 1-10*

In spite of the above qualifications, MINUSMA's presence and good offices have prevented a relapse into conflict in the North.¹⁹⁸ The vast majority of Malian and international interviewees think that without MINUSMA, the situation would be worse. They argue that due to MINUSMA, the situation in the North has stabilised, while in absence of MINUSMA, the whole country and, according to some, even the whole region could have fallen into the hands of Islamist forces. Also, MINUSMA successfully deescalated tensions during the 2018 electoral process, for example, by preventing the violent break-up of demonstrations by security forces.¹⁹⁹

MINUSMA in the current context

MINUSMA investigates allegations of and reports on violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law, and supports capacity-building and human rights awareness among the Malian security sector and justice actors. It is often the only actor in the position to investigate human rights abuses.²⁰⁰ It has done so with regard to terrorism and organised crime, which are the drivers of insecurity in Northern and Central Mali, and on the intercommunal violence in the Mopti and Ménaka regions. MINUSMA has also investigated allegations of violations

¹⁹⁸ Interviews with MINUSMA officials, 6 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with MINUSMA official, 4 July 2018, Bamako.

²⁰⁰ Interviews with MINUSMA officials, 10 September 2018, Mopti; Interview with MINUSMA official, 6 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 14 September 2018, Bamako.

in the context of counter-terrorism operations undertaken by the Malian Defence and Security Forces, and by “compliant” armed groups. Particularly in the Mopti region, the Malian army has been implicated in serious human rights violations in Nantaka and Kobaka. Moreover, the CMA has interpreted such counter-terrorism operations in the North as a cover for the redeployment of the Malian army in violation of the Agreement.²⁰¹ In spite of MINUSMA’s activities, the UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali concluded: “In the north, as in the centre of the country, there is a real climate of fear and insecurity with a major impact on the lives of people, haunted by daily violence.”²⁰²

MINUSMA’s presence and good offices have prevented a relapse into conflict in the North.

In response to the Ogossagou massacre and the deteriorating security situation in the Centre, MINUSMA, in coordination with the FAMA, responded by launching of Operation Oryx. By deploying military and UN Police (UNPOL) units, MINUSMA hoped to provide a deterrent presence in the Mopti region. MINUSMA focused particularly on the Bankass, Bandiagara and Koro districts so that the FAMA could focus on the border region.²⁰³

The Mission has been criticised for focusing too much on the implementation of the peace agreement in the North, as well as protecting its own personnel at the cost of PoC, particularly in the central regions. MINUSMA’s space for PoC is shrinking due to the hostile environment it operates in, as well as its ambiguous position in relation to counter-terrorism efforts. Reportedly, with the aim of distinguishing itself from counter-terrorism forces, the Mission has even refrained from undertaking robust military operations against extremist groups threatening civilians.²⁰⁴

Challenges

In the North, MINUSMA’s ability to consolidate the peace has been limited by a lack of progress in the political process. The conflict parties either lack political will or are still in a slow process of overcoming their fears to implement the Algiers Agreement.²⁰⁵

201 UN, “Final report of the Panel of Experts,” 2018.

202 Independent Expert on Mali, “Mali: ‘Real climate of fear and insecurity in country’s north and centre,’ says expert,” Press Release, Bamako/Geneva, 11 October 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23710&LangID=E>.

203 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General: Situation in Mali,” S/2019/454, 31 May 2019.

204 Namie di Razza, “Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism: The Dilemmas of UN Peacekeeping in Mali,” International Peace Institute, October 2018.

205 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, 6 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 14 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako.

In the Mopti and Segou regions, MINUSMA is not in a position to stabilise the security situation and protect the population, primarily for two reasons. First and foremost, MINUSMA did not have the mandate to operate in the central regions until June 2018, in part due to the government's resistance to it. The redeployment of the QRF from UNOCI to MINUSMA allowed for the Mission's first military foothold in the Mopti region.²⁰⁶ The QRF was, however, not fully deployed until July 2018.²⁰⁷ Moreover, the QRF is still insufficient to deal with the challenges, even though MINUSMA has had the mandate to operate in the central regions since June 2018.²⁰⁸

In the Mopti and Segou regions, MINUSMA is not in a position to stabilise the security situation and protect the population.

Secondly, MINUSMA's capabilities are too limited for dealing with the current complex and escalating situation, with the Ogossagou massacre, in which at least 157 people were killed, as its nadir.²⁰⁹ The Mopti region and Ménaka in the North have suffered most from the intercommunity cycles of violence.²¹⁰ The demands for PoC in these regions are currently formidable, as the weak or absent state, combined with insufficient accountability, has exacerbated a culture of impunity, allowing the dynamic of massacres to spiral out of control.

MINUSMA officials suggested that inter-communal dialogues require support, as there are no structural peace talks on the conflicts in the central regions. In addition, likely more military and civilian capabilities and capacities would be required.²¹¹ This is also reflected in the complaints from many civil society actors from this region, as they argued that MINUSMA is not doing enough.²¹²

Until 2016, MINUSMA was a relatively successful peace operation. It managed to improve stability in Northern Mali, contributed to decreasing the number of civilians killed in the conflict, and the increased stability enabled large numbers of displaced persons to return home. MINUSMA also supported the organisation of the 2013 elections and assisted the peace process, which culminated in the Algiers Agreement. Many of these achievements are still standing

206 UN Security Council Resolution 2295, 29 June 2016; Interview with MINUSMA official, 5 July 2018, Bamako.

207 UN Security Council, "Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General," S/2018/866, 25 September 2018.

208 UN Security Council Resolution 2423, 28 June 2018.

209 UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General: Situation in Mali," S/2019/454, 31 May 2019.

210 UN Security Council, Letter dated 21 February 2019 from the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali, addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2019/137.

211 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, 14 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 6 September 2018, Bamako.

212 Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako.

and are particularly impressive considering the size of the country, the logistical challenges, the hostile security environment, and the relatively limited resources.

Since 2016, MINUSMA's effectiveness in terms of stabilisation and PoC has decreased.

Since 2016, MINUSMA's effectiveness in terms of stabilisation and PoC has decreased. Although in the North fighting between the signatories of the Algiers Agreement has been absent, violence by Islamist groups has increased, and progress in the Malian peace process is slow. In addition, Central Mali has destabilised significantly, particularly since 2016. In the regions of Mopti and Segou, the growing presence of, and attacks carried out by, Islamist groups against state institutions have triggered the further retreat of an already relatively absent state. A vicious cycle of inter-communal violence has reached unprecedented levels. Only since June 2018 has MINUSMA been mandated to help the Malian Government address the situation.

VI. People-Centred Approach

MINUSMA's people-centred approach is challenged because of four main reasons. First, since the Mission's mandate is "government-focused", it is limited in how broadly it can engage with other non-state actors at a strategic level. Second, the highly insecure environment creates a "community outreach gap", because physically engaging with communities becomes too risky. Third, MINUSMA faces a highly challenging topographical environment, complicating the Mission's mobility, and consequently its ability to engage with communities.

Challenges

The Mission's mandate *de facto* prioritises state engagement, and this imposes several limitations on the people-centred approach from the outset. The majority of its mandated tasks are "*in support of the Malian Government*". This is problematic because the Malian Government does not always act in the interests of "the people".²¹³ The state and its agents are viewed as illegitimate and outright predatory in some localities in Central and Northern Mali. Since MINUSMA's principal interlocutors are government actors, it is limited in how broadly it can be inclusive at a strategic level. For example, the Mission must tread carefully when identifying which stakeholders to engage with to devise a political strategy in Central Mali,²¹⁴ cognisant of the fact that the government is wary of empowering groups which have not to date had a prominent political voice in the peace process.

²¹³ Interview with MINUSMA official, 11 September 2018, Bamako.

²¹⁴ Interview with MINUSMA official, 4 July 2018, Bamako.

Since MINUSMA's principal interlocutors are government actors, it is limited in how broadly it can be inclusive at a strategic level.

The insecurity in Northern and Central Mali severely constrains the ability of the Mission to be more “people-centred”, because it constrains Mission personnel from being able to visit, engage with and consult communities regularly about their needs. MINUSMA suffers the highest number of fatalities due to IEDs, the majority of which occur during convoy operations, followed by attacks on camps involving vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), guns and indirect fire.²¹⁵ Staff are bunkerised in “supercamps” in Bamako, Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, and confined to military bases in other locations in Central and Northern Mali. Civilian staff rely on military escorts to conduct their field missions. However, due to the deteriorating security situation, contingents may not always be willing to leave their bases. This is why some staff questioned, “What’s the point of having 50 staff at a base, when we cannot even go out?”²¹⁶ In addition to the risks incurred by Mission staff, civilians may face reprisal attacks from armed groups following visits by MINUSMA as they are accused of collaborating with “foreign forces”.²¹⁷ Civilian personnel conceded that because of this, the people-centred approach was their “weakest spot”.²¹⁸ In summary, the balance between ensuring the safety of UN personnel, which is part of MINUSMA's mandate, and interacting with the local people, is skewed towards the former due to the high-risk environment.

The balance between ensuring the safety of UN personnel, and interacting with the local people, is skewed towards the former due to the high-risk environment.

Compounding this community access gap in Central Mali is that one-third of the region is inaccessible due to flooding for six to seven months between July and January each year. This also dissuades contingents from leaving their bases for fear that their equipment may not withstand the conditions.²¹⁹ Without adequate air assets or a riverine capability, this means that the Mission cannot often reach the most vulnerable communities who remain isolated for long periods of time. Some live under the threat of violence from armed groups, as well as extreme

215 See Carlos A. dos Santos Cruz, William R. Phillips and Salvator Cusimano, “Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers: We need to change the way we are doing business,” UN: New York, 19 December 2017, p. 26.

216 Civil society focus group meeting, 10 September 2018, Mopti.

217 Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako.

218 Ibid.

219 Interview with MINUSMA official, 11 September 2018, Mopti.

poverty and food insecurity. Unfortunately, this feeds into a perception that the Mission is not doing enough because they are simply not visible, let alone relevant.²²⁰

Progress

Despite these stark challenges, the Mission has tried to engage with communities and reach out to the population, at least at an operational level. Following the signing of the Algiers Agreement, the Mission focused on delivering peace dividends to foster confidence in the peace process in areas recently liberated from armed groups.²²¹ Stabilisation programmes were designed in difficult security conditions through a bottom-up consultative process, stimulating buy-in from community leaders.²²²

One concrete way in which the Mission responds to the needs of communities is through QIPs. MINUSMA, which in 2017-2019 had the largest budget to implement QIPs out of all the UN peacekeeping operations,²²³ has financed over 525 of these projects since its inception in 2013.²²⁴ QIPs respond to requests by the Malian Government, international and national NGOs, international agencies, and civil society in “the areas of services and small public infrastructure rehabilitation, training and awareness-raising activities, employment and revenue creation.”²²⁵ These have undoubtedly helped fill a gap in basic service provision in areas which have been without schools and electricity. Security efforts receive the largest share of the QIP budget (23%), supporting efforts such as the construction of checkpoints, police stations, and camps for the FAMA.²²⁶ This has led to some concerns among interviewees that the majority of QIPs are in support of the needs of the government, and not the people.²²⁷

Through its good offices function, MINUSMA has exercised political leverage at some critical junctures to reign in excesses in the state’s behaviour. In the lead up to the 2018 presidential elections, senior leadership was instrumental in legalising pre-electoral demonstrations to diffuse clashes, following a violent crackdown by the police against protestors.²²⁸ Their presence

220 Civil society focus group meeting, 10 September 2018, Mopti.

221 Natasja Rupesinghe, “Strengthening community engagement in United Nations peace operations,” *Conflict Trends*, 3, ACCORD: Durban, 19 October 2016, <http://accord.org.za/conflict-trends/strengthening-community-engagement-united-nations-peace-operations>.

222 Ibid.

223 See UN Peacekeeping, “Quick Impact Projects for Communities,” <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/quick-impact-projects-communities>.

224 MINUSMA, “QIPs Overview, Mali,” MINUSMA, Bamako, June 2019, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/quick-impact-projects-qips>.

225 Ibid.

226 Some interviewees alerted us to this view. See also UN Peacekeeping, “Quick Impact Projects for Communities.”

227 Interview MINUSMA official, 11 September 2018, Mopti.

228 *New York Times*, “Police respond to Mali protestors with tear gas ahead of election,” 2 June 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/02/world/africa/mali-protesters-tear-gas-election.html>.

serves an oversight function, as the “eyes and ears” of the international community, which is important in a context where the state is conducting counter-terror operations.

Through its good offices function, MINUSMA has exercised political leverage at some critical junctures to reign in excesses in the state’s behaviour.

In spite of serious challenges that limit the Mission’s ability to reach out to local people physically, MINUSMA is trying to have an impact on the lives of the local population. In fact, all of its activities, including its strategic priorities, such as implementing the Algiers Agreement, are geared towards the benefit of the Malian people in the long term. The following tentative conclusions can be drawn: first, the Mission tries to engage with a broad range of civil stakeholders, mainly at the operational level, through QIPs, stabilisation and recovery projects, etc., but this is constrained mainly by security challenges. Second, it tries to include women, youths and other national and local actors at a local level through its programmes, projects and activities, rather than at a strategic level. Third, since the Mission’s actions are in support of the Malian Government, it is not surprising that the Malian State in many respects sets the agenda, and not the ordinary Malian citizenry.

VII. Legitimacy and Credibility

In terms of legitimacy and credibility, MINUSMA's presence is formally upon request of the Government of Mali.²²⁹ From the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Mali Metre surveys, and the focus groups conducted, it appears that at the outset of its engagements in Mali, MINUSMA's legitimacy and credibility was generally high (see Figure 18 and 19). The contribution of MINUSMA to the restoration of the constitutional order, to the peace process, and the aim of "stabilization of key population centres and support for the re-establishment of state authority throughout the country" were generally welcomed.²³⁰

Legitimacy and credibility since 2015

Since 2015, the legitimacy and credibility of the Mission have come under attack (see Figure 18 and 19). In January 2015, demonstrations were held in several cities and villages in Mali against MINUSMA. The reasons for the dissatisfaction, however, varied from one city to the other. In some cities, such as CMA-held Kidal, protests were organised after MINUSMA intervened forcefully in the fighting in Tabankort on 20 January 2015. The Mission was perceived to have acted partially and in favour of the government.

That same month, protests were organised in Gao, a generally pro-government town, as it was leaked that MINUSMA was talking with the CMA, while it was expected to fight these

229 Interview with official from the Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Bamako, 15 March 2019.

230 Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako.

“terrorist armed groups”.²³¹ While the legitimacy of MINUSMA recovered to some extent in the North and the South, in most places it never recovered completely and remained relatively at a low level. About half of the population is generally satisfied with MINUSMA’s performance (see Figure 18 and 19). There are, however, regional differences and much can be explained by MINUSMA’s credibility, especially in light of the deteriorating security situation in parts of the country, and its visibility in terms of stabilisation or development projects and expectations.²³²

Since 2015, the legitimacy and credibility of the Mission have come under attack.

Since the Algiers Agreement, the Mission is more positively perceived in the North (see Figure 18 and 19). In Gao and Timbuktu, the general perception is also that the presence of MINUSMA has helped to improve the conflict dynamics because the security situation has changed for the better. The presence of MINUSMA forces are perceived to serve as a deterrence and would also help with addressing armed conflict among the various armed groups. The legitimacy and credibility of the Mission are further boosted by its support to the restoration of services within the context of its stabilisation efforts.²³³ The perception from Kidal is, however, very different as it is still controlled by the CMA and the situation remains relatively tense.²³⁴

In the central regions, the main complaint is over MINUSMA’s absence.

In the central regions, the main complaint is over MINUSMA’s absence. Focus group participants want the Mission to play a more active role. Among the population in the southern regions, and among many government officials, the Mission has lost a large measure of goodwill. This is partly due to misunderstandings since the beginning, as they expected the Mission to fight rebels and be involved in counter-terrorism. Instead, many now see the Mission as an infringement upon Mali’s national sovereignty.²³⁵

231 Karlijn Muiderman, “On the recent clashes in northern Mali,” *The Broker*, 6 March 2015.

232 Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako.

233 Ibid; Civil society focus group meeting, 11 September 2018, Gao.

234 Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako.

235 Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako.; Interview with official from the Ministry of Youth, Employment and Citizen Construction, Bamako, 13 March 2019; Interview with representative from the National Commission for Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (CN-DDR), 18 March 2019, Bamako; Interview with representative from the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Bamako, 15 March 2019; Interview with member of the Monitoring Committee of the Agreement for Peace and National Reconciliation, Bamako, 15 March 2019; Interview with member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, Bamako, 13 March 2019; Interview with member of the Defence and Security Committee of the National Assembly, Bamako, 13 March 2019; Interview with member of the National Assembly Law Committee, Bamako, 13 March 2019; Interview with member of the High Council of Local and Regional Authorities, Bamako, 13 March 2019.

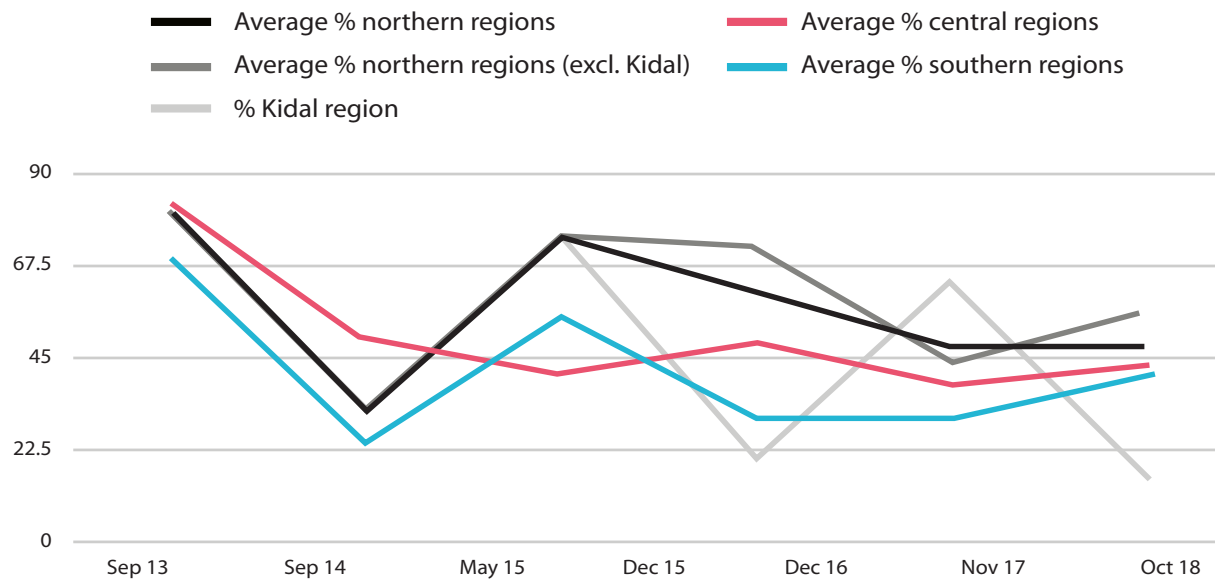


Figure 18: Satisfaction with MINUSMA, average for Northern, Central and Southern regions, September 2013 to October 2018

Source: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Mali Metres 1-10

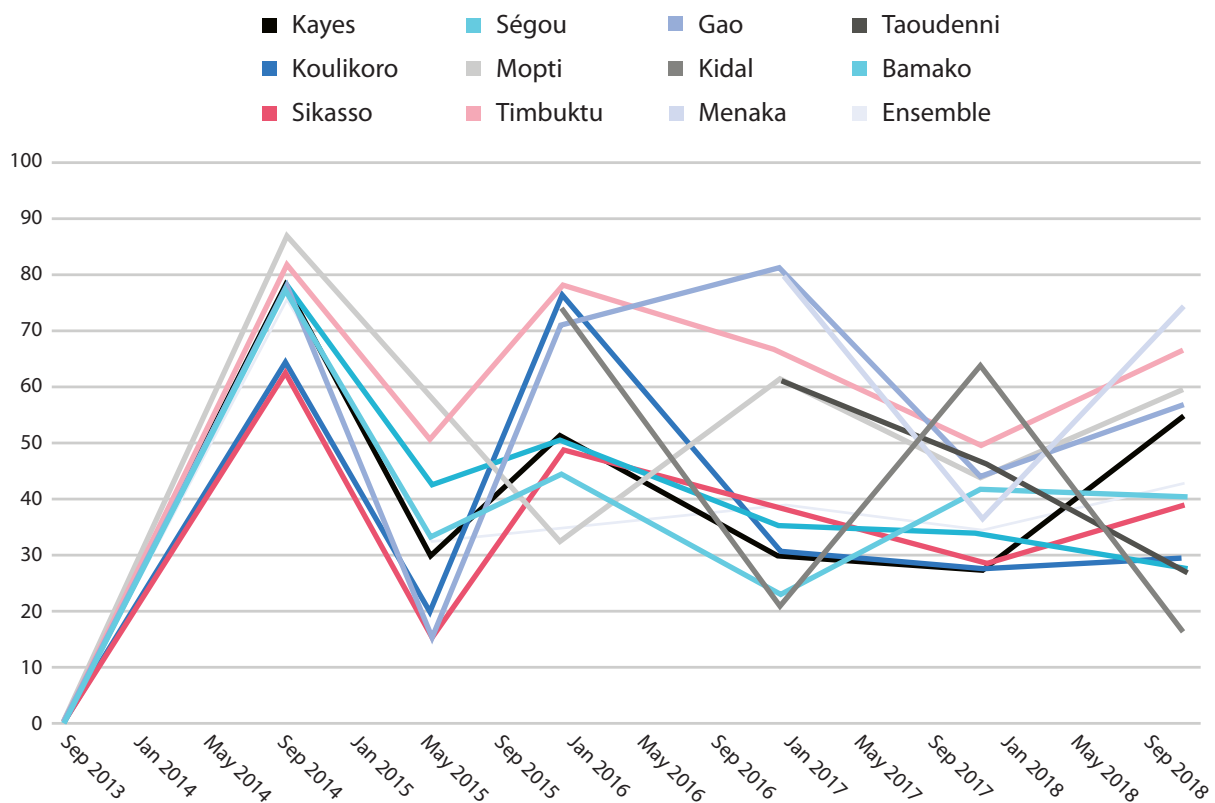


Figure 19: Satisfaction with MINUSMA per region, September 2013 to October 2018

Source: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Mali Metres 1-10

Challenges

Six main things have impacted on the legitimacy and credibility of the Mission. The first is a failure by the Mission to communicate its mandate and manage the expectations of Malians effectively. Some 24.7% of the respondents to the 2018 Mali Metre Survey mentioned this as a main criticism.²³⁶ MINUSMA's mandate is essentially to support efforts towards the implementation of the Algiers Agreement and the restoration of state authority. It does not have a counter-terrorism mandate. The failure to effectively communicate the tenets of its mandate and, through that, manage the expectations of the population has contributed to undermining the legitimacy and credibility of the Mission, as there is frustration over the "failure" of MINUSMA to combat the "terrorist threat" confronting the country. Moreover, ordinary citizens do not easily distinguish between the mandates of international operations, and a common assumption is that they all work together. Although countering the threat of terrorism rests with other entities, it is difficult to decouple MINUSMA's mandate from the expectations of the general public.²³⁷

There is frustration over the "failure" of MINUSMA to combat the "terrorist threat" confronting the country.

Against a lack of understanding of the mandate, the different tasks expected of MINUSMA pose the second challenge to MINUSMA's credibility. In total, 33.7% of all respondents to the 2018 Mali Metre criticised MINUSMA for being an accomplice to the armed groups.²³⁸ Tasked with supporting the peace process, and later the implementation of the Algiers Agreement, MINUSMA has to interact with all the parties to the agreement. In addition, its task of supporting the restoration of state authority requires it to meet with armed groups that are not part of the Algiers Agreement in a bid to encourage respect for the agreement. MINUSMA has to provide customised support to the various constituencies of the Algiers Agreement and, invariably, the Malian State. Engagement with the various armed groups has caused ire among some groups who see such interaction as condoning the actions of those groups – groups that MINUSMA from their perspective should be fighting.²³⁹

A third challenge that affects the credibility of MINUSMA relates to its association with the government and its agents. In localities where the government and its agents do not have support from the population, MINUSMA's legitimacy is negatively affected by its association

²³⁶ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Mali metre 10, 2019.

²³⁷ Civil society focus group meeting, 10 September 2018, Mopti.; Interview with representative of the CN-DDR, Bamako, 18 March 2019; Interview with representative of the TRC, Bamako, 15 March 2019; Interview with member of the Monitoring Committee of the Agreement for Peace and National Reconciliation, Bamako, 15 March 2019.

²³⁸ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Mali metre 10, 2019.

²³⁹ Civil society focus group meeting, 10 September 2018, Mopti.; Interview with representative of the CN-DDR, Bamako, 18 March 2019; Interview with representative of the TRC, Bamako, 15 March 2019; Interview with member of the Monitoring Committee of the Agreement for Peace and National Reconciliation, Bamako, 15 March 2019.

with the FAMA, and the JF-G5S, to which it provides operational and logistical support, as well as with the French counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane, which it co-locates with in some locations.²⁴⁰ For example, the human rights component of MINUSMA responsible for the investigation of alleged human rights violations often also requires FAMA personnel to provide its officers with escorts for field investigations. In instances when the allegations of heavy-handedness and human rights violations are levelled against the FAMA, their presence with MINUSMA during the investigations raises questions on the credibility of the process as well as of MINUSMA.²⁴¹ In spite of measures such as the HRDDP and human rights and international humanitarian law compliance frameworks, this clearly illustrates the challenges of supporting a state with a poor governance and human rights track record.

In localities where the government and its agents do not have support from the population, MINUSMA's legitimacy is negatively affected by its association with the FAMA, and the JF-G5S.

The fourth challenge is the constraints on the mobility of MINUSMA civilian staff who are affected by the volatile security situation. The continuing insecurity in Mali also hinders the mobility of the civilian component of MINUSMA and, as such, limits its ability to deliver on some of its mandated tasks. Fifth is the challenge of the bureaucratic red tape when accessing funds for QIPs. The bureaucracy associated with accessing funds for projects means that there is often a long gap between needs assessments undertaken by MINUSMA and the delivery of projects. According to interviewees, partners are wary of working with MINUSMA because of its bureaucracy.²⁴² The long delays in accessing funds and restricted mobility of MINUSMA staff impacts negatively on the Mission's credibility.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the legitimacy and credibility of MINUSMA are hinged on its ability to contribute to stabilising the security situation and to helping maintain the momentum of the political process agenda. This also implies that the Mission needs to effectively cover the central region and all other areas where a confluence of security issues threaten the security and stability of the state. Overall, 59% of the respondents to the 2018 Mali Metre survey do not think the Mission is effective when it comes to protecting the Malian population against the violence of armed and terrorist groups, which has been the main point of criticism since 2016.²⁴³

240 Interview with Malian researcher, 3 July 2018, Bamako.

241 Civil society focus group meeting, 10 September 2018, Mopti.

242 Interview with two MINUSMA officials, 7 September 2018, Bamako; Civil society focus group meeting, 10 September 2018, Mopti..

243 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Mali metre 10, 2019; Mali metre 18, 2016.

The inability of MINUSMA to provide the required security assistance to affected populations, especially the flooded areas in Central Mali during the rainy season, among other areas, is the sixth challenge. This has raised questions over its presence in the region. In the central region, the absence of a long-term strategy undermines the political engagement as the Mission lacks a framework for engagement and commensurate resources.²⁴⁴

The Mission is more positively perceived in the North, particularly because of the development projects it implements within the context of its stabilisation efforts.

Formally, MINUSMA's presence is upon request of the Government of Mali. However, it is often criticised by government officials, and only about half of the population is generally satisfied with MINUSMA's performance. The Mission is more positively perceived in the North, particularly because of the development projects it implements within the context of its stabilisation efforts. In the central regions, the main complaint is over MINUSMA's absence and that the Mission should do more. In the South, dissatisfaction is the highest, as the people expected the Mission to fight rebels and be involved in counter-terrorism. In localities where the government and its agents do not have support from the population, MINUSMA runs the highest risk as the Mission is increasingly tied to national and international counter-terrorism, which is in danger of further escalating conflicts.

244 Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako; Civil society focus group meeting, 11 September 2018, Gao.

VIII. Political Primacy

The primacy of politics is recognised and enshrined in the mandate of MINUSMA, which has as its strategic priority support for the implementation of the 2015 Algiers Agreement. Theoretically, MINUSMA is designed to assist in the delivery of a political solution, and the priorities of the Mission are aligned towards attaining the strategic priority of the Mission.²⁴⁵ One of the main priorities of MINUSMA and other international actors is the support for the extension and restoration of state authority in affected areas in Mali, notably in the North and, in more recent times, the central region of Mali. Through the provision of technical support to the processes that led to the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement and the Algiers Agreement, including the preparation of the members of the Movement, MINUSMA has supported the development of a framework for a political process in Mali. MINUSMA has also provided support at the operational level for the political processes, including dissemination of the various agreements; facilitating the (re)-establishment of local administration; mediation in local conflicts and even between criminal groups;²⁴⁶ capacity development of local government officials; and the establishment of frameworks for justice and reconciliation in relevant areas.²⁴⁷

One of the main priorities of MINUSMA and other international actors is the support for the extension and restoration of state authority.

²⁴⁵ Interview with MINUSMA official, 6 September 2018, Bamako.

²⁴⁶ Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako.

²⁴⁷ Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako.

Having political primacy is dependent on a number of interrelated factors, not all of which are necessarily within the mandate of MINUSMA. Most importantly, it depends on the willingness of the government and the opposition groups to move the political process forward. MINUSMA has supported the creation of an enabling environment, particularly in the North of the country, to allow for enhancing the political process through, among other efforts, political and institutional reforms, decentralisation, the development of infrastructure, processes for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, security sector reform, and efforts to facilitate secure mobility particularly through the refurbishment of airports in the North. These have aimed to promote confidence and trust in the political process in the country.²⁴⁸

Challenges

In spite of the above, MINUSMA struggles with the primacy of politics in its efforts. The implementation of the Algiers Agreement is the fulcrum for its engagement. Following UN Security Council resolutions, and under international pressure, Mission leadership has thus far not engaged with so-called “terrorist armed groups”. These are the Islamist groups, some of whom wield significant influence in the conflict, and pose a considerable threat to the future stability of Mali and the security of its people. Moreover, the reality on the ground demonstrates that boundaries between signatory or “compliant armed groups” and terrorist and criminal actors are fluid and cannot be easily separated into rudimentary categories. For MINUSMA to prioritise a political solution in all its activities, its engagement would have to move beyond its current counterparts, the government, and the “compliant armed groups”. Giving way to the growing domestic opinion, which supports the Malian Government entering into dialogue with key Islamist leaders, would need to be seriously considered.²⁴⁹

Furthermore, MINUSMA has been on the back foot in devising a political strategy to address the rapidly increasing violence in Central Mali. The Algiers Agreement only covers the North-South relationship. While early warnings were sounded, the response has been slow, partially because of the Malian Government’s reluctance to permit international involvement. MINUSMA’s mandate was only really expanded to cover the Centre in June 2018. Technically, in spite of the strategy devised by MINUSMA, there is no political process for MINUSMA’s engagement in the central region. The focus on Northern Mali from April 2013 until June 2018 disregarded the need for a comprehensive national political solution that comprehensively addresses the security challenges in Mali. Yet, the security challenges in Mali can only be solved politically. The Malian Government would have to lead a political process that the Mission can support. Such a political process would need to deal with not only the North, or even the

248 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, 4 July 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 5 July 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako.

249 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, 7 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako.

central regions, but with the entire country and, to some extent, the Sahel region as a whole. It would also need to engage beyond the current themes – including issues such as exclusion, criminality, and the governance aspects of natural resources and climate-related challenges. For MINUSMA to support such a process would, however, risk overstretch.²⁵⁰

MINUSMA has been on the back foot in devising a political strategy to address the rapidly increasing violence in Central Mali.

Even though support provided by MINUSMA and other international partners has helped with moving the political process forward, the success of the political process lies with the signatory parties. The failure to reach agreement on critical issues is hindering the political process, deepening divisions, and sustaining the conditions for insecurity. There are commonly two explanations for the hesitant position of the parties. The first is that there may be a lack of political will and parties may be insincere. They may lose the economic benefits from illegal trade and may lose other positions if an agreement is actually implemented. The second is that there is still a lot of fear among the parties and the sense of insecurity needs to be overcome. Peace processes usually take time to build confidence among parties.²⁵¹

Recent progress

The appointment of the Malian Minister for Social Cohesion, Peace and National Reconciliation, Lassine Bouaré, whose Ministry was established to coordinate the government's efforts to implement the Algiers Agreement, indicates commitment to the acceleration of the implementation of the political process. Holding signatories to the agreement accountable for its implementation, as started by the Security Council with its threat of sanctions in its 2018 resolution and continued in 2019, has been mentioned as helpful to MINUSMA in the field as it gave the Mission more leverage.²⁵²

The behind-the-scenes efforts of MINUSMA and other international actors have been invaluable in shaping the political process in Mali. Thus, although MINUSMA is by no means perfect, it is definitely supporting the solution to developing and sustaining a viable political process in Mali.

250 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, 6-7 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with French Embassy official, 14 September 2018, Bamako.

251 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, 14 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 15 September 2018, Bamako.

252 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, 4 July 2018, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA official, 5 July 2018, Bamako.

IX. National and Local Ownership

Many Malian and international actors agree that the stabilisation of Mali is likely to depend on the combination of a political settlement, and stabilisation and counter-terrorism measures.²⁵³ MINUSMA is in Mali upon the invitation of the Malian Government, which could theoretically withdraw its consent. As such, the Mission has the legal consent of the government.²⁵⁴ However, there are mixed signals on the extent of the consent of the parties in reality. Despite the articulated support of the government, the pro-government militia, the Plateforme and the CMA for the political process of the Algiers Agreement, there is more limited commitment to the implementation and, particularly, the timelines of the political settlement. As discussed in the previous section, this may be explained by a lack of political will, but could also result from the need for the parties to slowly build confidence before they feel secure enough to demilitarise.²⁵⁵

National ownership

Politicians and government officials are often very critical of the Mission. Those who are most supportive often say they are happy with the Mission as it is contributing to such things as development, project financing, providing air transportation, and stabilisation, but that they would

253 Interview with Barkhane official, 14 September 2018.

254 Interview with official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Bamako, 15 March 2019.

255 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, Bamako, 14 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 15 September 2018; Interview with French government official, Bamako, 14 September 18; Interview with G5 Sahel official, 14 September 18.

have preferred the Mission to have a more robust or proactive counter-terrorism mandate. They say they have ownership over MINUSMA's operations, but also say they would like to improve it. One government official explained his view of the Mission as follows: "I think it is necessary, even if it is an evil. It is a necessary evil for the moment because it solves many problems both politically and socio-economically, particularly in the northern regions."²⁵⁶

Politicians and government officials are often very critical of the Mission.

Those who are most critical of MINUSMA view it as an infringement on national sovereignty and argue its presence is making the government weaker as the government has to negotiate with the Mission continuously. These critics sometimes see the Mission as a front for French influence, or as having an interest in the continuation of the conflict as that would guarantee its personnel's jobs.²⁵⁷ One Malian parliamentarian explained:

They told us that they are not there to hunt down drug traffickers and they are not here to wage war against the MNLA. Currently, different communities are fighting each other in Central Mali. If the State is not in the position to act, why can MINUSMA not intervene? MINUSMA is worthless! The resources that MINUSMA has at its disposal would be more effective in the hands of the FAMA. The FAMA would not commit genocide and the country would be much more stable... let MINUSMA get the hell out of here. Instead of the UN, we need an African force.²⁵⁸

Although not always supported by their rhetoric, the current parties to the Algiers Agreement have, by and large, taken ownership over the work of MINUSMA.

Although not always supported by their rhetoric, the current parties to the Algiers Agreement have, by and large, taken ownership over the work of MINUSMA. To some extent, they depend on the Mission. However, that does not mean they will invest political capital in it. This is also

²⁵⁶ Interview with representative from the CN-DDR, Bamako, 18 March 2019.

²⁵⁷ Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with official from the Ministry of Youth, Employment and Citizen Construction, 13 March 2019, Bamako; Interview with official from the Ministry of Social Cohesion, Peace and National Reconciliation, 20 March 2019, Bamako; Interview with representative from the CN-DDR, 18 March 2019, Bamako; Interview with representative of the TRC, 15 March 2019, Bamako; Interview with member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, 13 March 2019, Bamako; Interview with member of the Monitoring Committee of the Agreement for Peace and National Reconciliation, 15 March 2019, Bamako.

²⁵⁸ Interview with member of the National Assembly Law Committee, Bamako, 13 March 2019.

evident in the suboptimal progress made in the political process so far. Rather, parties, like the government, often use the Mission as a scapegoat for their own failure to deliver.²⁵⁹

Many Malian and international actors often say that MINUSMA has the support of only half the population because the population lacks understanding of its mandate. However, it is more likely that the limited support for the Mission results from incomplete ownership over its mandate and the disagreement over what MINUSMA should ideally be doing. A more accurate description would be that there is a lack of appreciation of MINUSMA's peacekeeping mandate and that rather than an impartial "peacekeeping" Mission, many Malians, particularly in government and the people in the South, would prefer the Mission to fight the MNLA and Islamist groups.²⁶⁰

The limited support for the Mission results from incomplete ownership over its mandate and the disagreement over what MINUSMA should ideally be doing.

On the other side of the spectrum, national ownership is also challenged by the absence of a number of armed groups in the framework for the political settlement. The labelling of some of the actors in the Malian conflict as terrorist armed groups (TAGs) excludes them from participating in the discourse on the political settlement. There is no framework for the political engagement of these groups. Even though a number of foreign fighters were present in Mali at the onset of the armed conflict, most of them have left and, currently, the designated terrorist groups are best described as "Malian". It appears that there is an appetite among the general population for a dialogue with them. At the National Conference of Understanding (27 March to 3 April 2017) delegates at the conference urged the Malian Government to engage them in dialogue.²⁶¹ However, for MINUSMA, official dialogue with designated terrorist groups remains a red line, particularly as countries such as France oppose this.²⁶²

Ownership over projects

From the perspective of key MINUSMA and Malian Government actors, there is local ownership over MINUSMA's projects as these are always in response to demands from local authorities, e.g., the village chief and the local population would be involved. However, this ownership

259 Denis M. Tull, "UN Peacekeeping in Mali: Time to Adjust MINUSMA's Mandate," SWP Comment No. 23, April 2019.

260 Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako; Interview with representative from the CN-DDR, Bamako, 18 March 2019; Interview with representative of the TRC, Bamako, 15 March 2019; Interview with member of the Monitoring Committee of the Agreement for Peace and National Reconciliation, Bamako, 15 March 2019.

261 Interview with MISAHEL official, Bamako, 14 September 2018.

262 Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 7 September 2018.

is primarily at the local level, and efforts are often not embedded in national planning. This affects the sustainability of projects. For example, the Mission sometimes repairs schools, but it is difficult to follow up as the Mission is not continuously present. The FAMA often does not follow up, and coordination with the Ministry of Education at the central level is lacking.²⁶³

Some state officials in Bamako, therefore, claim MINUSMA's support to state-building and consolidation would not be demand-driven. They emphasise the minimal consultation between MINUSMA and state institutions, particularly in the identification, design and implementation of QIPs.²⁶⁴ For instance, it was suggested that even though the Malian Gendarmerie sees training as a priority and has developed an annual training programme, this does not appear to be the priority of MINUSMA. According to some, MINUSMA would have focused on the refurbishment of structures. While this is appreciated, there are concerns that not all the refurbishments were aligned with the national plan. Similarly, while support was requested by the Gendarmerie for standardised training on preventing and addressing gender-based violence, the support was not forthcoming as support was only provided for one out of the 100 brigades for which support was requested.²⁶⁵

National and local ownership for the peace process and the role of the Mission is relatively low. In order to strengthen national and local ownership, the discourse on a political settlement would need to be broadened, and the parties would need to explain to the population what agreement they have signed. In addition, despite its provision of development-related support, such as the refurbishment of facilities and the provision of support to CSOs, MINUSMA is yet to attain its core mandate of implementing the Algiers Agreement, which is a prerequisite for national and local level ownership.

263 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, Bamako, 7 September 2019; Interview with official from the Ministry of Youth, Employment and Citizen Construction, Bamako, 13 March 2019; Interview with member of the Defence and Security Committee of the National Assembly, Bamako, 13 March 2019.

264 Interview with Gendamarie 14 September 2018.

265 Ibid.

X. Women, Peace and Security

The multiple security threats interwoven into the political crises and localised conflict, especially in the Centre, have had a devastating effect on women and girls, particularly those who have been displaced and are enduring insecurity. The security situation prevented women from accessing the markets, moving around freely and securely, and organising themselves across communities.²⁶⁶ Many of the businesses that provided for the living of women in the North and the Centre have collapsed, which has threatened the very survival and livelihoods of these women.²⁶⁷

Progress

MINUSMA's mandate from the beginning appreciated the disproportionate impact of the Malian situation on women and girls, and women, peace, and security (WPS) goals were integrated into MINUSMA's mandate. However, initially, the Mission did not have a solid record of mainstreaming women's priorities into its actions and decisions at all levels. From the outset, it appears that there was insufficient appreciation for the strategic significance and value that the integration of WPS issues contributes to meeting the broader Mission objectives. The competing priorities confronting Mission leadership meant that too little attention was paid to fulfilling the WPS aspect of the mandate. Over this period the Mission was criticised for the low level of attention given to the WPS agenda, especially in areas such as personnel, budgeting,

²⁶⁶ Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 15 September 2018.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

and giving prominence to WPS issues in Mission reporting. For instance, in the beginning, the Gender Unit was heavily under-resourced with a budget of US\$3 000 to support mainstreaming efforts.²⁶⁸

However, progressively, there has been a shift, and now the WPS agenda has become integrated into peace and security decisions at all levels. The budgets have become bigger, more gender advisors have been recruited and deployed, training is ongoing in all sectors, and WPS now receives the same attention as other sections in Mission reporting. Through the Gender Unit, and with the support of UN in-country agencies, the Mission is increasingly providing technical support to the various Mission components, Malian authorities and civil society in the areas of political participation, reforms in the security sector, promotion of human rights and addressing gender-based violence.²⁶⁹ The Mission's efforts, support and technical assistance are greatly appreciated by its counterparts in the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family.²⁷⁰

Progressively, there has been a shift, and now the WPS agenda has become integrated into peace and security decisions at all levels.

Although few women participated in the peace process leading up to the signing of the Algiers Agreement, the agreement and the peace it aims for invariably addresses and reflects the needs of women and girls. The Mission, through its Gender Unit, has also increased women's participation and influence in the peace process by facilitating the formation of a separate committee composed of women to establish their own priorities for the finalisation and future implementation of the Algiers Agreement. Additionally, as part of increasing women's participation in the political process, the Gender Unit supported a platform of women's groups from the whole country to draft an advocacy document and a joint list of recommendations to the presidential candidates in the period leading up to the 2018 presidential elections.²⁷¹ In part, due to these efforts, there have been remarkable improvements in the number of women ministers in government as this increased from 8% to about 34%.²⁷²

However, the current political insecurity in northern and central parts of Mali continues to restrict and curtail the movement of women for livelihood purposes. Therefore, MINUSMA has supported the specific protection needs of the affected population, particularly women and girls

268 Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 15 September 2018.

269 Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako.

270 Interview with official from the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family, Bamako, 19 March 2019.

271 Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 15 September 2018.

272 Ibid.

through its confidence-building short- and long-range patrols.²⁷³ Through this, MINUSMA aims to reduce the number of rapes, abductions, kidnapping, and conflict-related sexual violence, which invariably is one of the top priorities of the Mission's protection strategy.

Challenges

One of the main challenges confronting MINUSMA in implementing the WPS agenda is the Malian culture, especially in the North. Women's roles are primarily limited to the private sphere, and they face restrictions when entering the public sphere. In Gao region, for example, fewer women are represented in civil society than elsewhere, which is attributed by MINUSMA officials to the cultural restrictions.²⁷⁴

There have been remarkable improvements in the number of women ministers in government as this increased from 8% to about 34%.

The Algiers Agreement peace process faces its challenges and is not moving as fast as hoped for, and women's groups have argued from its inception that this results from the insufficient attention given to women, who form about 52% of the Malian population.²⁷⁵

Another challenge is the number of women in MINUSMA. Two key functions of MINUSMA, as stipulated in the mandate, are to protect civilians and collect intelligence. Female representation in fulfilling these tasks is essential.²⁷⁶ The UN is also committed to the goal of 50:50 gender parity in all posts and vacancies available in all the sections and at the professional levels within the Mission. However, MINUSMA is a mission with relatively low women's representation. Notwithstanding efforts to increase the deployment of women, MINUSMA remains dominated by men.²⁷⁷ There has been improvement in the participation ratios of women uniformed personnel from 0.9% at its establishment in July 2013, to about 4.3% by June 2019 (see Figure 20). However, this increase remains relatively marginal.²⁷⁸ The difficulty in increasing women's participation in the Mission results from a range of factors including, with regard to troops, TCCs being hesitant to deploy women to harsh mission environments where threats of violence are real.²⁷⁹

273 Interview with MINUSMA official, Mopti, 10 September 2018.

274 <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>.

275 Interview with MINUSMA official, Mopti, 11 September 2018.

276 Interview with MINUSMA official, Mopti, 10 September 2018.

277 Ibid.

278 Interview with MINUSMA official, Gao, 10 September 2018.

279 Interview with MINUSMA official, Mopti, 10 September 2018.

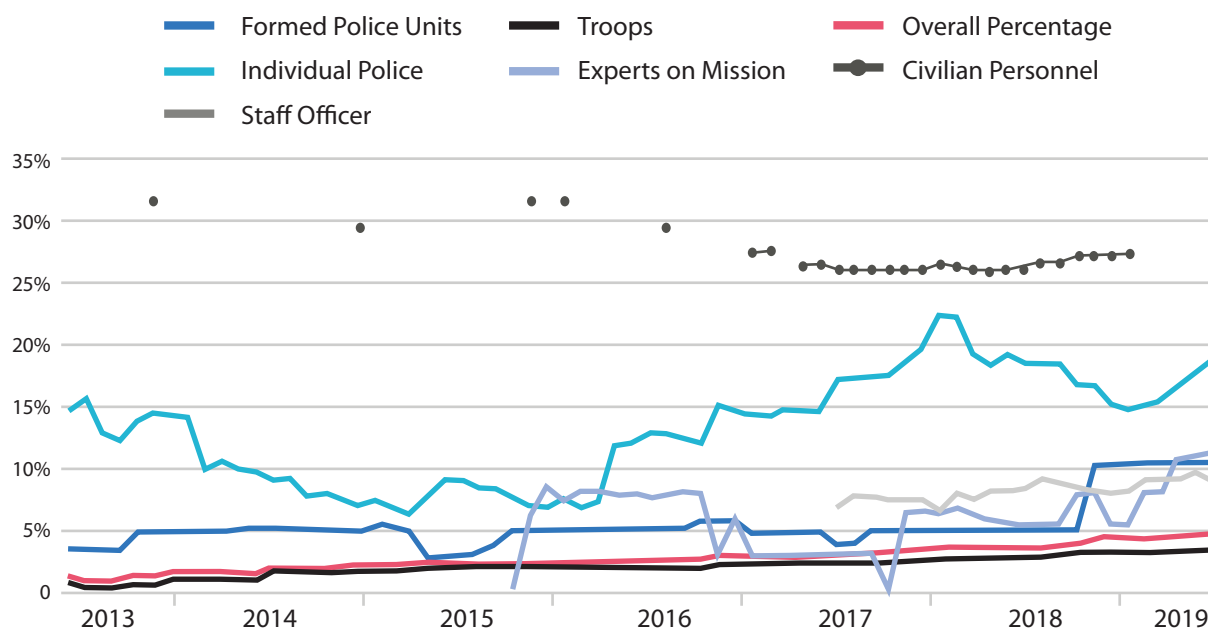


Figure 20: Percentage of women deployed in MINUSMA, 2013-2019

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database

Sexual exploitation and abuse

Regarding sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), the Mission has adopted all three strategic approaches of prevention, enforcement, and remedial action in addressing the conduct and discipline issues relating to SEA. MINUSMA is one of the missions with the lowest reported cases of SEA.²⁸⁰ Cumulatively, since the beginning of 2015, the Mission has reported 14 allegations of SEA, of which four were substantiated, four were unsubstantiated, five are still pending, and the results of the investigation are not available for one case.²⁸¹ This relatively low number of allegations may be partly explained by the fact that most of the Mission staff are housed in “super camps” and, as such, have very little or no interaction with the local population. Additionally, the risky nature of the terrain and the general insecurity within which most of the peacekeepers have to operate has been a major check on would-be perpetrators. However, Malians also do not have a culture of reporting sexual crimes, and they are not “open” on prostitution.²⁸²

Overall, the initial limited approach to WPS has given way to a more integrated approach in which women’s lived experiences, a better understanding of the problem, and increased capabilities are factored into the sustenance, effectiveness, and success of the Mission. The Mission has become an ardent promoter of gender equality and responsiveness in the political, civil, judicial and economic reconstruction process of Mali.

²⁸⁰ Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 7 September 2018.

²⁸¹ <https://conduct.unmissions.org/table-of-allegations>.

²⁸² Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 7 September 2018.

XI. International Support

From its creation as a replacement for AFISMA in April 2013, the support from the UN Security Council and member states from different regions for MINUSMA has been strong. Neighbouring countries provide the bulk of its troops, with key contributions also from Bangladesh and China. Critical technical support in the fields of intelligence, aviation, communication and logistics is deployed by several European nations that have in the recent past been wary of joining UN operations in Africa, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. This engagement, together with the various other international missions deployed to Mali (see below), demonstrates the importance many governments place on resolving Mali's ongoing conflicts and on MINUSMA as a key actor in this endeavour.

International disagreements

In spite of this general level of support for MINUSMA, there remain various tensions among the international actors. The most contentious issue is how to guarantee public security and curb terrorist activities in Northern and Central Mali. Simply put, there are ongoing tensions between those – such as the UN Secretariat, MINUSMA leadership and its civilian component – who prefer a “human security” approach and those – such as some UN military as well as regional states and organisations – who prefer a “state security” approach. While lip service is being paid to the necessity for a unified strategy, the former group clearly want to devote more resources to tackling the political, social and economic root causes of the conflicts while the

latter group would like to see the MINUSMA mandate strengthened to include the mandate to neutralise the “terrorists”.²⁸³

In spite of this general level of support for MINUSMA, there remain various tensions among the international actors.

The AU political mission MISAHHEL officially endorses the current mandate of MINUSMA, which does not include an active role against terrorist groups. However, it has also called on the UN to mobilise additional financial resources to directly support the recruitment, equipment and training of the Malian security forces to increase their combat effectiveness. In the same vein, MISAHHEL has also questioned why EUTM’s mandate only called for training, but not equipping, its Malian counterparts.²⁸⁴

Particularly controversial in this context is the role of the latest actor to appear on the scene, the JF-G5S. The AU, for example, accepts that a regional force to counter the terrorist threat is necessary to supplement Operation Barkhane. But it questions the motives of France and other European countries for financing the JF-G5S, which the AU sees as “the exit strategy” for Barkhane.²⁸⁵ The misgivings of ECOWAS regarding the G5-Sahel force are even more substantial. Representatives of the organisation have said that ECOWAS would have been better positioned to provide a regional anti-terror intervention force than the G5-Sahel. They have also voiced frustration over the fact that European nations are willing to provide capabilities to MINUSMA and through EU operations but are reluctant to support equivalent ECOWAS initiatives.²⁸⁶ It seems clear that the discord stemming from the French intervention, the subsequent deployment of AFISMA and its transition to MINUSMA in 2012-13, are still factors today.²⁸⁷

Particularly controversial in this context is the role of the latest actor to appear on the scene, the JF-G5S.

283 Interview with MINUSMA official, 5 July 2018; Interview with OCHA official, Bamako, 6 July 2018; Interview with MINUSMA officials, 6 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA officials, 6 September 2018; Interview with ECOWAS representative, 13 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA officials, 15 September 2018.

284 Interview with MISAHHEL official, Bamako, 14 September 2018.

285 Ibid.

286 Interview with ECOWAS official, Bamako, 13 September 2018.

287 Xenia Avezov, “The new geopolitics of peace operations II: A dialogue with Sahel-Saharan Africa,” SIPRI, March 2016, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/NGPII_Sahel-Saharan-Africa-%28Bamako%29.pdf; Lori-Anne Thérault-Bénoni, “The lack of credible and timely alternatives to France’s Opération Serval in Mali has highlighted the shortcomings of ECOWAS, the AU, and the UN,” Institute for Security Studies, 15 April 2013, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/lessons-from-the-malian-crisis-for-the-international-security-architecture>.

The role of the region

The attitude and actions of some neighbouring states are an additional cause for concern. While apparently supportive of MINUSMA's presence and mandate, their reported activities sometimes undermine its goal of stabilising Mali. The security services of Algeria and Mauritania are said to have intimate knowledge of the situation in Northern Mali and to be cultivating working relationships with various actors, including armed groups and traffickers. A MINUSMA official stated that their national interests are clearly best served by keeping trouble on the Malian side of their borders.²⁸⁸ In addition, Algeria is widely suspected of protecting at least some Islamists groups in order to counterbalance France's position in the Sahel and to guarantee Northern Mali as a market for its goods.²⁸⁹

The attitude and actions of some neighbouring states are an additional cause for concern.

The role of regional states and organisations is more positive in the mediation between the Malian Government and various armed groups aimed at implementing the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation. This effort is led by Algeria and supported by the UN, the AU and ECOWAS.²⁹⁰ Coordination between these facilitators seems to be satisfactory. However, there is also evidence of disagreements between the UN Secretariat and MINUSMA leadership regarding the role of Algeria in the mediation process, caused by the insufficient transparency in Algeria's intentions and the inner workings of its government.²⁹¹

International support and confidence

The proliferation of international and regional actors and their divergent interests in Mali has often led to tensions and competition, as opposed to a united strategy towards peace in Mali. Whether their deep international involvement in Mali is helping, hindering or, at worst, aggravating insecurity is hotly contested, and views diverge. On the surface, actors subscribe to a loose division of labour to "stabilise" the country on political, military, socio-economic and governance aspects. However, in practice, the sheer number of partners with divergent interests has clearly complicated conflict resolution efforts. The loss of confidence in international involvement cannot be understated; ordinary Malian citizens, especially in Bamako and Central Mali,

288 Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 15 September 2018.

289 See Alex Thurston, "Mali's tragic but persistent status quo," RSL Research Papers on Peace and Conflict Studies in West and Central Africa, January 2018, http://www.rosalux.sn/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/RLS_DAKAR_PC_01_2018n.pdf.

290 This process is bilaterally funded by the Netherlands. Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 7 September 2018.

291 Interview with AU official, Bamako, 14 September 2018; Interview with ECOWAS official, Bamako, 13 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 7 September 2018.

do not see its value. The broad perception is that international actors have not helped achieve peace, and violence has only worsened since their arrival. Clearly, much work remains to be done to overcome the rivalry and competition between individual neighbouring states, (sub-)regional organisations and outside actors before a coherent international strategy for the long-term stabilisation of Mali can be developed and implemented.

The sheer number of partners with divergent interests has clearly complicated conflict resolution efforts.

Lastly, there has been a push, particularly from the US administration, but not limited to it, to cut back the costs of peacekeeping operations affecting MINUSMA. Increasingly, the Security Council makes budget-driven decisions rather than conclusions based on the actual needs of the Mission and peace and security in Mali and the broader region. Aware of the budget limitations, the Secretariat generally proposes solutions that are realistically accepted by the Security Council.²⁹² However, the “Brahimi report” stated that the Secretariat “must tell the Security Council what it needs to know, not what it wants to hear.”²⁹³ The Security Council cannot expect MINUSMA to do more and more with less and less. For example, in addition to the further expansion of MINUSMA’s role in the Centre, the US proposed cutting 600 troops.²⁹⁴ MINUSMA cannot take care of the challenges in the North and the Centre of Mali with resources that are barely sufficient to deal with the North. In that sense, MINUSMA’s best ally, the Security Council, is at times also its biggest enemy.

MINUSMA’s best ally, the Security Council, is at times also its biggest enemy.

There is international support for MINUSMA, including general support from the Security Council, for the time being. However, much work remains to be done to overcome the distrust, rivalry and competition between individual neighbouring states, (sub-)regional organisations, and outside actors before a coherent and joint international strategy for the long-term stabilisation of Mali can be developed and implemented. Governments in the Sahel region support MINUSMA and the peace process. At the same time, Mali’s neighbours are keen to keep their own Islamist extremists on the other side of the border. African actors mistrust the role of France, and the US pressure to cut costs may have increasingly negative implications. Cracks in international support are starting to appear.

292 UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General: Situation in Mali,” S/2019/454, 31 May 2019.

293 UN General Assembly and Security Council, Identical letters dated 21 August 2000 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council, A/55/305-S/2000/809.

294 What’s in Blue, “Mali: Renewal of MINUSMA’s Mandate,” 27 June 2019, <https://www.whatsinblue.org/2019/06/mali-renewal-of-minusmas-mandate-2.php>.

XII. Coherence and Partnerships

The issue of internal and external coherence is highly relevant to MINUSMA because of the exceptionally large number of parallel operations present on the ground and because, uniquely among UN operations, it shares its mission area with two operations – Operation Barkhane and the JF-G5S – tasked with offensive military action against terrorist groups.

External coherence and partnerships

The EU currently deploys two CSDP missions in Mali. They focus on advising and training the higher echelons of the Mali military (EUTM) and the police, gendarmerie and national guard (EUCAP Sahel Mali).²⁹⁵ To these activities, MINUSMA routinely provides support, mostly in the area of logistics.²⁹⁶ MINUSMA and both EU missions also hold joint training courses – a first in the history of the two organisations. While UN-EU technical cooperation is positive, there is still a disturbing absence of a shared strategic vision for the stabilisation of Mali. Several UN and EU staff stated that working-level contacts were good in spite of, rather than because of, directives from headquarters and urged more efforts are needed to develop a coherent approach, particularly in the field of SSR.²⁹⁷ Malian counterparts, as well as the public, are

²⁹⁵ See EU Council Decision 2013/34/CFSP for the mandate of EUTM; EU Council Decision 2014/219/CFSP for the mandate of EUCAP.

²⁹⁶ Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 6 September 2018.

²⁹⁷ Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 11 September 2018; Interview with EUCAP official, Bamako, 13 September 2018.

sometimes bewildered by the multitude of parallel actors, wondering why European countries chose to provide certain capabilities through EU operations rather than within MINUSMA.²⁹⁸

While technical cooperation is positive, there is still a disturbing absence of a shared strategic vision for the stabilisation of Mali.

While MINUSMA has numerous points of contact with EUCAP and EUTM, cooperation with Barkhane is largely limited to MINUSMA's military component. It is most extensive in the area of intelligence. MINUSMA personnel meet their Barkhane counterparts several times a week to exchange information on current threats and delimit areas of operations to avoid friendly fire incidents.²⁹⁹ The French mission does not, however, share operational intelligence on planned counter-terrorism activities with the UN. This state of affairs suits both sides: MINUSMA is keen to avoid the impression of endorsing potentially lethal action by the French military in advance.³⁰⁰ Barkhane, on the other hand, does not trust UN staff with such sensitive information that could compromise the safety of both French personnel and local collaborators.³⁰¹ An additional area of cooperation is the co-location of units in shared camps in the North of Mali. This arrangement is highly beneficial to Barkhane as the use of bases guarded and supplied by UN blue helmets frees up considerable French resources, allowing Barkhane to sustain its mobile approach to combatting terrorist groups.³⁰²

Arguably the most controversial of MINUSMA's partnerships is the one with the JF-G5S. It is based on a February 2018 agreement between the UN, EU and G5 Sahel. In Mali, MINUSMA is to provide to the JF-G5S engineering and logistical support and casualty evacuation (subject to full reimbursement to the UN).³⁰³ UN military staff see the engagement of regional militaries in combatting terrorist groups generally and the "hot pursuit" of such groups across national borders allowed by the JF-G5S mandate specifically as positive.³⁰⁴ However, there are conflicting views about whether the JF-G5S can become an effective actor in its own right. The JF-G5S leadership feels that significant progress against terrorist groups is achievable.³⁰⁵ UN military staff are less optimistic. Clearly, the JF-G5S is currently reliant on significant logistical support by French and MINUSMA forces. In addition, supplying airlift to JF-G5S could degrade the

298 Focus group meeting, 12 September 2018, Bamako.

299 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, Bamako, 7 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA official, Gao, 10 September 2018.

300 Interview with MINUSMA official, Gao, 10 September 2018.

301 Interview with Barkhane official, Bamako, 14 September 2018.

302 Interview with Barkhane official, Bamako, 14 September 2018.

303 UN Security Council Resolution 2423, 28 June 2018, #49.

304 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, Bamako, 6 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA official, Gao, 10 September 2018.

305 Interview with JF-G5S official, Bamako, 14 September 2018.

UN's own capabilities, as existing assets in this area are barely sufficient for MINUSMA's current needs.³⁰⁶

The internal coherence of MINUSMA and the UN country team is also less than perfect, especially between the military and civilian components.

More importantly, civilian UN staff are doubtful about the effectiveness of the JF-G5S' largely military approach in combating regional "terrorism". This complex phenomenon is the result of longstanding failures of governance and a lack of economic opportunities. In fact, the presence of military forces that are not trusted by the local population due to their questionable human rights record could exacerbate, rather than resolve, the tensions that led to the growth of extremist groups.³⁰⁷

Internal coherence

However, it is not only frameworks for the cooperation with external partners that need to be improved. The internal coherence of MINUSMA and the UN country team is also less than perfect, especially between the military and civilian components. Some in the UN military component complain of not receiving adequate guidance from civilian mission leadership.³⁰⁸ In contrast, some among civilian staff blame the Mission's difficulties on the military component's lack of equipment and training.³⁰⁹ There is also disagreement within the force about the role MINUSMA should play in confronting terrorist groups. While most interviewees accepted the current mandate, several called for a change that would allow the blue helmets to act more aggressively.³¹⁰ Until 2017, the Mission did not have a comprehensive mission plan,³¹¹ limiting coherence in efforts and reducing the ability of the Mission components to leverage the efforts of one another. For instance, stabilisation efforts have not always been aligned with the military efforts because of the lack of effective coordination in MINUSMA and between the Mission

306 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, Bamako, 6 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 6 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA official, Gao, 10 September 2018.

307 Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 15 September 2018. See also Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, "A fragile military response. International support of the G5 Sahel Joint Force," Danish Institute for International Studies, November 2018, <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/a-fragile-military-response>.

308 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, Bamako, 7 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA official, Gao, 10 September 2018.

309 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, Bamako, 11 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 15 September 2018.

310 Interviews with MINUSMA officials, Bamako, 4 September 2018; Interview with MINUSMA official, Gao, 10 September 2018.

311 Interview with MINUSMA official, 6 September 2018, Bamako.

and other actors.³¹² The situation appears even more dire in the central region, especially because of the limited ability of MINUSMA to provide security, particularly in the flood zones during the rainy season.³¹³

Different operations each focus mainly on their own areas or niches, rarely conflicting with one another, but also not coordinating their efforts enough to speak of a joint international “strategy”.

Overall, there is broad consensus among all international missions about the need for more coherence and a genuine willingness among their staff on the ground to work together. Although this situation has been described in the past as a “security traffic jam”, most of the time, these missions are complementary, as there is enough to be done.³¹⁴ The main challenge in terms of coherence and partnerships is that the different operations each focus mainly on their own areas or niches, rarely conflicting with one another, but also not coordinating their efforts enough to speak of a joint international “strategy”. Coordination means more than having coordination meetings. Unfortunately, there is no agreement yet on precisely what such a joint international strategy would entail. Until then, the missions and MINUSMA’s components will continue to “act as individual ‘islands’ in the sea of Mali’s conflict.”³¹⁵ This does not mean their efforts will be without positive effects, but the outcomes will be suboptimal.

312 Interview with MINUSMA official, 7 September 2018, Bamako.

313 Civil society focus group meeting, 10 September 2018, Mopti.

314 Jean-Marie Guéhenno, “Open Letter to the UN Security Council on Peacekeeping in Mali,” ICG, 24 April 2017; Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 6 September 2018.

315 Interview with MINUSMA official, Bamako, 11 September 2018.

XIII. Conclusions

Until 2016, MINUSMA was a relatively successful peace operation. It managed to improve stability in Northern Mali, especially around the major urban centres, contributed to decreasing the number of civilians killed in the conflict, and the increased stability enabled large numbers of displaced persons to return home. MINUSMA also supported the organisation of the 2013 elections and assisted in the peace process, culminating in the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, also known as the Algiers Agreement. Many of these achievements are still standing and are particularly impressive, considering the size of the country, the logistical challenges, the hostile security environment and, in spite of a \$1 billion budget, the relatively limited resources for implementing its mandate. However, since 2016, MINUSMA's effectiveness in terms of stabilisation and the PoC has decreased.

In the North, fighting between the signatories of the Algiers Agreement – the government, its allies in the Plateforme, and the CMA – has been absent, and reportedly these parties cooperated during the 2018 elections. Moreover, in recent months, the signatory parties have been making some progress in the implementation of the Algiers Agreement and the 2018 Pact for Peace, in part due to pressure from the Security Council. Reconciliation processes are tenuous as trust among the parties is not easily built. Progress in the Malian peace process is thus slow.

However, violence has increased as Islamist groups have been attacking MINUSMA, the FAMA, and the Algiers Agreement signatories. As a consequence, MINUSMA has sustained an extraordinary number of fatalities compared to other recent UN peace operations. On 20 January 2019, in Aguelhok, it lost ten members in one attack alone. It is this security environment that is the biggest operational challenge to MINUSMA's effectiveness.

In addition to the challenging situation in the North, Central Mali has destabilised significantly, particularly since 2016. In the regions of Mopti and Segou, the growing presence of, and attacks carried out by, Islamist groups against state institutions have triggered the further retreat of an already relatively absent state. Islamist activities and retaliation by government forces have stoked the proliferation of self-defence militias and a vicious cycle of inter-communal violence that has reached unprecedented levels. MINUSMA has only been mandated to help the Malian Government address the situation since June 2018. At the end of 2018 and during 2019, mass killings occurred on all sides. Violence reached an unprecedented scale with the 23 March Ogossagou massacre in which some 160 Peul were killed. The government has been implementing a strategy to restore state presence in the central regions, namely, the Plan to Re-establish Security in Central Mali (PSIRC), but results so far have been limited. At worst, the redeployment of the military is aggravating insecurity in some localities. MINUSMA's presence is mainly in larger towns. It is still very limited in the central regions and rural areas where non-state armed actors are active, and it does not have the required capabilities to protect civilians. This is in spite of the fact that the latest mandate renewal specifically asks MINUSMA to protect civilians in the centre of the country.

Many achievements are still standing and are particularly impressive, considering the size of the country, the logistical challenges, the hostile security environment and, in spite of a \$1 billion budget, the relatively limited resources for implementing its mandate.

The EPON research team conducted 66 interviews with MINUSMA and other international officials, Malian officials, civil society representatives, and researchers; organised focus group meetings with civil society in Bamako, Gao and Mopti; and conducted literature and document research. The team is very grateful for the generous support received in the process from MINUSMA and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

The team found that MINUSMA is facing much criticism. Interviewees and focus group meeting participants feel the Mission is no longer able to improve peace and stability in Mali, and they readily described MINUSMA's shortcomings. At the same time, there is consensus that, in the absence of MINUSMA, the security situation in Mali, and perhaps even the whole region, would likely deteriorate significantly. Only a few interviewees and focus group meeting participants said there would be no difference, or a chance of improvement, if MINUSMA were to leave.

Effectiveness explained in dimensions

People-Centred Approach

MINUSMA's response to the asymmetric threats it faces has often been bunkerisation in “super-camps” and in military bases and allocating significant resources to convoy protection. As civilian staff members rely on military escorts to conduct their field missions, the whole Mission's ability to reach out to local populations in a people-centred approach has been constrained. In spite of this, MINUSMA is trying to have an impact on the lives of local populations. The Mission tries to engage with a broad range of civilian stakeholders, mainly at the operational level and through QIPs, stabilisation and recovery projects, etc.

The state, the government, and its agents are viewed as illegitimate and outright predatory in some localities in Central and Northern Mali.

However, since the majority of its mandated tasks are “in support of the Malian government,” it is the Malian State that in many respects sets the agenda and not the ordinary Malian citizenry. This is a challenge because MINUSMA's principal interlocutor does not always act in the interests of the people. More importantly, the state, the government, and its agents are viewed as illegitimate and outright predatory in some localities in Central and Northern Mali. This limits the Mission's broad inclusivity at the strategic level.

Legitimacy and Credibility

In terms of legitimacy and credibility, formally MINUSMA's presence is upon request of the Government of Mali. From the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Mali Metre surveys, and the focus groups conducted, it appears that about half of the population is generally satisfied with MINUSMA's performance. The Mission is more positively perceived in the North, particularly because of the development projects it implements within the context of its stabilisation efforts.

In the central regions, the main complaint is over MINUSMA's absence. Focus group participants want the Mission to play a more active role. Among the population in the southern regions, and among many government officials, the Mission has lost a large measure of goodwill. This is partly due to misunderstandings since the beginning, as they expected the Mission to fight rebels and be involved in counter-terrorism. Instead, they now see the Mission as an infringement upon Mali's national sovereignty.

At the same time, in localities where the government and its agents do not have support from the population, MINUSMA's legitimacy is negatively affected by its association with the FAMA and JF-G5S, to which it provides operational and logistical support, as well as with the French counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane, which it co-locates with in some locations.

In spite of measures such as the HRDDP and human rights and international humanitarian law compliance frameworks, this clearly illustrates the challenges of supporting a state with a poor governance and human rights track record.

Moreover, ordinary citizens do not easily distinguish between the mandates of international operations, and a common assumption is that they work together. Recently, MINUSMA and other missions have even been accused of complicity with the state, including in allegations that it is arming self-defence militias that have committed atrocities. In spite of measures such as the HRDDP and human rights and international humanitarian law compliance frameworks, this clearly illustrates the challenges of supporting a state with a poor governance and human rights track record.

Primacy of Politics

MINUSMA struggles with the primacy of politics in its efforts. The implementation of the Algiers Agreement is the fulcrum for its engagement. However, this agreement only covers the North-South relationship. Under international pressure, Mission leadership has thus far excluded so-called “terrorist armed groups”. These are the Islamist groups, some of whom wield significant influence in the conflict, and who pose a considerable threat to the future stability of Mali and the security of its people. Moreover, the reality on the ground demonstrates that boundaries between signatory or “compliant armed groups” and terrorist and criminal actors are fluid and cannot be easily separated into rudimentary categories. Furthermore, MINUSMA has been on the back foot in devising a political strategy to address the rapidly increasing violence in Central Mali. While early warnings were sounded, the response has been slow, partially because of the Malian Government's reluctance to permit international involvement.

In order to strengthen national and local ownership, the discourse on a political settlement would need to be broadened, and the parties would need to explain to their population what agreement they have signed.

For MINUSMA to prioritise a political solution in all its activities, its engagement would have to move beyond its current counterparts, the government, and the “compliant armed groups”. Giving way to the growing domestic opinion, which supports the Malian Government entering into dialogue with key Islamist leaders, would need to be seriously considered. With regard to the Centre, the Malian Government would have to lead a political process that the Mission can support. MINUSMA would need to deal with not only the North or even the central regions, but with the entire country and, to some extent, the Sahel region as a whole. It would also need to engage beyond the current themes – including issues such as exclusion, criminality, and the governance aspects of natural resources and climate-related challenges. This would, however, risk overstretch.

National and Local Ownership

Although not always supported by their rhetoric, the current parties to the Algiers Agreement have by and large taken ownership over the work of MINUSMA. To some extent, they depend on the Mission. However, that does not mean they invest in it. This is also evident in the limited progress made so far. Rather, parties, like the government, often use the Mission as a scapegoat for their own failure to deliver. Moreover, related to the legitimacy of the Mission described above, local ownership of MINUSMA’s efforts is limited by a lack of understanding of or dissatisfaction with the Mission’s mandate among large sections of the Malian population. In order to strengthen national and local ownership, the discourse on a political settlement would need to be broadened, and the parties would need to explain to their population what agreement they have signed.

Women, Peace and Security

Initially, the topic of women, peace and security did not receive the attention it requires. However, this has given way to a more integrated approach in which women’s lived experiences, understanding, and capabilities are factored into the substance, effectiveness, and success of the Mission. MINUSMA ensured the inclusion of gender issues in the Algiers Agreement and its subsequent monitoring. It has also become a promoter of gender equality and responsiveness in the political, civil, judicial and economic reconstruction process of Mali, in part by supporting projects and training, and aiming to have a more gender-sensitive approach in its efforts.

International Support

There is international support for MINUSMA, including general support from the Security Council, for the time being. However, much work remains to be done to overcome the distrust, rivalry and competition between individual neighbouring states, (sub-)regional organisations, and outside actors before a coherent and joint international strategy for the long-term

stabilisation of Mali can be developed and implemented. Governments in the Sahel region support MINUSMA and the peace process. At the same time, Mali's neighbours are keen to keep their own Islamist extremists on the other side of the border. African actors mistrust the role of France, and the US pressure to cut costs may have increasingly negative implications. Cracks in international support are starting to appear.

The US pressure to cut costs may have increasingly negative implications.

Coherence and Partnerships

Apart from MINUSMA, Mali hosts a range of multilateral peace operations and interventions: the AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHHEL), the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali), the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali), Operation Barkhane, and the JF-G5S. Although this has been described in the past as a “security traffic jam”, most of the time, these missions are complementary, as there is enough to be done. The main challenge in terms of coherence and partnerships is that the different operations each focus mainly on their own areas or niches, and do not coordinate their efforts enough to speak of an international “strategy”. Coordination means more than having coordination meetings. As such, the missions operate as islands in the sea of the Malian conflict, rarely conflicting with one another, but also rarely working together in an international joint strategy.

Strategic Policy Dilemmas

Currently, MINUSMA finds itself at a crossroads. It needs time to succeed, but this is also valuable time Mali does not have at this moment. In the meantime, civilians suffer from attacks, while the US particularly is losing interest in supporting a costly UN peace operation that is not able to deliver quick results. MINUSMA might regain momentum for the stabilisation of Mali, and the broader Sahel region, if strategic choices are made on a number of policy dilemmas. On the other hand, if the Security Council makes budget-driven choices, the results may be disastrous. Some of the main strategic policy dilemmas the Mission faces are described below.

To decentralise the Mission, or not?

Although originally large parts of MINUSMA's civilian component were meant to be deployed in the field, logistical and security reasons have prevented this from happening. Currently, large parts of the civilian component are concentrated in Bamako. This has as an advantage easier

communication with the central government, and it facilitates the institution-building side of the mandate. Moreover, a further decentralised mission runs the risk of being spread even more thinly. At the same time, one of the main problems is that the majority of the Malian population, who live in the southern regions, see many white UN cars in the streets of Bamako, but do not see major benefits of MINUSMA operations. In their view, the Mission does not undertake counter-terrorism, and it also does not bring them the stabilisation projects received by other areas where MINUSMA is deployed. However, the Mission might not be able to completely decentralise, as that could exacerbate negative public perceptions in the South of the Mission being partial, in favour of rebel forces, and unwilling to deal with terrorism.

To concentrate on the North, the Centre, or both?

Originally, MINUSMA was set up to deal with the conflict in the North. Over the past two years, the conflict has intensified in the central regions of the country. For several reasons, the Centre requires attention. First and foremost, PoC requires the Mission to deploy there actively. MINUSMA could conduct patrols in rural hard-to-access areas where civilians are in dire need of security guarantees, and more could be done to ensure the FAMA can deploy a more permanent but non-predatory presence in these areas that are difficult to access. Central Mali is a melting pot of ethnic groups, and it is densely populated, so a further escalation of violence risks fuelling ethnically-motivated atrocities, and completely destabilising the territorial integrity of the country, as well as neighbouring countries.

One of the main problems is that the majority of the Malian population, who live in the southern regions, see many white UN cars in the streets of Bamako, but do not see major benefits of MINUSMA operations.

MINUSMA's 2019 mandate renewal has focused more attention on the Centre, while the Mission's tasks for the North remained the same. However, this increased attention to the central regions requires resources, which UN Security Council resolution 2480 and later the Fifth Committee did not significantly provide.³¹⁶ For security reasons, TCCs also hesitate to send their troops to the Centre. Given the current budgetary and resource limitations, attention paid to the central regions may be at the cost of gains made in the North. Although some progress has been made in the North, it is likely too early to drawdown from this region. There is still a continued need for a strong MINUSMA presence to sustain its thus far successful contribution to building confidence among the Algiers Agreement signatory parties. This raises the question as to whether the Security Council has made MINUSMA's mandate more unrealistic.

³¹⁶ MINUSMA's budget was increased from \$1.07 billion for 2018/19 to \$1.14 billion for 2019/20.

Given the current budgetary and resource limitations, attention paid to the central regions may be at the cost of gains made in the North.

To link with the government, or not?

MINUSMA's current strategic aim is to restore and extend state authority throughout Mali's national territory. This task, like MINUSMA's supportive role for the JF-G5S, is at times at odds with the Mission's good offices, confidence-building and facilitation tasks that are required to support dialogue, reconciliation and social cohesion within the context of the implementation of the Algiers Agreement. The latter tasks require impartiality, which is lost by linking the Mission with the current government. In the central and northern regions, the state is mostly absent beyond larger towns, and in some localities, it is perceived as abusive, predatory and illegitimate. There is also a lack of confidence in its ability to protect the local populations and in its willingness to fight Islamist groups. The challenge is that support for the national government and its security sector is required to overcome one structural cause of instability in Mali – state weakness. However, in the absence of sufficient human rights due diligence, legitimacy and inclusivity, it may further contribute to another cause of instability.

To support counter-terrorism and stabilisation, or go back to basics?

Given the destabilisation of Mali since 2016, the question has arisen as to what extent the current counter-terrorism and stabilisation efforts by the Malian armed forces, Barkhane, the JF-G5S, and MINUSMA are still effective. In fact, current counter-terrorism conducted in Mali is highly problematic as it has further fuelled local conflict dynamics. The limited support for the government, its poor human rights and governance record, and its reported use of ethnic proxy militias who are responsible for committing atrocities against the civilian population make it an awkward partner for MINUSMA.

The Malian Government and, by proxy, international counter-terrorism support, insufficiently distinguishes between Islamism and the legitimate concerns of sections of the Malian population.

The Malian Government and, by proxy, international counter-terrorism support, insufficiently distinguishes between Islamism and the legitimate concerns of sections of the Malian population. These grievances are, in turn, exploited by “terrorist” actors. This has amplified inter-communal

violence, further radicalised parts of the population, and led to mass internal displacement. The complex Malian situation places the Mission in difficult situations in which the choices that have to be made are not binary or clear cut. At the same time, returning to political tasks alone may risk further destabilisation of the country and potentially the whole Sahel-West African region.

XIV. Strategic Policy Options

As a result of these strategic policy dilemmas, a number of strategic policy options are conceivable. The Brahimi report states that the Secretariat “must tell the Security Council what it needs to know, not what it wants to hear.” This responsibility extends to analysts. The section below endeavours to do this.

1. Drawdown and possible continuation as a political mission

Drawing down the military force and concentrating on the civilian component could appear to be the most cost-effective solution in the short run. However, the risk and serious consequences of the North breaking away, or of a collapse of the Malian state affecting the broader region, should be enough to drop this option. In the absence of its military presence, MINUSMA is probably less able to continue its military and civilian confidence-building role, particularly in the North, and with regard to the peace process. Moreover, a military drawdown would likely signal a lack of interest from the international community in the developments in Mali, give momentum to those forces that want to continue the conflict, and undo the current peace dividend.

2. Continuation as a peacekeeping and stabilisation operation

This is the most likely option, and there are several variations of this scenario, depending on the regional focus of the Mission, the resources available, and the extent of decentralisation of the civilian component.

a) Focus on the North

The Mission might be considered unsuitable to deal with the local and diversified problems of the Centre, and could focus on its original mandate of supporting the political process and stability in the North. Resources would not be increased, and attention would not be further shifted to the central regions. This option risks effectively allowing the Centre of the country to collapse, which in turn might lead to the breakup of the country as the connection between the South and the North would be lost.

b) Focus on the Centre

Considering the above-mentioned risks for the territorial integrity of Mali, the serious need for PoC in the central regions, and the likelihood that the available resources will remain the same, a strategic refocus for MINUSMA might be to deal with the most urgent and current issues. Shifting existing military and civilian capabilities south would enhance MINUSMA's outreach and representation, and might prevent the central regions from collapsing. In the short term, it would have to focus on PoC and advocate strongly for the disarmament of ethnic militias operating in Central Mali. Having a riverine and a designated helicopter unit could enable PoC in areas that are currently inaccessible. MINUSMA could deploy a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to hotspots where inter-communal violence is rife, such as in Bankass or Koro. However, to have the most impact, patrols must be conducted in rural areas affected by insecurity. At the same time, solutions need to be found to ensure stability in the long term. Furthermore, political engagement could continue on the peace process in the North, and a military presence in the hotspots Kidal and Menaka is advisable. Nevertheless, if MINUSMA were to drawdown from other areas in the North, the stability of the whole northern region might be at further risk because of the absence of the Mission's confidence-building presence. Depending on MINUSMA's level of success in the central regions, the North might then eventually break away again.

c) **Struggling on with the current resources and focusing on the Centre and the North**

This is the choice made in the 2019 mandate renewal. The deployment stays *grosso modo* (i.e., relatively) the same, with some redeployments within existing resources from the North to the Centre. MINUSMA could reconfigure its troops for a short to medium time period so that a fully-fledged military and UNPOL contingent can be deployed to hotspots in Central Mali, with the possibility of functioning as an inter-positional force when inter-communal conflicts flare up. This might not directly further destabilise the situation in the North, but it may also not be enough to help stabilise the Centre. Most likely, this would continue Mali's slow process of destabilisation, but prevent the immediate collapse or break-up of the country.

d) **Expansion and focus on the Centre and the North**

Expanding the Mission to the central regions without affecting the current deployment in the North and, therefore, not risking the stability of that region, would require the Mission to have additional resources for the central regions (as described above). This would clearly have been the best option for Mali, but was not the choice made for the 2019 mandate renewal. The Security Council wanted to avoid the associated higher costs, which would have been a challenge for the UN under the current budget constraints. Moreover, an expanded mandate with the required resources allocated would have allowed certain parties to dodge their responsibilities further, as the UN would be taking care of them.

3. Readjustment to a counter-terrorism mission

Although this is a less likely and more a problematic option, it is clearly the preferred option of the Malian Government, many Malian stakeholders, particularly in Bamako, and key regional players. Currently, MINUSMA is only meant to provide logistical support to the JF-G5S, but the military counter-terrorism efforts of JF-G5S on the Malian side of the border could be integrated into MINUSMA. In fact, the Malian Government and ECOWAS initially hoped that, upon deployment, MINUSMA would continue the counter-terrorism role of AFISMA.

Since MINUSMA as a whole is unlikely to receive such a counter-terrorism mandate, the JF-G5S could be deployed as an FIB comparable to that of MONUSCO, as was originally foreseen by ECOWAS. Alternatively, a model could be envisioned, like AMISOM and the UN Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), in which MINUSMA is replaced by a regional counter-terrorism force that is supported by UN logistics. The benefits of both models are that the military counter-terrorism strategy would be better integrated into the international approach for the region and it would be better resourced, more accountable in terms of human rights obligations, and more legitimate as it would be part of the UN system, among other benefits. Three major disadvantages

are that the JFG5S in Mali is essentially the FAMA, which is not yet reconstituted; the UN system is currently unfit for counter-terrorism; and Mali's problem is mainly a breakdown of its social contract, which cannot be solved militarily.

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This report assesses the extent to which the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is achieving its current strategic objectives, and the impact the Mission has had on the political and security situation in Mali.

Until 2016 MINUSMA managed to strengthen stability in northern Mali, decreasing the number of civilians killed in the conflict, and allowing large numbers of displaced persons to return home. MINUSMA also assisted the peace process, culminating in the 2015 Algiers Agreement. Many of these achievements are still standing. However, since 2016 MINUSMA's effectiveness in terms of stabilisation and the protection of civilians has decreased. In the North, the signatory parties have been making slow progress in the implementation of the Algiers Agreement and the 2018 Pact for Peace. In addition, central Mali has destabilised significantly, as Jihadist activities have stoked a vicious cycle of inter-communal violence that has reached unprecedented levels. MINUSMA has only been mandated to help the Malian government address the situation since June 2018.

As one of the largest multidimensional peacekeeping operations – currently including nearly 13,000 soldiers and 1,800 police officers from 57 contributing countries, and almost 750 civilians – MINUSMA has been provided with significant resources and an extraordinarily ambitious mandate. However, the Mission finds itself at a crossroads. It needs time to succeed, but this is valuable time Mali does not have. Civilians have come under increasing attack, and the US, in particular, is losing interest in supporting a costly UN peace operation that is not able to deliver quick results.

This report considers the degree to which there is an alignment between the mission's resources and its mandate. It also makes an assessment of the options available to the Mission to increase its effectiveness in the face of extremely challenging circumstances.