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Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network

MINUSMA's 2021

Mandate Renewal

in uncertain times

Arthur Boutellis

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MINUSMA's 2021 mandate renewal in uncertain times

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Executive summary

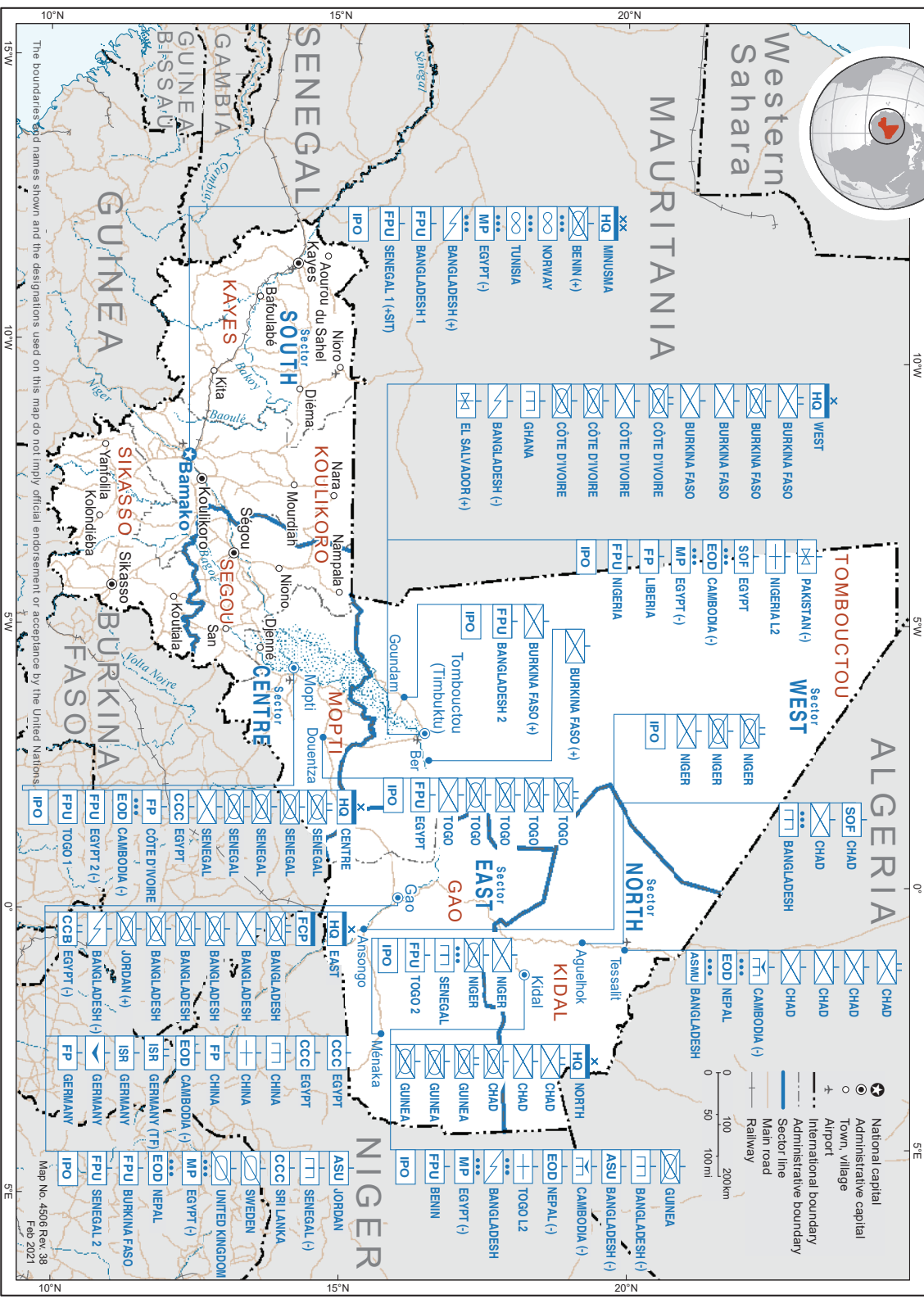
The Security Council will renew the mandate of the 8-year-old United Nations Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in June 2021 at a time of multiple transitions: on the Malian side with the Transition government due to end in February 2022, and on the mission side with a new SRSG. It also comes at a time of great uncertainties over the future of the peace process and political transition, but also over the future of the French regional military operations Barkhane and the Joint Force G5 Sahel. The overall security situation has deteriorated in Mali and beyond in the Sahel since 2013. Yet, Northern Mali enjoys a semblance of stability as the two rival coalitions of signatory armed groups found a *modus vivendi*. But progress in the implementation of the peace agreement is slow, state presence minimal, and attacks on a more resilient MINUSMA continue. Although violence has decreased in Central Mali since September 2020 largely due to the brokering of local agreements of different sorts, insecurity continues to spread further to the South of Mali.

There seems to be a general consensus that the two strategic priorities of the MINUSMA mandate should remain to support the implementation of the Algiers Agreement by the Malian parties and to facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive politically led Malian strategy to protect civilians and re-establish State authority in Central Mali. The main issues for discussion will be how to carry out these priorities more effectively and how to best add to the mandate elements pertaining to supporting the Malian Transition without diverting limited resources away from the first two strategic priorities. Beyond the strategic priorities, issues of human rights and accountability, people-centered approaches, strategic communication, women's participation, and climate-related security risks are also discussed in this report. Many of the challenges the mission is facing will however not be resolved by an adjusted mandate alone; but a clearer strategic direction from MINUSMA's leadership strongly backed by a unified Security Council can certainly help.

MINUSMA

FEBRUARY 2021

UNITED NATIONS
Geospatial



Map No. 4506 Rev. 38
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Introduction

The Security Council will renew the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in June 2021 for the 8th time. When it does, it will be in the context of many uncertainties in Mali, including over the future of the peace process following the assassination of Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) leader Sidi Brahim Ould Sidati in Bamako on 13 April, and the 18-month national political transition that followed the 18 August 2020 military coup and three months of protests, despite the recent announcement that presidential elections will be held on 27 February 2022.¹ In terms of international and regional support, there is also uncertainty over the future of the French regional military operations *Barkhane* – after president Macron called for a ‘civilian surge’² – and the Joint Force G5 Sahel (JF-G5S) – following the death of Chadian president Idriss Déby Itno. Meanwhile, Mali is experiencing a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, already responsible for the deaths among others of African Union’s special envoy to Mali and the Sahel Pierre Buyoya and Mali’s opposition leader Soumaïla Cissé in December 2020.

This report follows the general methodological framework developed by the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), but with a particular focus on the upcoming June 2021 MINUSMA mandate renewal. The EPON consultant, Arthur Boutellis, conducted 60 interviews with MINUSMA and other international and Malian officials, civil society representatives, and researchers in Mali, including a short visit to Mopti, during the second half of April 2021;

1 Mali to hold elections next February following post-coup transition. (15 April 2021), *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mali-hold-elections-next-february-following-post-coup-transition-2021-04-15/>

2 G5-Sahel summit looks at the future of French-led Operation Barkhane (2021, February 15), *RFI*. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20210215-g5-sahel-summit-looks-at-the-future-of-french-led-operation-barkhane-mali-chad-niger-burkina-faso-mauritania-jihadist-attacks-united-nations>

and conducted literature and document research. As highlighted in the 2019 EPON report³, MINUSMA continues to be the subject of misunderstandings and criticism from Malians and the region alike for not doing enough to ‘fight terrorism’, and often serves as the scapegoat for shortcomings from national actors themselves. However, consensus remains that in the absence of MINUSMA the security situation would likely further deteriorate.

The overall security situation has deteriorated in Mali and beyond Mali in the Sahel since 2013.

The overall security situation has deteriorated in Mali and beyond Mali in the Sahel since 2013. Yet, Northern Mali enjoys a semblance of stability as the two rival coalitions of signatory armed groups seem to have found a modus vivendi. Despite a highly symbolic first ever meeting of the Algiers Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA) held in Kidal on 11 February,⁴ the northern region still has very limited state presence, and periodic complex attacks against peacekeepers continue even though MINUSMA has become more resilient. On 2 April, Chadian peacekeepers successfully repelled an attack against a MINUSMA base in Aguelhok, Kidal region.⁵ Although Central Mali has experienced a decrease in violence since September 2020 largely due to the brokering of a number of local agreements of different sorts, insecurity continues to spread further to the South of Mali not only to the Segou region but also further South in Sikasso Region at the border with Côte d’Ivoire, the latter having experienced its first improvised explosive device (IED) attacks in the first quarter of 2021.⁶

3 van der Lijn, J., et al. (2019). *Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)*, The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Networks <https://effectivepeaceops.net/publication/minusma/>

4 Mali: l’ONU se félicite de la tenue d’une réunion du Comité de suivi (2021, February 17), *ONU Info* <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2021/02/1089372>

5 Four peacekeepers killed in complex attack on UN base in Mali (2021, April 7) *UN News*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/04/1088982>

6 Maintaining Peace and Stability in Mali’s Sikasso Region (2020) *International Alert*. https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Mali_MaintainingPeaceAndStability_EN_2020.pdf

1. Brief history of MINUSMA

MINUSMA has already gone through three major phases since it was first established on 1 July 2013 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter by UN Security Council Resolution 2100 (2013) with a troop ceiling of just above 11,000 military personnel. During the first phase (July 2013 to June 2015), the UN mission supported the organization of the 2013 elections that led to the restoration of the Constitutional order (following the March 2012 military coup) and assisted the peace process that led to the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, also known as the Algiers Agreement.

The second phase (July 2015 to June 2018) was characterized by the mission's support to the implementation of the Algiers Agreement in addition to supporting the extension of state authority. The agreement provided the mission with a clearer political framework, captured in Resolution 2295 (2016), which also gave MINUSMA a 'more proactive and robust' mandate and increased its troop ceiling to approximately 13,000 military personnel. During this second phase, the Security Council also established a parallel Mali sanction regime in 2017, and through resolution 2391 (2017), opened the way for MINUSMA to provide 'operational and logistical support' to the JF-G5S contingents, to enhance their ability to conduct cross-border counterterrorist operations across the region.⁷

The third phase of the mission (June 2018-current) was marked by a shift of attention towards Central Mali in response to the deteriorating security situation; however, the Council maintained the same troop ceiling and the mission's primary strategic priority to support the

⁷ UN (2017) *Security Council Outlines Modes of Support, Reimbursement for Joint Anti-Terrorism Force in Sabel, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2391*. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13112.doc.htm>

implementation of the Algiers Agreement. Resolution 2480 (2019) added a second strategic priority to MINUSMA's mandate to 'facilitate 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.' The Council also requested the mission 'to develop a long-term conditions-based transition approach to ensure a phased, coordinated and deliberate transition of security responsibilities' to the UN Country Team and the government, which the mission did in January 2020.

The resolution also requested the Secretary-General to produce a long-term roadmap with benchmarks that would lead to a possible exit strategy for MINUSMA.

Resolution 2531 (2020) updated the 'priority measures' for the Malian parties to fulfil, including 1) DDR and integration into reconstituted inclusive MDSF units (at least another 2,000 members of the signatory armed groups); 2) ensuring the completion of the constitutional reform in accordance with the conclusions of the national inclusive dialogue, and of institutional reforms envisioned by the Agreement; 3) operationalizing the Northern Development Zone; and 4) implementing the recommendations of the high-level workshop on participation of women in the mechanisms established by the Algiers Agreement, as well as an observatory led by women. The resolution also requested the Secretary-General to produce a long-term roadmap with benchmarks⁸ that would lead to a possible exit strategy for MINUSMA without putting the stability of Mali and the region in jeopardy, effectively initiating discussions on mission transition and exit but without any specific timetable.⁹ The document submitted to the Council on 25 March 2021¹⁰ sets out benchmarks and sectorial priorities to be achieved by the end of the political transition in 2022, which makes up the first phase of the road map.

Following the 18 August 2020 military coup, the Security Council issued a presidential statement (PRST/2020/10) calling on the Malian transitional authorities to 'take ownership' of the Algiers Agreement and 'to take expedited action to protect civilians, reduce intercommunal violence, and restore peaceful relations between communities in central Mali'; and requested

8 'A set of realistic, relevant and clearly measurable benchmarks and conditions, including, among others, progress in the implementation of the Agreement, the redeployment of the reformed and reconstituted MDSF across the territory of Mali, the full operationalization of the FC-G5S and the implementation of MINUSMA's adaptation plan, to ensure a phased, coordinated and deliberate transition of security responsibilities opening the way for a possible exit strategy for the mission, when the conditions are met, without jeopardizing the stability of Mali and its region, to be presented in its entirety to the Security Council by 31 March 2021' UN (2020) S/RES/2531. New York: United Nations: Paragraph 64.

9 UN (2020) *Security Council Renews Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2531*. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14235.doc.htm>

10 The roadmap outlines key objectives to be achieved during the current political transition in Mali, and major remaining challenges to be addressed thereafter to allow MINUSMA to begin planning for a transition of security responsibilities and the progressive transfer of mandated responsibilities to the country team and national stakeholders; a third phase is also envisaged for the road map, which will be developed at a later stage and will consist of an exit strategy. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2021_300.pdf

MINUSMA, 'within its mandate and existing resources, to support the political transition in Mali.'

El-Ghassim Wane of Mauritania arrived in Bamako on 5 May 2021, succeeding Mahamat Saleh Annadif of Chad who had led MINUSMA since December 2015. Mr. Wane started his career with the African Union (AU) and rose in seniority to director of peace and security and later chief of staff. He also served as UN assistant secretary-general for peacekeeping operations between 2016 and 2017. Subsequently he led strategic reviews of various UN peacekeeping operations, including a confidential internal UN review in 2020 of peacekeeping responses in four critical missions, making him keenly aware of the complex strategic and operational challenges contemporary peacekeeping faces. Alain Noudéhou was also just announced as the new Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC).

2. Assessing the effectiveness of MINUSMA since 2019

2.1. Supporting the Peace Process

At the beginning of 2021, expectations had been raised that the transition government may have given a new momentum to the peace. A number of members of armed movements signatory to the Algiers Agreement were appointed in the current Malian transition government in October 2020 – both as government ministers and members of the National Transitional Council (CNT in French) – who have also been some of its most active members.¹¹ And on 11 February 2021, the Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA in French) met at ministerial level (the fifth time since 2015) for the first time ever in the Kidal *Coordination of Azawad Movements* (CMA in French) stronghold in northern Mali. A new timetable for implementing provisions of the agreement over coming months was adopted, and the number of women representatives at the CSA increased from 9 to 12 (to include women in its four subcommittees).¹² Around the same

11 Diallo, A. (2020, December 4). Mali : qui sont les membres du Conseil national de transition? *JeuneAfrique.com*. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1085990/politique/mali-qui-sont-les-membres-du-conseil-national-de-transition/>

12 This builds on the earlier achievement of the January 2020 high-level workshop on the inclusion of women in the implementation of the peace agreement (a benchmark of resolution 2480 (2019)) of getting the parties to include 9 women (3 for each of the 3 parties: government, CMA and *Plateforme*) representatives in the CSA. The government of Norway provided financial support via the MINUSMA Trust Fund for the participation of these women at the CSA for at least 24 months, while UN Women, MINUSMA, and the Folke Bernadotte Academy jointly provide capacity-building in collaboration with the Malian Government for the women newly appointed to the CSA.

time in Bamako, a high-level meeting of the parties focused on defense and security issues and the issue of integration quotas.¹³

Signatory armed movements – CMA and *Plateforme* – despite various new splits and shifts in alliances, seem to have found a *modus vivendi*, have not disarmed and go about their affairs largely unchallenged in northern Mali.

However, and despite the holding of another CSA meeting on 29 March, this time in Kaye in Western Mali, the implementation of the peace agreement – almost six years after its signing – remains extremely slow. The transition government’s focus inevitably shifts back on Bamako politics and the two coalitions of signatory armed movements – CMA and *Plateforme* – despite various new splits and shifts in alliances, seem to have found a *modus vivendi* – notably through the parallel Anéfis process¹⁴ and the latest Cadre Stratégique Permanent (CSP) signed in Rome early May 2021 – have not disarmed and go about their affairs largely unchallenged in northern Mali. The lines between signatory armed groups and other armed groups with criminal and/or extremist agendas remain blurred despite repeated Council demands that the former ‘cut off all ties to terrorist organizations, notably Al-Qaida in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and associated groups, and take concrete and visible steps to this effect’¹⁵ and the addition of the sanctions regime in 2017.

The 2017 decision of the Technical Security Commission (CTS) that signatory armed groups were to stop patrolling with heavy weapons (all weapons except individual personal weapon, rifle or pistol) and had to get prior authorization from MINUSMA for convoys of more than five vehicles (with markings and flags of their respective group), has never been properly monitored or enforced. The CTS, which is chaired by the MINUSMA Force Commander, met on 20 May 2021 after months without meeting apparently due to *per diem* issues.

The assassination of CMA leader Sidi Brahim Ould Sidati in Bamako on 13 April 2021, for which the motives remain unclear, also raises serious concerns about the future of the peace process. Despite being an (MAA) Arab leader in a Tuareg dominated CMA coalition, Ould Sidati had become a central figure: he signed the Algiers Agreement on behalf of the CMA and was seen as a moderate figure capable of constructive compromise; based in Bamako, he had managed to create stronger ties to the Malian elite, including the latest transition government

13 Réunion de haut niveau autour de l’Accord pour la paix et la réconciliation : La défense et la sécurité au cœur de la rencontre Bamako Mali (2021, February 10) *Malijet* https://malijet.com/actualite/dans_les_regions_du_mali/252702-reunion_haut_niveau_autour_accord_pour_paix_.html

14 Boutellis, A., Mechoulan, D. and Zahar, M-J. (2020) *Parallel Tracks or Connected Pieces? UN Peace Operations, Lessons Learnt and Peace Processes*. International Peace Institute <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/12/parallel-tracks-or-connected-pieces-un-peace-operations-local-mediation-and-peace-processes>

15 UN (2012) *S/RES/2085*, 20 December. New York: United Nations: paragraph 2.

which he apparently engaged early to secure representation in. The CMA quickly appointed a more junior Tuareg as its representative in Bamako whereas the MAA appointed Mohamed Ould Ouweinat to replace him as of the head of the Arab movement.

Short of a more forceful and concerted role by the Algeria-led international mediation to focus the parties' attention on key priorities and hold them accountable, meaningful progress is unlikely.

In its December 2020 report, the *Independent Observer* noted that the implementation of core provisions of the peace agreement lagged behind, notably the decentralization of state institutions and increased representation of the northern population in national institutions; the integration of combatants from the signatory armed groups into the reconstituted national army and its effective redeployment, creation of a territorial police, and DDR process; the creation of the Northern Development Zone and concrete economic development projects in the northern regions; and justice reform and transitional justice with a view to enhance national reconciliation.¹⁶

The Constitutional reform presents a unique opportunity to consolidate trust between the parties and 'lock in' some of these core political-institutional provisions from the Algiers Agreement

Some of the same old issues such as the lack of genuine consultations between the government and the signatory armed movements between the regular CSA meetings, and the absence of a national operational organ for following up on decisions, continue to hamper implementation and the trust between the parties despite the recent appointment of Inhayé Ag Mohamed as the new high representative of the president of the Transition for the implementation of the peace agreement. Short of a more forceful and concerted role by the Algeria-led international mediation – as already envisaged in the 'Pact for Peace' signed by the Malian government on 15 October 2018¹⁷ – to focus the parties' attention on key priorities and hold them accountable, meaningful progress is unlikely. Although MINUSMA has made extensive use of its good offices in support of the peace process, it is still too often put in the position of service

16 The Carter Center, *Report of the Independent Observer – Observations on the Implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, Resulting from the Algiers Process*, December 2020.

17 The Pact for Peace provides for international mediation efforts to make binding decisions in case of divergences between the parties, in conformity with article 52 of the Algiers Agreement.

provider and could probably do more in terms of rallying the international community (and its representatives based in Bamako) to keep the pressure on the parties.

The Constitutional reform presents a unique opportunity to consolidate trust between the parties and ‘lock in’ some of these core political-institutional provisions from the Algiers Agreement into the future Malian Constitution, without it being seen as ‘giving in’ to northerners (as many of these provisions would also benefit Southern Mali regions). This would also make it easier for the future elected government to move forward on these measures thereafter.

2.2. Supporting PoC and the re-establishment of state authority in Central Mali

In response to the Security Council adding a second strategic priority for Central Mali while keeping the same troop ceiling and overall budget, MINUSMA has developed an Adaptation Plan for both its Force and its civilian components. The challenge is that conflict dynamics in Central Mali (now encompassing five regions with Bandiagara, Douentza, and San having been recently created in addition to Mopti and Segou) are not addressed in the Algiers Agreement and are extremely complex, with extremist groups exploiting local disputes between (farming and herding) and within communities and feelings of marginalization. Community-based armed groups and militias have proliferated as a result; the *Dan Na Ambassagou* Dogon militia remaining an important actor despite having been officially dissolved by the previous government.

The implementation of a Protection of Civilians (PoC) mandate in a context of violent extremism where the UN mission itself is the target of attacks poses its own set of unique challenges and dilemmas.¹⁸ The creation of a new military ‘Sector Center’ in June 2019 means that some MINUSMA military capabilities are now dedicated to that Central Mali region and are better able to respond to mission priorities there. Yet, these military capabilities remain very limited for a very large region where movements by roads are restricted due to the IED threat and during the rainy season as well as during contingent rotations every 6 months to which a mandatory COVID 14-day quarantine has been added.

Despite progress with early warning in part thanks to MINUSMA’s Early Warning and Rapid Response standard operating procedure (SOP) and community liaison assistants (CLAs), rapid reaction remains challenging. Due to camp protection requirements, only two infantry companies from Senegal based in Mopti and two infantry companies from Togo based in Douentza are effectively able to carry out the protection mandate of MINUSMA (and can’t

18 Namie Di Razza (2018) *Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism: The Dilemmas of UN Peacekeeping in Mali*. International Peace Institute <https://www.ipinst.org/2018/10/protecting-civilians-in-the-context-of-violent-extremism-the-dilemmas-of-un-peacekeeping-in-mali>

move below company size). Only one company from each of these battalions can set up a Temporary Operating Base (TOB) at a time (and there has always been at least one TOB deployed at all times since January 2019), and their reaction ability is then limited to the second company stationed at the main base.¹⁹ During *Operation Mangoose* in June 2020, Egyptian special forces and Pakistani Military Utility Helicopter were temporarily redeployed from Sector West (Timbuktu) to Sector Center. The El Salvador light military attack helicopter based in Timbuktu is also stationed part time in Mopti to support the Sector.

For the Adaptation Plan to be effective, it will also require the right mindset from contingents.

The military Adaptation Plan is meant to be a game changer by rendering peacekeepers more mobile and flexible with additional air mobility and surveillance (ISR) assets as well as quick reaction capabilities. However, it also requires sending some infantry home to make space for these new units under the same troop ceiling. The Adaptation Plan is aimed at ensuring that the peacekeeping force can operate safely and effectively in an asymmetric threat environment like Mali. Extensions to the UN camps in Mopti/Sevare and Gao are currently being built (thanks to additional budget made available to MINUSMA) to accommodate new units currently being generated following a May 2020 Force Generation Conference (including a level 2 hospital, military helicopters, force protection and quick reaction forces; as well as additional Unmanned Aircraft Systems to be based in Timbuktu).

But for the Adaptation Plan to be effective, it will also require the right mindset from contingents. For example, the Europeans (UK, Sweden and Germany) composing the Mobile Task Force (MTF) based in Gao, currently limit their mobility to a 50km range around the city of Gao (in Sector East) and temporarily into other sectors for operations (Center, West and North) in part due to their persisting lack of trust in the UN military medical evacuation systems' ability to meet the 10-1-2 rule²⁰ despite progress made by the mission.²¹ An additional challenge to implementing the Adaptation Plan is the need for more agile mission support logistics, which unfortunately can at times be hindered by UN procurement and related rules and regulations set by the General Assembly despite efforts by mission support.

On the civilian side, the Mopti regional office managed to increase its civilian staffing by 10 percent compared to pre-2018 levels but needs remain great. This raises the question of whether some of the MINUSMA civilian and UN Police resources in Bamako and other regions where

19 TOBs also remain particularly exposed to attacks in certain areas as demonstrated again with the 10 February 2021 suicide attack on the Kéréna TOB in the Douentza region which injured 28 Togolese soldiers (one later died) and forced the mission to abort the larger operation.

20 First aid within ten minutes, advanced resuscitation within one hour and surgery within two hours of wounding.

21 Boutellis, A., & Beary, M. (2020) *Sharing the Burden: Lessons from the European Return to Multidimensional Peacekeeping*. International Peace Institute https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/European-Canadian_Final.pdf

Malian state counterparts are not present could be shifted towards the Center, at least temporarily as part of mobile teams. The mission, which has few staff vacancies, is envisaging a staffing review and the UN Police initiated its own adaptation plan to look into these issues and to consider its options.

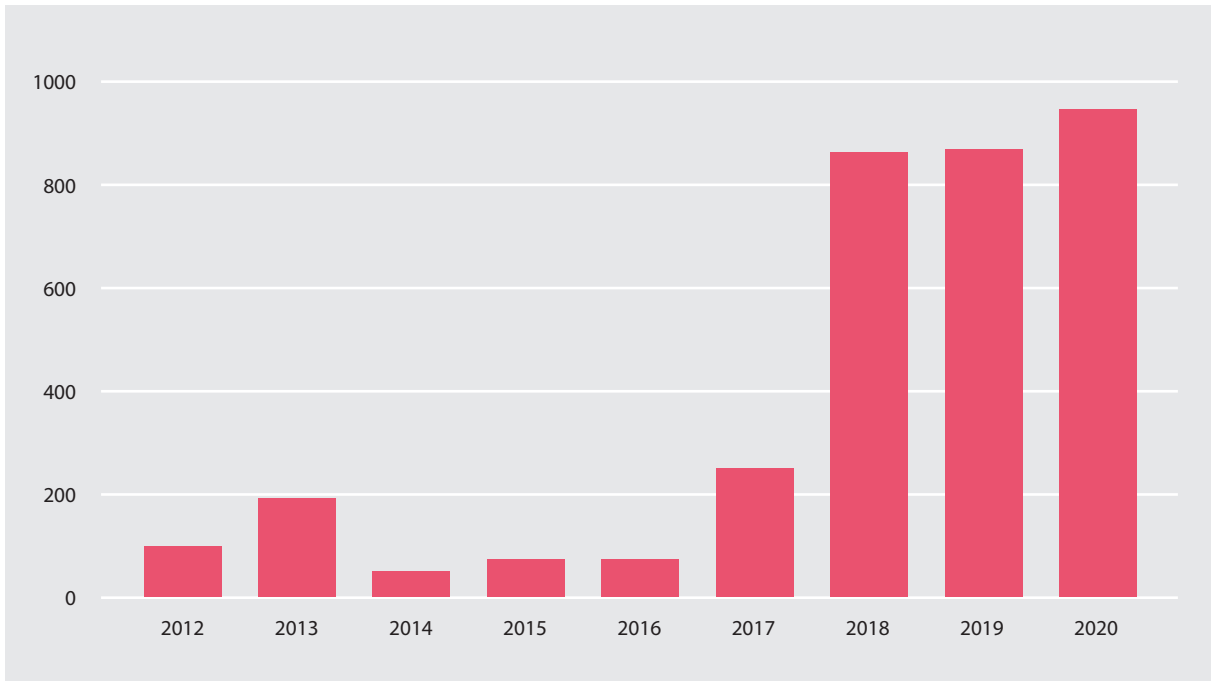
The challenge for the mission is to do more in the Center without forgetting about the other regions, and to apply differentiated approaches by region while maintaining overall coherence.

One particular challenge has been the lack of coordination officers in regional offices to support the heads of offices in coordinating the many civilian sections and improve joint planning and coordination with the UN police and Force at sector level. Indeed, while much of the MINUSMA Force planning is done in a centralized manner at Force Headquarters in Bamako, it is essential that coordination between the different mission components happens at the level of the regional offices where needs are better understood. The mission has an Integrated Action Plan for the Center and integrated planning process with the UN Country Team (nicknamed “One UN”) and some of the more recent operations such as *Operation Buffalo Dry* – providing for the deployment of a TOB enabling civilian components to carry out their work – seem to be the way forward for more integrated actions. The challenge for the mission is to do more in the Center without forgetting about the other regions, and to apply differentiated approaches by region (most notably to the reestablishment of the state authority) while maintaining overall coherence.

The good news in Central Mali is that violence has reduced significantly since last Fall 2020 and markets have reopened in some localities, allowing the resumption of trade between communities. This is in great part due to local peace deals (the mission registered no less than 36 of these since 2019).²² Some of these were concluded with the support of MINUSMA and international NGOs; a recent one with support from the *Haut Conseil Islamique du Mali* (in March in Niono circle, Segou region, including the lifting of the ‘siege’ of Farabougou) apparently with a mandate from the Ministry of National Reconciliation. Others seem to have been imposed by extremist groups, the latter generally excluding state return, and in its place introducing their versions of Islamic justice and education, which presents serious human rights – including women’s rights – concerns.

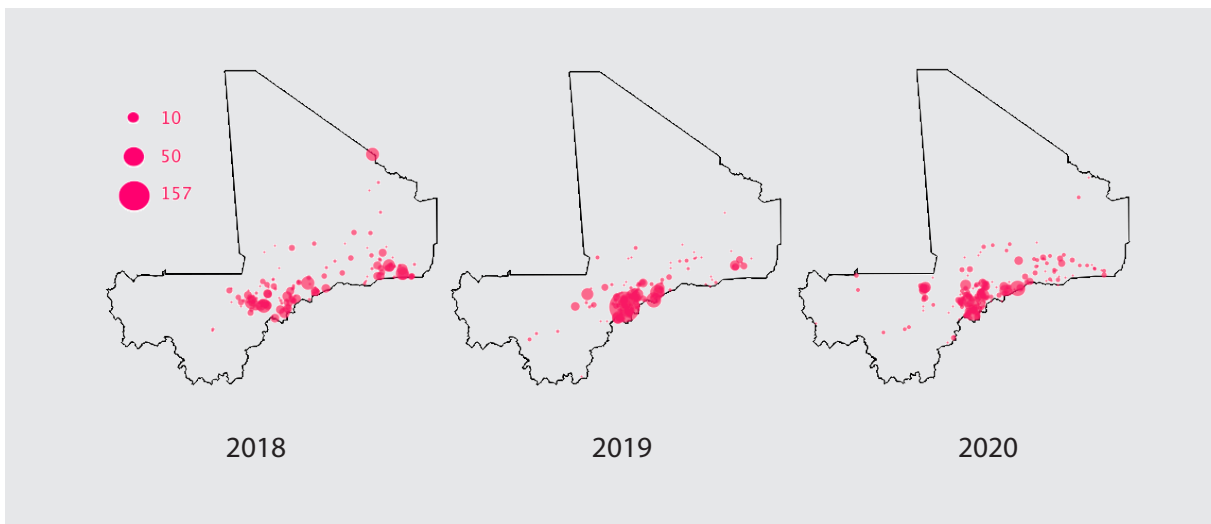
22 These local deals generally include a cessation of hostilities, forgiveness/pardon for past actions, and the return of displaced populations.

Figure 1: Mali civilian annual fatalities



Data Provider: ACLED (anti-civilian violence dataset) / Visualisation: J. Luengo-Cabrera

Figure 2: Mali civilian fatalities by location



Data Provider: ACLED (anti-civilian violence dataset) / Visualisation: J. Luengo-Cabrera

While the MINUSMA-supported agreements are generally the result of longer mediation processes (seven months in the case of Dounapen in Koro in 2020 thanks to a TOB which made the work of civilian sections possible²³) and involve the state (Regional Support Team

23 Seán Smith, “Early Warning and Rapid Response: Reinforcing MINUSMA’s Ability to Protect Civilians”, *Center for Civilians in Conflict*, April 2021 https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CIVIC_Peacekeeping_EWRR_Report_EN_BAT_web.pdf

for National Reconciliation or *Equipe d'Appui a la Reconciliation ERAR* in French), their main added-value seems to be the peace dividends they bring in the form of quick impact projects. The mission observed that humanitarian and development projects played a pivotal role in bolstering reconciliation efforts and strengthening social cohesion, but also play a prevention role as extremist groups tend to target communities where they can exploit pre-existing divisions rather than villages with strong social cohesion.

Many observers however see these local deals as being primarily the result of communities being tired of the violence and displacements, and caution that they are fragile. While these local peace deals may limit the ability of extremist groups to exploit local disputes and tensions, these groups continue to move around the areas and to exert pressure on local populations. The Malian state accompaniment of these local deals is therefore crucial, including through projects and social services. The return of state administration and Malian Defense and Security Forces (MDSF) will likely take more time and need to be gradual since many communities do not welcome them and fear their return would worsen the situation again.

Preventing recruitments and/or radicalization of youth by armed groups and militias through livelihood projects is also crucial. MINUSMA itself funded around 200 projects in total since 2014 in Central Mali,²⁴ but will only achieve so much in the absence of a genuine national political strategy that can address deep-rooted issues of access to land and water (including transhumance corridors) exacerbated by changing climate patterns.²⁵

The major challenge remains the lack of clear national vision for the Center, compounded with limited national capacities outside of Bamako.

The major challenge remains the lack of clear national vision for the Center, compounded with limited national capacities outside of Bamako and the lack of effective structures to coordinate the government's actions at the regional level. This despite the creation of the *Cadre Politique de Gestion de la crise* in June 2019 with two regional committees in Mopti and Segou, and the elaboration of a *Strategie de stabilisation du Centre du Mali* by the Permanent Secretariat led by Ambassador Boubacar Gaoussou Diarra who passed away on 23 April. A high representative for the Center had also been named in August 2019 but his role remains unclear. The current transition government indicated its intention to enter into dialogue with 'radical Malian groups'

24 These include Quick Impact Project (QIPs); Community Violence Reduction (CVR) projects implemented by the DDR section representing 12 projects per year in Central Mali out of 30 annually in Mali; and projects funded by various donors through the MINUSMA Trust Fund.

25 NUPI & SIPRI (May 2021) *Climate Peace and Security Fact Sheet: Mali* https://www.nupi.no/nupi_eng/About-NUPI/Projects-centers/Climate-related-Peace-and-Security-Risks

and to dissolve 'all militias' but observers suggest that despite a high profile transition government visit to the Center in late March, the latter's attention is not sustained.

2.3. Supporting the 18-month Malian political transition

Since the 18 August 2020 military coup that followed three months of protests led by a coalition of opposition parties and civil society groups, international partners – notably the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the AU and the UN through MINUSMA – have worked relatively cohesively through the *Groupe de Soutien*²⁶ to ensure a peaceful transition and the establishment of the institutions of the transition, including a Transition Government formed in early October 2020 and a 121 members National Transition Council (CNT in French) appointed as the 'parliament' of the Transition.

Eight months into the transition period however, relatively little has been achieved besides an action plan (PAG) and roadmap of the Transitional Government that was adopted by the CNT on 22 February. On 14 April 2021, the government finally announced the electoral calendar. While it formally complies with the 18 months transition period, many observers question whether it will be feasible to hold the Constitutional referendum on 31 October (and to promulgate the new Constitution on 14 January 2022) followed by presidential and legislative elections on 27 February 2022 and worry that the temptation will be to let the dates slide.

Eight months into the transition period however, relatively little has been achieved.

Beyond the legal aspects related to the electoral college, there are practical questions regarding the financing and securing of the electoral process in localities not under government control, that remain unanswered as of now. This calendar has already been criticized by the *Mouvement du 5 juin – Rassemblement des forces patriotiques* (M5-RFP) for the lack of prior consultations with political parties and civil society. It is also important to recall that former president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) was deposed following protests related to disputed (parliamentary) elections held in the Spring of 2020. The 2022 elections should not create another crisis on top of the current one.

Inclusivity will also be a major challenge for the *Comite d'Orientation Strategiques* (COS) of the transition created on 31 March president Bah N'daw as a 'consultative body' tasked to advise on and guide the implementation of the political and institutional reforms that the prime minister

26 Created by the Africa Union Peace and Security Council, the *Groupe de Soutien* composed of the AU, ECOWAS, MINUSMA, as well as neighboring countries, held a first meeting on 30 November 2020 in Bamako; and a second one on 9 March 2021 in Lomé, Togo.

will carry out between now and the end of the transition period. While the COS includes 50 personalities from political parties, civil society, signatory armed movements, trade unions, academia, women, youth and religious and traditional authorities, many among the Malian political class and civil society continue to denounce the lack of consultations and seem to lack confidence in the ability of the Transition Government to carry out such reforms. The social climate also continues to be tense and civil administrators, teachers, transporters, and medical personnel have all gone on strike recently; the M5-RFP also envisages to resume protests after the end of Ramadan in May.

MINUSMA's support to the Transition will in any case need to be accompanied by solid risk management as elections get closer.

More concerning possibly has been the control by the military junta of the Transition Government, with several high-ranking military officials including three leaders of the coup, a large number of seats given to military officials in the CNT, and the nominations of 13 security officials among 17 regional governors this past November. Although members of the Transition Government are not allowed to run in the upcoming elections, the vice-president Colonel Assimi Goïta is suspected by some of having presidential ambitions when no obvious candidate has yet emerged from the old Malian political class after the death of opposition leader Soumaïla Cissé in December. Prime Minister Moctar Ouane resigned on 14 May 2021 but was immediately reappointed in order to carry out a government reshuffle and to form a new "broad-based" cabinet, amid growing criticism of the army-dominated authorities.²⁷ MINUSMA's support to the Transition will in any case need to be accompanied by solid risk management as elections get closer.

Women's representation in the government has decreased since the coup, with only four women among the 25 members Transition Government (16 percent), and 32 women among its 121 members CNT, short of meeting the 30 percent minimum quota for women's representation set by the national law 052 adopted in 2015. Only one of the newly appointed regional governors is a woman, and among regional interim authorities, the representation stands at only 1.4 percent. Although incidents of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) have increased lately, the consultation process on the draft law on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) was suspended in January 2021 after the objection of the *Haut Conseil Islamique du Mali*, which had already successfully opposed the adoption of a new Family Code in 2011.²⁸

27 Mali's interim prime minister to form new government. (2021, May 14), *France24* <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210514-mali-s-interim-prime-minister-moctar-ouane-to-form-new-government>

28 Mali Loi anti VBG : battue en brèche (2021, January 14) *Journal du Mali* <https://www.journaldumali.com/2021/01/14/mali-loi-anti-vbg-battue-breche/>

A further concern has been the continued lack of accountability in Mali despite it being listed as a priority in the Transition Government roadmap. One of the first decisions of the Transition Government in October 2020 was to release some 200 'presumed terrorists' in exchange for the release of four hostages, including opposition politician Soumaïla Cissé, held captive by an al-Qaida-affiliated group in northern Mali.²⁹ In March, a Malian court ended the trial of 2012 coup leader Amadou Sanogo citing a 2019 reconciliation law.³⁰ No one has yet been prosecuted for the 23 March 2019 massacre of at least 160 civilians in Bankass Circle³¹, and many other attacks committed since have not led to effective sentencing, including attacks on peacekeepers. The same goes for abuses allegedly committed by MDSF during last year's coup³² and in recent operations in Central Mali.³³ These killings and abuses are rarely investigated and seldom lead to prosecutions, with the notable exception of 10 prosecution orders under the Code of Military Justice issues earlier this year.³⁴ Figures from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) also indicate that security forces caused more civilian fatalities in Mali in 2020 than violent extremist groups or communal violence.³⁵

The relationship between MINUSMA and the other national and international partners operating in Mali has always been, and remains subject to, various interpretations within and outside the mission.

2.4. The relationship between MINUSMA and other forces

While there is a general recognition of the complementarity between the different forces operating in Mali and of the importance of international actors no substituting for MDSF, the issue of the relationship between MINUSMA and the other national and international partners

29 Release of hostages in Mali a "victory" for transition government (2020, October 9), *RFI*. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20201009-release-of-hostages-in-mali-a-victory-for-transition-government-islam-ciss%C3%A9-sophie-p%C3%A9tronin-jihadists-al-qaeda>

30 Mali court ends trial of former coup leader Sanogo (2021, March 15) *AfricaNews* <https://www.africanews.com/2021/03/15/mali-court-ends-trial-of-former-coup-leader-sanogo/>

31 International Federation for Human Rights (2019) Central Mali: Perpetrators of Ogassagou massacre should be arrested and sentenced to stop the spiral of violence <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/mali/central-mali-perpetrators-of-ogassagou-massacre-should-be-arrested>

32 Amnesty International (2021) *Mali. Un an après, toujours pas de justice pour les victimes des manifestations et du coup d'État*. <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2021/04/mali-justice-still-needs-to-be-done-for-victims-of-protests-and-coup/?fbclid=IwAR3z4g4U-NbBxFRv8MMXloyB6vH1dt-8WVdcDTSY3r3iwtVFMZ5MHMS> Es

33 Human Rights Watch (2021) *Mali: Killings, 'Disappearances' in Military Operations* <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/20/mali-killings-disappearances-military-operations>

34 UN (2021) S/2020/299. *Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General*. New York: United Nations: paragraph 61.

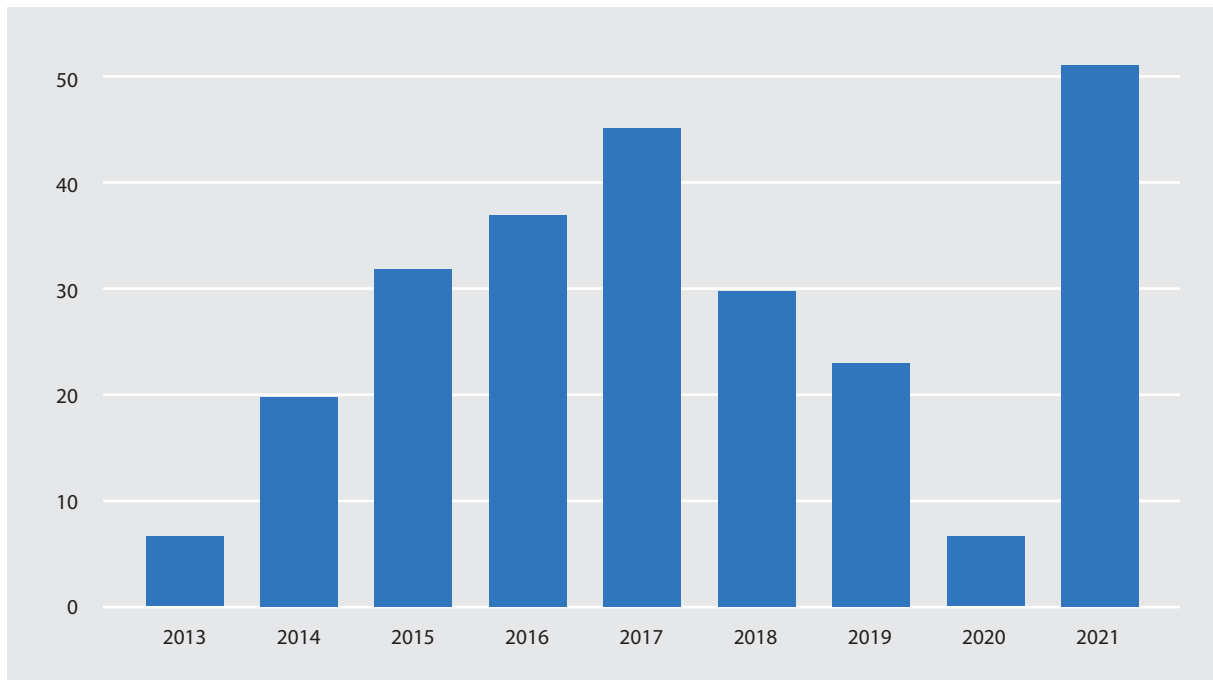
35 Moderan, O., Bako, H., Handy P-S., *Sabel counter-terrorism takes a heavy toll on civilians*, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) 14 April 2021.

operating in Mali has always been, and remains subject to, various interpretations within and outside the mission, which in turn affects the mission’s credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness.

The Council has requested ‘the Secretary-General to ensure adequate coordination, exchange of information and, when applicable, support, within their respective mandates and through existing mechanisms, between MINUSMA, the MDSF, the JF-G5S, the French Forces and the European Union missions in Mali, and further requests MINUSMA to convene regular meetings of the *Instance de Coordination au Mali* as the main platform for such coordination, exchange of information and support.’³⁶ Yet in practice, coordination remains a serious challenge.

The 2019 EPON study had already raised the fact that ‘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 MDSF, and the JF-G5S, to which it provides operational and logistical support, as well as with the French regional counterterrorism Operation *Barkhane*, which it co-locates with in some locations.’³⁷ The blurring of lines between the different forces has also arguably increased in the last couple years with a growing number of troop contributing countries (TCCs) operating under different forces and mandates in Mali (Chadian forces both in MINUSMA and the JF-G5S; UK in both MINUSMA and *Barkhane*; Sweden in both MINUSMA and *Takuba*, the latter’s headquarter also collocated with MINUSMA in the Menaka camp).

Figure 3: Mali annual fatalities from jihadi attacks targeting MINUSMA (2013-2021)



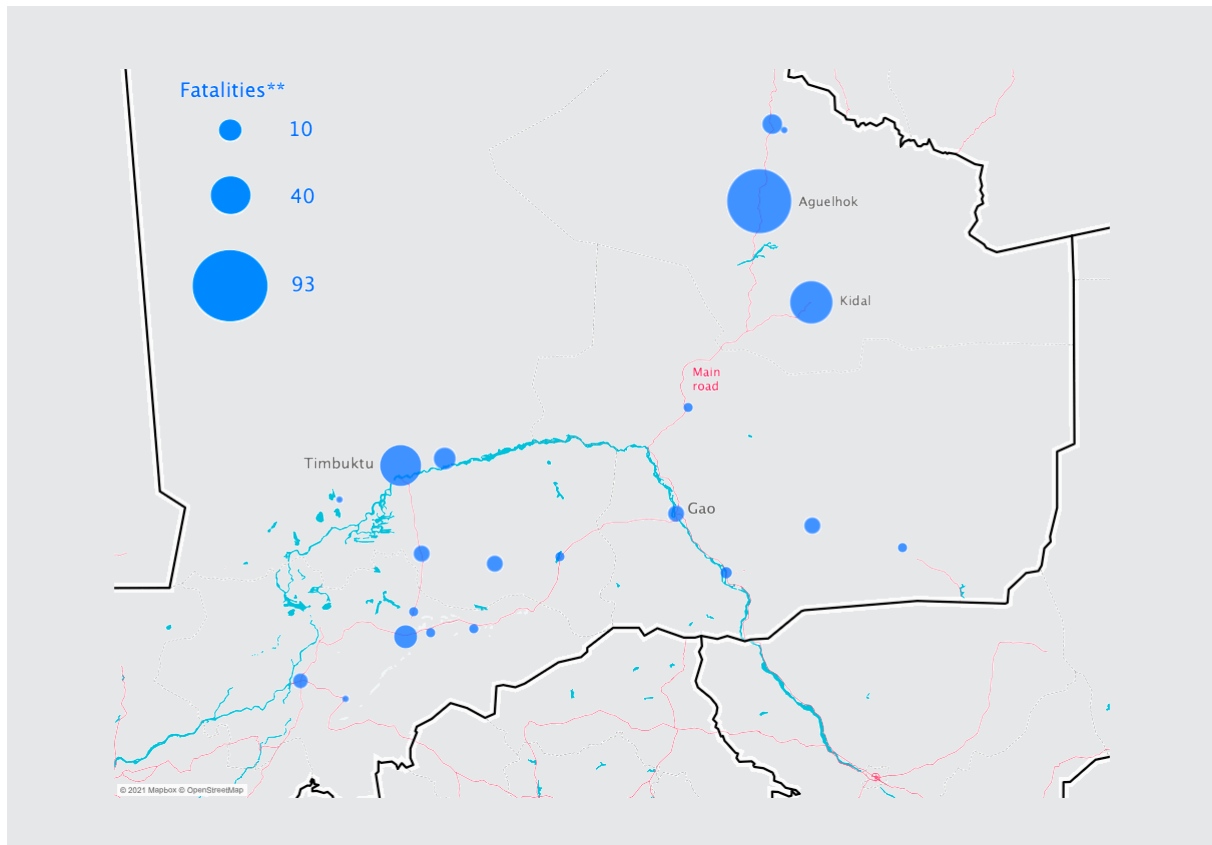
Data Provider: ACLED as of 30 April 2021; fatalities from attacks may include non-MINUSMA personnel
 Visualisation: J. Luengo-Cabrera

36 UN (2020) S/RES/253, 29 June 2020: Paragraph 30.

37 van der Lijn, Jair. et al. (2019). *Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)*. Oslo: The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network: p. 83. <https://effectivepeaceops.net/publication/minusma/>

Expectations from the government and populations alike that the UN mission will carry out counterterrorism operations remain high and are at times entertained by countries from the subregion.³⁸ MINUSMA has neither the mandate nor the capacities to do so but has not always been good at communicating this and managing expectations. With that said, the mission's stabilization and protection mandate under Chapter VII 'with a proactive, robust, flexible and agile posture' already gives it a wide margin of action.

Figure 4: Locations of Mali fatalities from jihadi attacks targeting MINUSMA (2013-2021)



*Data Provider: ACLED as of 30 April 2021; fatalities from attacks may include non-MINUSMA personnel
Visualisation: J. Luengo-Cabrera*

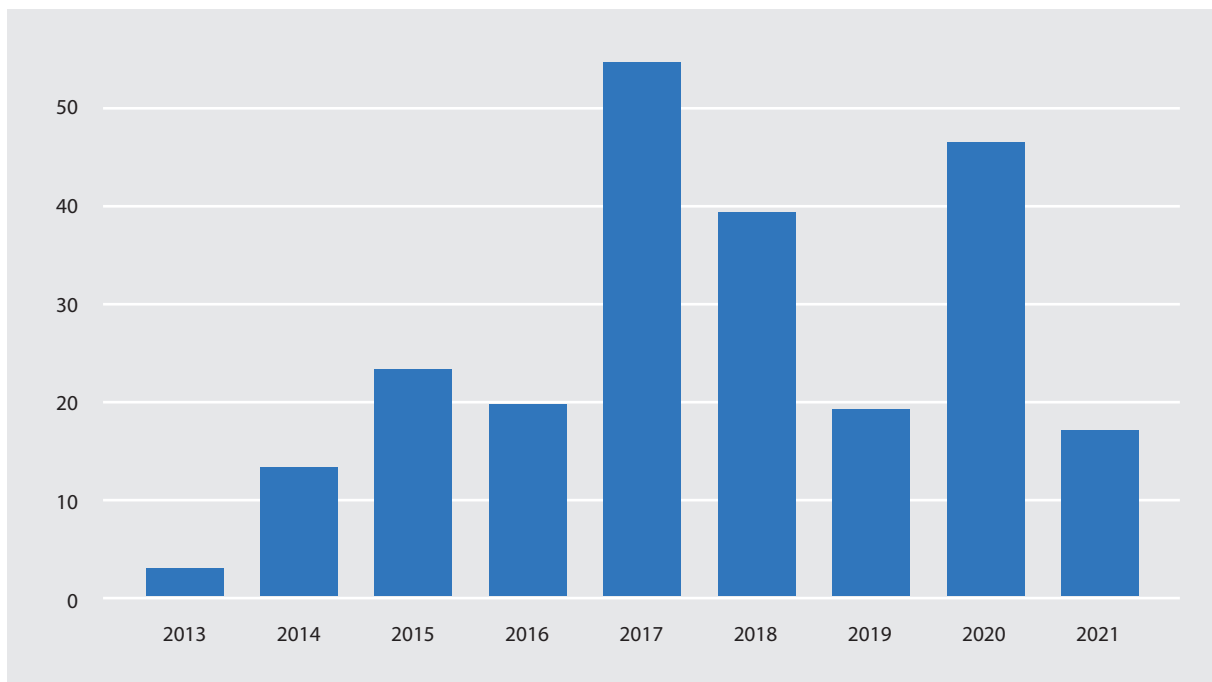
Despite above-mentioned limitations related to certain caveats and gaps in air assets, the MINUSMA Force arguably has the most willing and able leadership and troop contributing countries it has ever had, has been able to overcome the 'bunkerisation' denounced by the 2018 independent strategic review. It has increased the tempo of operations – despite the COVID-19 crisis – and thereby improved the safety and security of its troops (also enabled by continuous UNMAS support to TCCs on C-IED). The question, however, remains the manner in which the MINUSMA force 'works with' (coordinates, exchanges information and, support) other forces and with what concrete objectives.

³⁸ Mali peacekeeping mandate must be strengthened, says Senegal's Sall (2019, November 18), *RFI*. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20191118-mali-peacekeeping-mandatemust-be-strengthened-says-senegals-sall>

The question, however, remains the manner in which the MINUSMA force ‘works with’ (coordinates, exchanges information and, support) other forces and with what concrete objectives.

While few observers question the medical evacuation support the mission is providing to MDSF including those under JF-G5S, material support (such as gasoline and food rations) to these same forces – within the framework of the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) – becomes problematic, and a reputational risk for the mission, when these forces engage in active military counterterrorism operations, and all the more so if they commit human rights violations in the process. While the coordination of operations with MDSF and in few cases *Barkhane* may be useful and necessary where the different forces operate nearby one another – such as in Douentza region at the moment – these operations cannot be ‘joint’.

Figure 5: Jihadi attacks targeting MINUSMA (2013-2021)

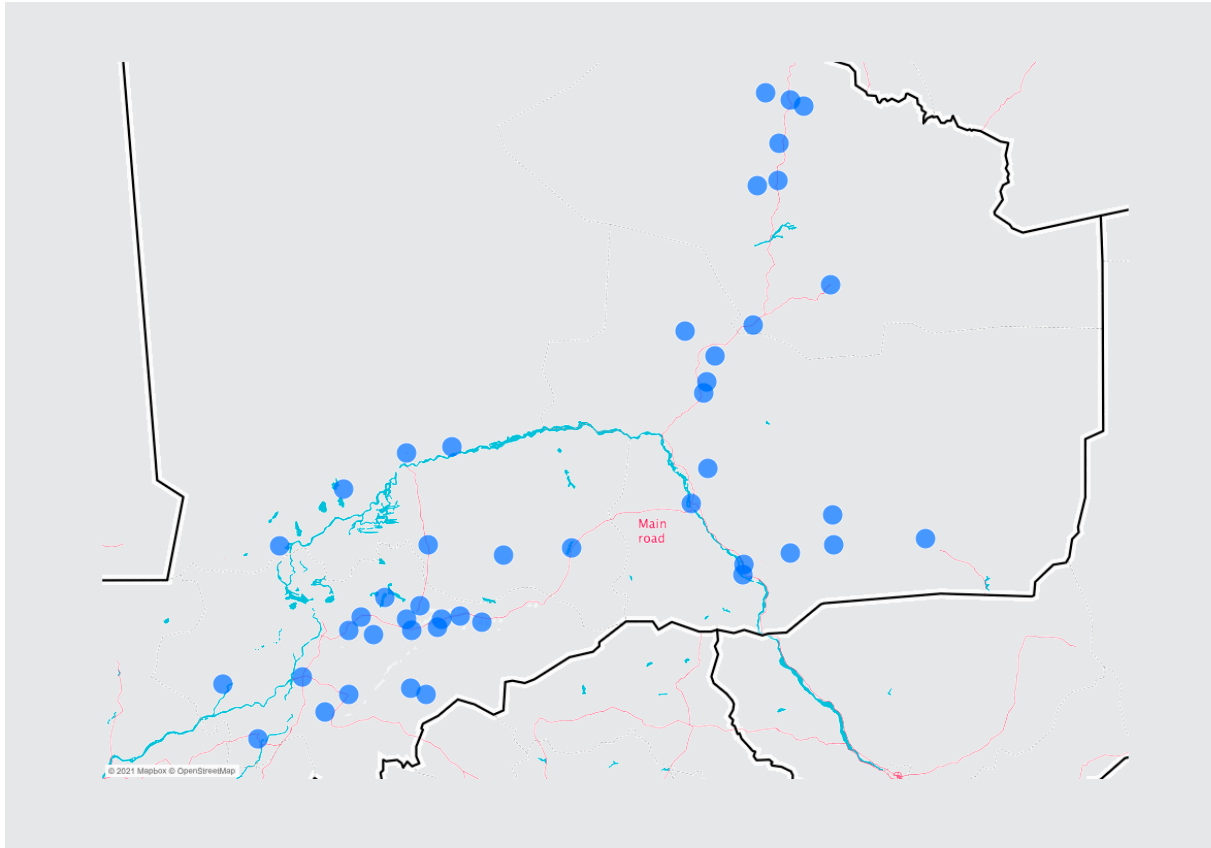


Data Provider: ACLED as of 30 April 2021 / Visualisation: J. Luengo-Cabrera

An additional challenge for the UN mission relates to its status under the Geneva Convention. Under international law (IHL), peacekeeping missions benefit from protection against attacks similar to that of civilians and it is a war crime to intentionally direct attacks against peacekeeping missions. But like civilians, members of missions may nonetheless lose such protection if they take a direct part in hostilities. And while there is no doubt attacks targeting MINUSMA civilian personnel and indiscriminate attacks against camps housing such

personnel constitute war crimes, attacks directed exclusively against MINUSMA military personnel present legal complexities.³⁹

Figure 6: Location of jihadi attacks targeting MINUSMA (2013-2021)



Data Provider: ACLED as of 30 April 2021 / Visualisation: J. Luengo-Cabrera

If and when blue helmets become party to a conflict, not only would they lose their protected status and become legitimate military targets under IHL, but this could also call into question the integrated nature of the mission. Some UN Agencies, Funds and Programs have actually already sought to distance themselves from peacekeepers and moved outside of MINUSMA camps as an attempt to preserve their independent humanitarian space and access.⁴⁰

While the UN's human rights reporting on abuses committed by all parties to the conflict in Mali – armed groups as well as national and international forces – has sought to affirm the impartiality of the mission, it has frustrated the government and *Barkhane* alike. France's defense minister rejected the conclusions of the March 2021 MINUSMA report on the Bounty

³⁹ UN (2021) *Report of the International Commission of Inquiry for Mali*, 29 January. New York: United Nations: paragraphs 825-830. The Commission ultimately “considers this to be a matter of great legal and strategic importance that could be taken up by the Secretary-General.”

⁴⁰ The official position of the UN Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) in New York remains that UN peacekeepers cannot be party to a conflict.

incident, where three armed militants and 19 civilians were killed in a French airstrike at a wedding celebration on 3 January 2021.⁴¹

MINUSMA's mandated 'operational and logistical support' to the JF-G5S conducting cross-border counterterrorist operations across the region (with a Joint Command Centre with *Barkhane* based in Niamey set up in 2020) as 'a temporary measure' while the JF-G5S continues 'developing its own capacity to support itself' continues to be an added challenge for the mission. Over the past year, the mission has not been able to implement Security Council-mandated provision of life support consumable, including through the use of local contractors, due to disagreements between the EU and the UN over who should shoulder risks and financial liability under the technical agreement (between the UN, the EU and the G5 Sahel).

It also remains difficult if not impossible for MINUSMA to monitor JF-G5S actions due to the remote border areas where it operates, and many within the mission would actually welcome the creation of a separate and dedicated UN support office for the JF-G5S; but also realize this option already put forward in the past will likely not be supported politically by key Security Council members who favor bilateral support to individual G5 countries.⁴²

There also seems to be a growing recognition that the militarization of both the national and international responses has not led to more stability and that while security is paramount, a more people-centered approach and a greater focus on governance reforms and the more decentralized levels are needed in order for the re-establishment of (functioning) state authority to be meaningful and accepted by local communities. In this context and in the perspective of a future mission transition, cooperation between MINUSMA as an integrated mission and the EU, World Bank and development partners will be key. Cooperation with the EU is already growing, as the latter promotes more integrated responses under *inter alia* its project Secured Development and Governance Pole (PSDG), consisting of fortified and self-sufficient bases for internal Malian security forces and other state institutions, as a way to create expanding islands of security starting in the Mopti region.⁴³

41 UN (2021) *Division des droits de l'homme et de la protection. Rapport sur l'incident de Bounty du 3 janvier 2021*. Bamako: MINUSMA. Available at: https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/rapport_final_bounty_bounty9.pdf.

42 De Coning, C. & Karlsrud, K. (2021) *Enhancing the Effectiveness of the G5 Sahel Force by Strengthening Strategic Coherence and International Support*, *NUPI Policy Brief*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

43 Lebovich, A. (2020) *Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the Sahel*. European Council on Foreign Relations <https://ecfr.eu/publication/disorder-from-chaos-why-europeans-fail-to-promote-stability-in-the-sahel/>

3. Implications for MINUSMA's mandate renewal

The mandate renewal exercise is always a delicate one. The Security Council does want the tasks assigned to the mission to be as relevant as possible but also needs to be careful to enable the mission rather than create expectations that it can't meet, or not to burden it with too many additional planning processes and reporting requirements if and when amending or assigning new tasks. Heavy reporting requirements are already felt at every levels of the mission including in regional field offices.

Mandate renewal is all the more challenging in a time of multiple transitions: on the Malian side with the Transition government due to end with the February 2022 elections, and on the MINUSMA side with a new SRSG and DSRSG/RC/HC. Many of the challenges the mission is facing (such as the need for better strategic and operational integration between civilian components and the Force, including integrated planning; the relation between MINUSMA and other forces operating in Mali, the MDSF in particular; the empowerment of heads of regional UN offices while keeping overall mission coherence; etc.) will not be resolved by a new mandate; but a clearer strategic vision and direction from MINUSMA's mission leadership strongly backed by a unified Security Council can certainly help.

The last resolution 2531 (2020) is already 17 pages long, includes two strategic priorities, six priority tasks and two other secondary tasks. In addition to the regular quarterly reporting requirements to the Security Council (including on benchmarks, generally seen as useful and increasingly so as they are both more concrete and realistic), the UN has had to provide every

six months the Security Council with a letter focusing on progress on operations, performance (including information on undeclared caveats and their impact on the mission) and the implementation of the integrated strategic framework; as well as separate reports on the JF-G5S. Now is probably not the time to ask for more reporting or yet another strategy from the mission, which is already in the process of reviewing its mission concept, staffing, and integrated operational planning and coordination procedures.

The main issue may be how to best add to the mandate elements pertaining to supporting the Malian Transition into the MINUSMA mandate.

There seems to be a general consensus that the current two strategic priorities of the mandate are still relevant and should remain. The main issue for discussion this time around may be how to best add to the mandate elements pertaining to supporting the Malian Transition into the MINUSMA mandate.

3.1. The first strategic priority: The Peace Process

While the first and primary strategic priority of MINUSMA should remain to support the implementation of the Agreement by the Malian parties, as well as by other relevant Malian stakeholders, more ambitious benchmarks could be set in order to increase the pressure on the Malian parties towards working together in a permanent national operational organ and effectively implementing key provisions of the agreement in between CSA meetings over the coming year.

The Security Council could usefully call for the resuming of regular Technical Security Commission (CTS) meetings under the chairmanship of the MINUSMA Force Commander and support the effective monitoring and enforcement of its decisions.

The Security Council could discourage the reopening of the agreement, and instead emphasize the importance of translating key provisions⁴⁴ from the agreement into the new Constitution being discussed by the Transition Government. It could also emphasize the importance of seeing practical progress on the ground in key areas of decentralization of state institutions, the

⁴⁴ Resolution 2531 (2020) referred to institutional reforms envisioned by the Agreement, in particular the establishment of Regional Assemblies and election by direct universal suffrage; creation of a second parliamentary chamber 'as an institution whose remit and composition support the objectives of the Agreement'; transfer of decentralized State services and 30 per cent of State revenues to local authorities in their areas of competence; creation of the regional territorial police; and establishment of electoral districts. The new Constitution could also usefully enshrine other principles of the Algiers agreement, notably the 'inclusivity and significant representation of all Malian populations within the defense and security forces.'

redeployment of the reconstituted units of the Malian army, and the creation of the territorial police. Last but not least it could encourage the continued and meaningful participation of women in the CSA and its subcommittees.

3.2. The second strategic priority: Central Mali

Keeping with the formulation of the second strategic priority, the Security Council could further encourage the Malian government to articulate a clearer national vision for Central Mali – notably in relation to dealing with armed groups and militias but also for the gradual re-establishment of (functioning) State authority that is accepted by local populations – and to empower effective national structures to coordinate the government's actions at the regional level.

MINUSMA could support such a national vision as part of its efforts to 'scale up' local agreements – in partnership with the Regional Support Team for National Reconciliation (ERAR) and 'as a means of presaging the state's return to rural areas, and, secondly, wider governance reform'⁴⁵ – as well as its stabilization and PoC efforts more generally, with a greater focus on youth and women. The mission could usefully support the government in rebuilding a social contract or 'compact' with the communities of Central Mali provided there is a genuine political will to do so and ownership in Bamako and with the Malian authorities in the region.

The Security Council could also express its continued support for the Adaptation Plan (despite the delays) and force generation efforts as part of the efforts to facilitate the implementation by Malian actors of the *Stratégie de stabilisation du centre du Mali*. While doing so, it may however want to consider a slight increase in the troop ceiling in order to be able to accommodate new units (air assets, ISR and quick reaction forces) without having to send home infantry units which remain indispensable notably to patrol and deploy TOBs. But the Council should also send strong messages to TCCs to encourage them to be more mobile and flexible and to overcome caveats that hamper the ability of the mission to implement the plan.

Last but not least, the Security Council could express – as it has already done in the past – support for integrated actions between the Force and civilian components of the mission, which is where the mission brings the most added value, while emphasizing the three tiers of POC action and the primary responsibility of the Malian state to protect civilians and the fact that MINUSMA should avoid substituting for the Malian government.

45 Crisis Group, *A Course Correction for the Sahel Stabilisation Strategy*, Africa Report N°299, 1 February 2021

3.3. Supporting the Malian Transition within the framework of existing two strategic priorities

There is no doubt that MINUSMA needs a solid national partner in order to successfully implement the two above-mentioned existing strategic priorities. However, many cautions against making support to the Malian Transition a third strategic priority for the mission, fearing that it could distract from or divert limited resources away from the first two strategic priorities, particularly if MINUSMA is not given additional resources but expected to do more by the Transition Government.

The Security Council could indeed simply decide to integrate language already used in the last paragraph of PRST/2020/10 – which requested MINUSMA, ‘within its mandate and existing resources, to support the political transition in Mali’ – into the new resolution, possibly under the existing primary strategic priority. This would suffice for the mission to continue supporting the Transition Government through February 2022 with a particular focus on the two strategic priorities, without risking being dragged into supporting other aspects of the action plan (PAG) and roadmap of the Transitional Government which are not in sync with the mission's priorities.

It is important for the International Community to send strong and cohesive messages regarding the need for the Transition and Constitutional reform process to be consultative and inclusive.

With that said, the Malian Transition presents a unique opportunity to address structural and governance deficiencies that have fed cycles of conflict, political crises and coups Mali has experienced and that justify robust but careful support to the Malian Transition, the Constitutional reform process and the operationalization of the future Constitution thereafter.

In any case, it is important for the International Community to send strong and cohesive messages regarding the need for the Transition and Constitutional reform process to be consultative and inclusive, and for the Transition government to respect the terms of the transition and to organize timely and credible elections will be important given the growing suspicions towards the intentions of the former military junta. The Security Council should not be lured by the time and again proven ability of Malian parties to engineer progress they can report on just ahead of Council meetings.

3.4. Beyond strategic priorities

Beyond the strategic priorities, the Security Council may wish to strengthen the language in MINUSMA's mandate on both the promotion and protection of human rights – already a priority task – and on accountability, possibly with one or more dedicated benchmarks given the pressing need for greater Malian commitment to criminal investigations and judicial proceedings following alleged reports of abuse – including by MDSF – and to addressing criminal impunity.

Related to this, the Security Council may wish to emphasize the importance of a more people-centered approach⁴⁶ to the mission's support to stabilization and reestablishment of state authority⁴⁷ in the Center and to the protection of civilians, in an asymmetric threat environment. While it has already encouraged MINUSMA 'to enhance communication efforts to underscore the role and responsibilities of the Malian authorities to protect civilians while raising awareness on its own role and limitations' in the last mandate, the Council may also wish to emphasize again the importance of Strategic Communication in promoting successes, managing expectations, and helping to address disinformation, misinformation and hate speech.⁴⁸

The 25 March 2021, Secretary-General's roadmap for a transition of MINUSMA calls for the increased participation and representation of women in the CSA subcommittees and 2022 national elections, and the establishment of a women's observatory. The Council could keep the pressure on Malian parties to act on these, and support the effective operationalization of the Observatory – including its regional antennas – by making it a mandated benchmark.

Given the Security Council momentum on climate-related security risks, this issue may come up in mandate renewal discussions. It is to be recalled that specific language had been introduced in paragraph 68 of resolution 2423 (2018).⁴⁹ Yet, at the time the mission did not have the capacity to meaningfully take this into consideration and the paragraph was dropped in the subsequent mandate. This time around, interested members states may wish to first consider supporting MINUSMA with the required expertise (by for instance funding an extrabudgetary

46 de Coning, C. & Gelot, L. (2020, May 29) Placing people at the center of UN peace operations, *Global Observatory*. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/05/placing-people-center-un-peace-operations/>

47 Cedric de Coning, John Karlsrud and Paul Troost, 2015. Towards More People-Centric Peace Operations: From 'Extension of State Authority' to 'Strengthening Inclusive State-Society Relations'. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4(1): p. 49. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.gl>

48 Nick Birnback (2019), *Under the Blue Flag: Leadership and Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations*, Challenges Forum Policy Brief 2019:4

49 UN (2018) S/RES/2423. New York: United Nations: para. 68. "Notes the importance for the Government of Mali and the United Nations to take into consideration, as appropriate, the security implications of the adverse effects of climate change and other ecological changes and natural disasters, among other factors, in their activities, programs and strategies in Mali,"

environment adviser position⁵⁰ and/or trainings) and work on a proof of concept⁵¹ before attempting to add specific language in the mandate.⁵²

50 Hegazi, F., Krampe, F., & Smith, E. (2021) *Climate-related Security Risks and Peacebuilding in Mali*. SIPRI. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2021/sipri-policy-papers/climate-related-security-risks-and-peacebuilding-mali>

51 De Coning, C., Krampe F. & Sherman J., (2021) *Emerging Lessons from Implementing Climate-Related Peace and Security Mandates*. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/04/emerging-lessons-implementing-climate-related-peace-security-mandates/>

52 *PRST/2011/15* already notes that ‘conflict analysis and contextual information on, inter alia, possible security implications of climate change is important, when such issues are drivers of conflict, represent a challenge to the implementation of Council mandates or endanger the process of consolidation of peace. In this regard, the Council requests the Secretary-General to ensure that his reporting to the Council contains such contextual information.’ UN (2011) *PRST/2011/15*. New York: United Nations

About EPON

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management. However, their effectiveness remains the subject of confusion and debate in both the policy and academic communities. Various international organizations conducting peace operations, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify their effectiveness and impact. Although various initiatives are underway to improve the ability to assess the performance of peace operations, there remains a distinct lack of independent, research-based information about the effectiveness of such operations.

To address this gap, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with over 40 partners from across the globe, have established an international network to jointly undertake research into the effectiveness of peace operations. This network has developed a shared methodology to enable the members to undertake research on this topic. This will ensure coherence across cases and facilitate comparative research. The network produce a series of reports that are shared with stakeholders including the UN, AU, and EU, interested national government representatives, researchers, and the general public. All the EPON reports are available via <https://effectivepeaceops.net>. The network is coordinated by NUPI. Many of the partners fund their own participation. NUPI has also received funding from the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the Network and its research, including via the UN Peace Operations project (UNPOP) and the Training for Peace (TfP) programme.

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The Security Council will renew the mandate of the 8-year-old United Nations Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in June 2021 at a time of multiple transitions: on the Malian side with the Transition government due to end in February 2022, and on the mission side with a new SRSG. It also comes at a time of great uncertainties over the future of the peace process and political transition, but also over the future of the French regional military operations Barkhane and the Joint Force G5 Sahel. The overall security situation has deteriorated in Mali and beyond in the Sahel since 2013. Yet, Northern Mali enjoys a semblance of stability as the two rival coalitions of signatory armed groups found a modus vivendi. But progress in the implementation of the peace agreement is slow, state presence minimal, and attacks on a more resilient MINUSMA continue. Although violence has decreased in Central Mali since September 2020 largely due to the brokering of local agreements of different sorts, insecurity continues to spread further to the South of Mali.

There seems to be a general consensus that the two strategic priorities of the MINUSMA mandate should remain to support the implementation of the Algiers Agreement by the Malian parties and to facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive politically led Malian strategy to protect civilians and re-establish State authority in Central Mali. The main issues for discussion will be how to carry out these priorities more effectively and how to best add to the mandate elements pertaining to supporting the Malian Transition without diverting limited resources away from the first two strategic priorities. Beyond the strategic priorities, issues of human rights and accountability, people-centered approaches, strategic communication, women's participation, and climate-related security risks are also discussed in this report. Many of the challenges the mission is facing will however not be resolved by an adjusted mandate alone; but a clearer strategic direction from MINUSMA's leadership strongly backed by a unified Security Council can certainly help.