



Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix

THE DILEMMAS OF INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IN MALI

Bruno Charbonneau

**A Stabilizing Mali Project Report
OCTOBER 2017**

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Contents

Foreword	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	7
Methodology	8
MINUSMA's mandate and role	9
<i>Stabilization</i>	13
<i>A "robust" posture?</i>	14
Division of labour and Operation Barkhane	17
The counter-terrorism question	20
Conflict resolution and management in Mali	22
Conclusion and recommendations	24
References	26
About the author	30
About the Centre FrancoPaix	31

Foreword

The following report is my contribution to the Centre FrancoPaix Mali Project. Following the work of my colleagues, Professor Jonathan Sears and Dr. Adam Sandor, I analyse the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Unlike the many analyses available, I focus particularly on the division of labour between MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane. Rather than distinguishing the two, thus accepting the parameters of the division of labour, I analyse how it impacts the work of MINUSMA and the possibilities of conflict resolution in Mali.

In the coming months, the Centre FrancoPaix will publish complementary reports and analyses that will cover different elements and dimensions of the situation in Mali. A final report will be available in the spring of 2018. The following is therefore part of a collective research effort.

Indeed, in September 2016, the Centre FrancoPaix launched a major research project on the Malian conflict and its international engagements. Entitled “Stabilizing Mali: the challenges of conflict resolution”, the project aims to produce a rigorous scientific analysis of Malian conflict dynamics. Through multidisciplinary and multidimensional analyses of the situation and opportunities for action, through a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods and with a team of eight expert researchers, the initiative seeks to establish the connections and relationships between multiple variables, notably the links between conflict dynamics and those of international intervention. As such, the Mali Project will develop an enhanced and detailed understanding of the conflict and opportunities for peace.

The complexity of the situation in Mali is undeniable. The difficulties of the peace process are obvious. The limits of mediation and international interventions are important and, some will say, counterproductive. We do not pretend to know or to have discovered the solution to the Malian conflict, but we are confident that our approach and our team can identify and analyse the crucial links between various dimensions of the conflict, and thus shed new light on it.

Good reading.

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Other debts are more subtle, intimate, sometimes indirectly related to the project, daily, but just as essential to its completion and success. Special thanks to my friend and colleague Kalilou Sidibé, to whom I owe a lot; to my friends and colleagues, Jonathan Sears, Adam Sandor, Camille Evrard, Tony Chafer, Mandy Turner, Florian Kuhn and Christian Leuprecht, for our exchanges, our friendship and more; thanks to Maxime Ricard, PhD student and coordinator FrancoPaix, for his inexhaustible support and work; thanks to Michel, for his support and his trust; and thanks to the team of the Chair Raoul-Dandurand, Frédérick, Louis, Élisabeth, Yvana, Céline and Jennifer, without whom all this would have been impossible.



THE DILEMMAS OF INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IN MALI¹

In April 2013, following French January's Operation Serval, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2100 authorized the *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA). Its primary mandate was to stabilize Mali and help to re-establish state authority under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. The mission was to build on Serval's military successes which were said to have put in place the necessary security conditions for UN, regional, and national engagement in conflict resolution.

It is clear that the security situation in Mali has deteriorated since 2014 (CSNU 2017) while the peace process has barely progressed (Boutellis and Zahar 2017) and while the effectiveness of the French counter-terrorist operations has been called into question (Goffi 2017; Guichaoua 2017; Trotignon 2017).² Against this backdrop, the purpose of this report is to identify the obstacles, challenges and dilemmas facing MINUSMA. Some have observed the deficiencies of its action and particularly its inability to ensure security, stability and even its own protection. Others have criticized its so-called "robust" posture as almost war-like, which undermines its impartiality and efforts to resolve the conflict. There is also tension between those demanding the means for filling the capacity gaps for the purpose of fully assuming this robust posture, and those who criticize this posture as falling outside the mandate of UN peacekeeping missions. Ultimately, however, it is the war against terrorism perspective that weakens MINUSMA's impartiality and thus its authority as an impartial actor and guarantor of the peace process.

The analysis that follows focusses on the obstacles MINUSMA faces for affecting the political-security situation in Mali.³ The analysis examines the conditions of possibility that the mission is putting or trying to put in place in order to provide the framework within which the various stakeholders act. Primarily, the evaluation of MINUSMA is based on the main goal and the associated objectives as defined by the Security Council.⁴ The objectives are not always easy to define. Even if the Security Council resolutions

¹ This report was translated from the French. In case of discrepancy between the texts, the original French version prevails.

² While I write these lines (September 2017), the truce between the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA) and the platform groups and the governor's visit to Kidal at the end of August allow us to be cautiously optimistic. It remains to be seen if the trend will continue. The status quo in Ménaka, for example, could lead to growing tensions between the CMA and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad.

³ MINUSMA's humanitarian, peacebuilding and other actions will not be addressed in this report. The analysis is limited to the political (peace process, conflict resolution, negotiations, etc.) and security aspects (violence, combat, etc.) of the situation in Mali.

⁴ There is a vast amount literature on the evaluation of peace missions (Bratt 1996; Diehl 1993; Pushkima 2006; Van de Lijn 2010; Brosig and Sempijja 2017). There is no consensus on mission objectives, which would provide a basis on which their evaluation could be formed. The UN (2008) states that the missions must 1) establish a secure and stable environment making the rule of law possible, 2) allow political dialogue and good governance, and 3) serve as a framework for the activities of other international actors.

establish the mission objectives, they are deliberately ambiguous and therefore subject to negotiation and interpretation.

MINUSMA finds itself in a situation that imposes a dilemma between the objectives of conflict resolution (revolving around the peace process and the “root causes” of the conflict) and the objectives of conflict management (revolving around counter-terrorist and stabilization actions). Resolution and management processes are different and occasionally contradictory. Moreover, their respective actions are shared, thanks to a “division of labour” between MINUSMA and France’s Operation Barkhane, with the UN mission being deployed alongside a French military mission that does not always or necessarily have the same priorities.

After a short summary of the report’s methodology, the first section will address MINUSMA’s mandate and role. Although the name of the mission makes it clear, that the mission aims at *stabilizing Mali*, the concept of stabilization is open to a number of interpretations and includes multiple potentially destabilizing mission elements. The second section will discuss the specifics of the mission: a “special mission” for some, a “robust” posture for others. Then, the division of labour with Operation Barkhane is analysed and followed in the fourth section by the analysis of the effects of the “terrorist question” on the outcomes of MINUSMA. Finally, the last section summarizes the effects of the division of labour and the “terrorist question” on MINUSMA’s work.

Methodology

This report is based on the collection of data from multiple sites, carried out in Bamako in 2015 and 2017, in Paris in 2015, 2016 and 2017 and in New York in 2013, 2016 and 2017. A total of 94 semi-directed interviews were conducted with people from MINUSMA, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the governments of Mali, France, United States and other European countries and various interested Malian, French, and European experts, journalists and researchers. An analysis of primary source documents (UN, Malian and French primarily), secondary sources (university literature) and grey literature (think tanks, analysis or research centres, etc.) supports the analysis of the primary data collected as shown by the bibliographic notes.

The logic of the evaluation of MINUSMA’s work is based on the premise that its main goal is defined by Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which authorises its mandate. Thus, acting under Chapter VII which seeks “to maintain or restore international peace and security” (Article 39), the Security Council defines MINUSMA’s goal in Mali.

How can this goal of maintaining or restoring peace and security in Mali be achieved? That is the whole purpose of the mandate and the mission objectives that it defines. The evaluation logic therefore analyses the three main objectives and their interaction in order to evaluate their contribution to the main goal. As described in the resolutions concerning MINUSMA, these main objectives are: 1) stabilization; 2) restoration of Malian state authority; and 3) subsequent to resolution 2227 of 2015, support for the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali. The evaluation logic also takes into

account two elements that are too often analysed separately. First, the very conception of MINUSMA is based on a division of labour with Operation Barkhane. Then, the terrorist question, which is embedded in the three objectives, justifies the division of labour with Barkhane and must therefore be conceived as a cross-cutting problem. Evaluating MINUSMA is thus to see if or how its three main objectives can lead to achieving the goal of maintaining or restoring peace and security.

MINUSMA's mandate and role

First, it must be borne in mind that the initial political-strategic framework, or the context, surrounding the creation of MINUSMA was imposed by France's Operation Serval. Authorized in January 2013 by President François Hollande, Serval was a combat mission to push back the terrorist groups and restore Malian territorial integrity (Assemblée nationale 2013; Notin 2014). The military assessment of Operation Serval was largely positive according to a number of experts. The intervention was praised for its effectiveness, its relatively low financial costs and its communication strategy which was able to justify fighting terrorists in hand-to-hand combat on Malian soil (Chivvis 2016). From a political perspective, from the perspective of conflict resolution in Mali, it is a failure (Boeke and Schuurman 2015; d'Evry 2015). Despite the transformation of Serval into Operation Barkhane, the French military intervention has reached its limits (Goffi 2017; Shurkin, Pezard and Zimmerman 2017).

That said, the French government never claimed that it wanted to resolve the conflict in Mali. Hollande and his generals were clear about this. The French army was fighting terrorists in order to establish the conditions deemed necessary for the development and implementation of a political solution (Erforth 2015). According to a French representative to the United Nations, Serval was a "bridging force" between the French force and the UN and its Malian, regional and international partners (Interview, New York, March 9, 2017). In other words, according to the French government, it was not France's responsibility to resolve the conflict. This denial of responsibility is justified, at least in part, by the fear and risk that France would be accused of neo-colonialism, imperialism or other types of accusations signifying that France used force to impose its will on Africa (Charbonneau 2008, 2014, 2017a; Charbonneau and Chafer 2014).

French policy in Africa or in Mali is another debate that this report cannot address. However, the consequences of this context on the MINUSMA mandate and action must be recognized and analysed. Since 2013, the MINUSMA mandate has evolved according to the dynamics of the conflict and the perception of international priorities. Table 1 summarizes the main points of the mandate as defined by the Security Council, making it possible to compare annual resolutions and highlight their evolution.

MINUSMA is under the authority of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which although contested, authorizes a certain proactive use of force: "all necessary means ... to carry out its mandate". The various resolutions also authorize the French army "to use all necessary means" in support of the Mission. Since 2013, the Council has also consistently noted "the transnational dimension of the terrorist threat in the Sahel region". Although the mandate redefines the mission objectives every year during

renewal, it retains other familiar elements: protection of civilians, promotion and protection of human rights, support to humanitarian aid, action supporting justice, good offices, etc.

MINUSMA activities and responsibilities are varied and numerous, so much so that some might argue that it does not have the means to fulfil its ambitions. The emphasis placed on the political aspects in the 2013 and 2014 resolutions have gradually given way to a more “robust” posture, especially from 2015. Resolution 2227 (2015) announced a stand in favour of the Malian state and the “the progressive redeployment of the Malian Defence and Security Forces especially in the North of Mali”, in support of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali. Resolutions 2295 (2016) and 2364 (2017) go further still by emphasizing that MINUSMA must “proactively and robustly” defend its mandate, particularly against asymmetrical attacks.

MINUSMA MANDATE RESOLUTIONS

Resolution	Mandate	Highlights
S/RES 2100 (2013)	<p>a) Stabilization and support for the reestablishment of State authority, including preventing the return of armed elements, expanding and re-establishing public administration, rebuilding the security sector and assisting in the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs (DDR);</p> <p>b) Support of the transitional road map, including national dialogue, electoral process, restoration of constitutional order, democracy and national unity, use of good offices, reconciliation and organization and conduct of presidential and legislative elections;</p> <p>c) Protection of civilians and United Nations personnel;</p> <p>d) Promotion and defense of human rights;</p> <p>e) Support for humanitarian action;</p> <p>f) Support for the safeguarding of cultural heritage;</p> <p>g) Action for national and international justice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes MINUSMA; • Acting under Chapter VII; • 11,200 military personnel; • 1,440 police personnel; • "Authorizes MINUSMA to use all necessary means ... to carry out its mandate"; • "Authorizes French troops ... to use all necessary means ... to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat upon request of the Secretary General"; • "Urges Sahel and Maghreb States to enhance interregional cooperation and coordination [against] the activities of terrorist groups".
S/RES 2164 (2014)	<p>Priority tasks:</p> <p>a) Security, stabilization and protection of civilians, including support of Malian authorities to prevent the return of armed elements and enhanced operational coordination with the Malian Defence and Security Forces;</p> <p>b) Support for national dialogue and reconciliation, including assistance in negotiation, use of good offices, supporting the cantonment of armed groups, DDR programs, organization of local elections, support for justice and activities of the international commission of inquiry;</p> <p>c) Support for the re-establishment of State authority throughout the country, for the rebuilding of the security sector, for the promotion and protection of human rights, and for humanitarian assistance.</p> <p>Additional tasks:</p> <p>a) Protection of United Nations personnel;</p> <p>b) Support for cultural preservation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting under Chapter VII; • "Noting with increasing concern the transnational dimension of the terrorist threat in the Sahel region"; • "Authorizes MINUSMA to take all necessary means to carry out its mandate"; • "Authorizes French forces ... to use all necessary means ... to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat upon request of the Secretary General".
S/RES 2227 (2015)	<p>a) Support, monitor and supervise the implementation of the ceasefire arrangements;</p> <p>b) Support to the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, including support for the implementation of political and institutional reforms, implementation of the defense and security measures of the Agreement, cantonment, DDR and the "progressive redeployment of the Malian Defence and Security Forces especially in the North of Mali", support measures for reconciliation and justice, and support the organization of local elections;</p> <p>c) Good offices and reconciliation;</p> <p>d) Protection of civilians and stabilization, including providing support to the Malian authorities to stabilize key population centres;</p> <p>e) Promotion and protection of human rights;</p> <p>f) Humanitarian aid and projects for stabilization, including "in support of the Malian authorities, to contribute to the creation of a secure environment" for the distribution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcomes the signing of the 2015 Agreement; • Concerned about the slow deployment of MINUSMA personnel and equipment; • "Noting with growing concern the transnational dimension of the terrorist threat in the Sahel region"; • Acting under Chapter VII; • "Authorizes MINUSMA to take all necessary means to carry out its mandate"; • "Authorizes French force ... to use all necessary means ... to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat upon request of the Secretary General".

	<p>of humanitarian assistance and the implementation of projects aimed at stabilizing the north;</p> <p>g) Protection, safety and security of United Nations personnel;</p> <p>h) Support for cultural preservation.</p>	
S/RES 2295 (2016)	<p>Priority tasks:</p> <p>a) Support to the implementation of the Agreement, including political and institutional reforms, support for the redeployment of Malian forces, cantonment and DDR, support for reconciliation and justice measures, assistance in the organization of local elections;</p> <p>b) Good offices and reconciliation;</p> <p>c) Protection of civilians and stabilization, "including against asymmetric threats", in support of the Malian authorities to stabilize the key population centres;</p> <p>d) "Countering asymmetric attacks in active defence of MINUSMA's mandate";</p> <p>e) Protection, safety and security of United Nations personnel;</p> <p>f) Promotion and protection of human rights;</p> <p>g) Humanitarian aid.</p> <p>Other tasks:</p> <p>a) Stabilization projects;</p> <p>b) Weapons and ammunition management;</p> <p>c) Support for cultural preservation;</p> <p>d) Cooperation with the Sanctions Committee against ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravely concerned by the constant delays in the implementation of the Agreement; • Welcomes the fact that the ceasefire has been respected since August 2015; • "Expressing its continued concern over the transnational dimension of the terrorist threat in the Sahel region"; • Acting under Chapter VII; • Increases force levels to 13,289 military personnel and 1,920 police officers; • "Decides that the strategic priority of MINUSMA is to support the implementation ... of the Agreement"; • "Authorizes MINUSMA to take all necessary means to carry out its mandate"; • "Requests MINUSMA to move to a more proactive and robust posture to carry out its mandate"; • "Authorizes French force ... to use all necessary means ... to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat upon request of the Secretary General".
S/RES 2364 (2017)	<p>The mandate is, with the exception of a few words, identical to S/RES 2295 (2016). To point (a), S/RES 2364 (2017) adds:</p> <p>"to support the deployment of joint security patrols in the North of Mali, where necessary and where possible".</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Recognizing the recent progress achieved for the implementation of the Agreement ... while <i>expressing</i> its deep concern over the persistent delays"; • Expresses its concern "about the volatile security situation, especially the expansion of terrorist and other criminal activities into central and southern Mali"; • "Expressing its continued concern over the transnational dimension of the terrorist threat"; • "Welcoming the deployment of the <i>Force Conjointe des Etats du G5 Sabel</i> [sic]"; • Acting under Chapter VII; • "Authorizes French force ... to use all necessary means ... to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat upon request of the Secretary General".

Stabilization

“Stabilization” is at the core of the MINUSMA mandate but the term suggests rather than defines what stabilization means. In 2015, the report from the *High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* (HIPPO) noted the systematic and problematic use of the concept of stabilization in Security Council resolutions. The notion was particularly problematic for missions supporting the re-establishment or restoration of state authority, as this support to the state calls into question the peacekeeping principle of impartiality. Because the term “stabilization” is ambiguous and encourages various interpretations, the report recommended the clarification of the concept (HIPPO 2015, 30).

To stabilize refers to the idea of maintaining something in a position of equilibrium, to fix it in a certain state, to prevent it from changing or to create the conditions for maintaining a specific state. The ambiguity referred to in the HIPPO report is rather the lack or the impossibility of reaching a consensus about “what” is to be stabilized or if it ought to be stabilized or transformed. In other words, the stabilization of Mali assumes that everyone agrees on the “Mali” to be stabilized. However, fundamentally, the Malian conflict is about defining “Mali” as a state and as the foundation for organizing the political community. (Charbonneau and Sears 2014; Hüsken and Klute 2015; Sears 2017; Whitehouse and Strazzari 2015).

In practice, MINUSMA and international stakeholders in general, ignore this difficulty. The management of the effects of the conflict is easier and less risky as it allows political complications to be avoided (Chandler 2017). So, “Mali” is conceived as a given object that must be stabilized (Charbonneau and Sears 2016). The stabilization of Mali is not defined by the object to be stabilized, but through the claimed specificity of its environment, which itself is assumed to justify the specificity of the mission.

Indeed, a consensus about MINUSMA has formed to define it as a “special mission” or “pioneer mission,” both among practitioners and a number of researchers. One officer emphasized that MINUSMA is not a “robust” or counter-terrorism mission, but a “special mission” (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, Jan. 31, 2017). Its mandate is part of a “complex and asymmetrical situation” (Interview, French representative, New York, March 9, 2017), but one which, according to certain MINUSMA military personnel, is completely different from the situation in Somalia and Afghanistan (Interviews, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 10, 2017). Other military personnel seem to think that MINUSMA needs a mandate like ISAF, given “[that] it is not a normal peacekeeping mission” (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 1, 2017). Given the effects of the “complexity of the rebellion and the ethnic and terrorist components of a complex intercommunity setting where everything is intertwined” (Interview, European Union, Bamako, Feb. 9, 2017), some believe “that the country must be cleaned up” in order to create a secure space for dialogue and the peace process (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 9, 2017).⁵

⁵ This language is also found among Malians: “la grande lessive” or “le laver propre” (ko ka je en bamanan) which characterizes the “incomplete revolution of March 1991”: and the aspirations of the Malian people for 25 years for “a radical change of the old order, for more justice, liberty, economic and

Because the situation in Mali is defined as complex and asymmetrical, including a “terrorist” element, MINUSMA is largely seen as a “hasty” mission, with a mandate that is “unsuited” to its environment (Interview, African diplomat, New York, March 10, 2017). MINUSMA is ostensibly facing a situation for which it is not prepared. What is being asked of it is deemed impossible to carry out because it does not have the equipment or soldiers to do so (Interview, Malian diplomat, August 2017).

A “robust” posture?

A “robust” posture should, in principle, allow for the “stabilization of Mali” and the success of the mandate. The Capstone doctrine defines robust peacekeeping as: “the use of force at the tactical level with the authorization of the Security Council and consent of the host nation and/or the main parties to the conflict” (UN 2008, 34). The UN differentiates a robust posture from peace enforcement by stating that the latter does not require the consent of the parties, but this distinction is increasingly blurry and transgressed (Karlsrud 2017; Rhoads 2016). According to Thierry Tardy, apart from the problems of compatibility with the principles of peacekeeping, the idea of a “robust force” is always undermined by the mission’s political constraints, the quality and availability of troops and the reluctance on the part of contributing countries to risk the lives of their soldiers. In the end, according to Tardy, the idea of “robustness” pertains more to the mission’s effectiveness for carrying out its mandate and for protecting itself (Tardy 2011). Beyond the question of effectiveness, the issue is the use of force in the name of re-establishing or keeping the peace (Sloan 2014).

A singular aspect of MINUSMA is the creation of the *All Sources Information Fusion Unit* (ASIFU). ASIFU is an unprecedented capacity for intelligence gathering for a UN mission. Its mission is to produce and analyse aggregated information in order to protect the force against asymmetric threats and to support MINUSMA in carrying out its mandate. Therefore, in principle, ASIFU must improve mission effectiveness. The unit gathers and analyses information, producing various analytical products (weekly, bi-weekly, quarterly and thematic reports). The collected data comes from capacities provided by European contributing countries, including experts, drones and, at least at first, special forces units and helicopter reconnaissance missions. ASIFU has limited human resources and is made up solely of European soldiers. The initial opposition to integrating this type of intelligence gathering capacity within a UN mission gave way to operational pragmatism. That being said, the introduction of the ASIFU structure and capacities as part of a UN peacekeeping mission was not completely smooth.

First, ASIFU intelligence gathering activities are at times defined as an “anti-terrorist action” because it participates in preserving and protecting the force against attacks (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, January 31, 2017). By virtue of its mission, its responsibilities, its capacities and its contribution, ASIFU has a significant effect on the

social well-being. It meant to level everything off, to brush aside the destroyers of the people at all levels and start over with men who had not been steeped in the disastrous management of the defunct regime, competent men who were patriots and morally irreproachable” (Dia 2013, 146). My thanks to Jonathan Sears for the reference.

very nature of UN peacekeeping to the extent that it challenges its principles and operating procedures. As an innovation, the unit is faced with the traditional operational constraints of peacekeeping. For example, ASIFU recommendations for action cannot all necessarily be implemented given the national restrictions of the contributing countries and the mandate parameters. Because Barkhane does not have the same operational constraints, it can operate where MINUSMA cannot. This could partly explain that exchanges of information were confirmed between MINUSMA and Barkhane (United Nations 2016; Interview, soldier, Paris, April 15, 2016). Such intelligence sharing calls into question the impartiality of the UN mission.

MINUSMA must first define the type of information it wants, ought to collect and for what purpose (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, February 7, 2017). The Information Collection Plan comes from the command of the military force (U2) but is operationalized by ASIFU which formulates the questions. There does not seem to be any consensus on the type of information that should be prioritized, or more specifically, which of the armed signatory groups (GAS) or armed terrorist groups (GAT) should be targeted. For the moment, the priority seems to be collecting intelligence that could prevent combat between the GAS in order to contribute to the peace process (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 1, 2017). Officially, very little information is gathered regarding GAT, as this would come under the Barkhane Operation, which is responsible for counterterrorism (see next section).

There is also the issue of the level of information that should be gathered and prioritized: should ASIFU focus on the strategic, operational or tactical level? ASIFU commanders prefer their mission to emphasize the broad analysis of trends over time, of strategic analyses for the benefit of mission leadership. In the peacekeeping context, however, this approach competes with the mission of the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC; under civilian command). In practice, ASIFU focusses increasingly on the operational and tactical levels.

Coordination between ASIFU and JMAC is minimal according to their respective members. The competition between the two units is an open secret. ASIFU is under military command while JMAC is integrated into the civilian component of the mission. Data is not shared, the analyses are not always shared, and each unit encroaches on the other's territory (Rietjens and Waard 2017). JMAC members feel that they are barely heard (Interviews, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 10, 2017). As of this writing, ASIFU is not integrated into the mission although the unit is currently in the process of being integrated into Force command for January 2018. This will undoubtedly accelerate the current trend of concentrating on tactical information, risking to further cut ties with the political mission (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 7, 2017).

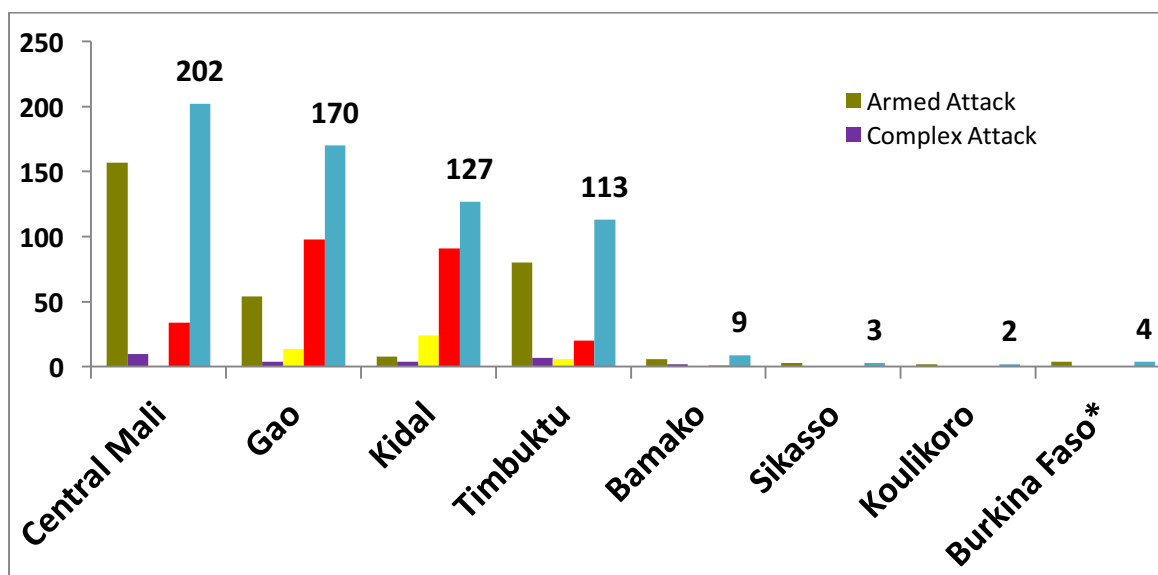
It is very difficult to judge ASIFU's effectiveness or contribution to the mission, given the unit's nature and function. Nonetheless, on the one hand, the innovation that ASIFU brings to peacekeeping transforms the identity, objective and implementation of peacekeeping operations. Indeed, the problem of sharing (or not) information and analyses with the Force's members, with Barkhane or any other partners, as well as

pressure to act on the basis thereof, has definitely challenged the operating procedures, relations between troop contributing countries and the impartiality of UN troops. On the other hand, if ASIFU still seems incapable of giving a clear answer to the question “Who is who?” in Mali—that is to identify the actors of the conflict (Interviews, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 10, 2017)—one must ask what the unit brings that the JMAC does not already offer, given the effects of ASIFU on the nature, legitimacy and impartiality of the mission.⁶

ASIFU and JMAC produce a great deal of confidential information and analyses but both units lament that this does not lead to specific action on the part of the mission. As a superior officer of MINUSMA stated, an intelligence-based approach must be proactive, “which means having the capabilities, flexibility, movement, [and] freedom to act.” Instead, “we wait on logistical support” (Interview, MINUSMA, Feb.1, 2017).

This new intelligence gathering capacity has not prevented MINUSMA from being one of the most dangerous and deadly operations (see the tables below). For a so-called “robust” operation, which is presumably at war (Karlsrud 2015), it struggles to protect its own troops who are regularly the target of attacks. MINUSMA is perceived by its personnel, as a disorganized mission that is not integrated, “in complete disarray”, “a mess and the quintessence of the UN’s problems”, essentially immobile in the north, focussed on protecting its force eighty percent of the time and having “no impact” (seven different interviews, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 2017).

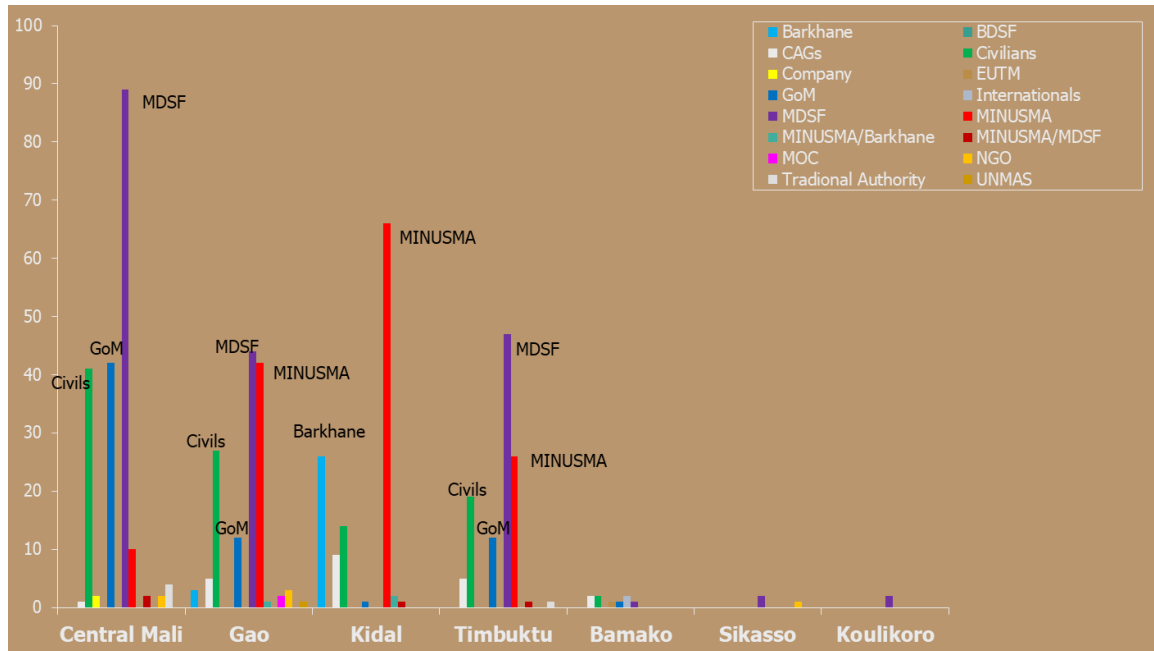
Terrorist attacks, per region



Source : MINUSMA

⁶ The members of JMAC I met with all spoke French, whereas this was not the case with members of ASIFU. The latter were apparently informed by their respective national commands, prior to their deployment, that knowledge of French was not necessary to the mission. These same ASIFU members described this as a “total lie” (a number of interviews, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 2017).

Targets of attacks



Source : MINUSMA

MINUSMA's dangerous situation occasionally leads to appreciating Barkhane: "It is very fortunate that they are here!" (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, Jan. 31, 2017). Barkhane prevents MINUSMA from "suffering heavy losses" (Interview, Paris, April 18, 2016). In many regards, to the extent that the concept of "robustness" refers to the use of force for protecting the force and mandate, the MINUSMA "robust" posture is ensured by the French military force.

Division of labour and Operation Barkhane

Too frequently, MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane are analysed separately, thus ignoring an important variable in the tensions between the constraints of peacekeeping and counter-terrorist actions (Charbonneau 2017b). Yet, MINUSMA comes from the 2013 French military initiative, Operation Serval, and its work continues to be shaped by Barkhane military activities and French political initiatives (like the Franco-African efforts for the creation of a G5 Sahel counter-terrorist force). In other words, the counter-terrorist strategies of France in the Sahel region, of the Sahel G5 countries, and of the European Union, in particular, have consequences and impose limits on MINUSMA.

In many respects, Barkhane is the exit strategy of Operation Serval (Interview, researcher, Paris, April 19, 2016). Instigated in January 2013, Serval was a short-term stabilization operation that was to establish the security conditions necessary for MINUSMA's deployment and work (Interview, French military personnel, Paris, April 15, 2016). Serval had no political mandate. All it was supposed to do was establish the political conditions for making conflict resolution possible. Since the security situation

was never stabilized, making retreat seemingly impossible or irresponsible, the French government declared Serval's success and end by restructuring its military posture in Africa towards the Sahel and around Operation Barkhane (Charbonneau 2017a).

So, officially, Barkhane is the military component of a "new strategic approach" which has regionalized the resources of Franco-African military cooperation. It "rests on a logic of partnership...[and] its first priority is to promote the appropriation by the G5 Sahel partner countries of the struggle against the Armed Terrorist Groups (GAT), on the entire Sahel-Saharan zone" (Ministry of Defense 2015). It therefore aims to prevent the restoration of terrorist sanctuaries and to help with the construction of a "collective security process" in the Sahel-Saharan region.⁷ Barkhane is made up of 3,500 French soldiers, approximately 20 helicopters, 200 light vehicles and 200 armoured vehicles, 6 to 10 support aircraft, 4-6 fighter aircraft and 5 drones, all deployed over two permanent bases in Gao and N'Djamena and a number of "relay platforms" distributed in the region. Soon, the drones will be armed (Alonso 2017; Vilmer 2017). Its capacity is intended to allow permanent and simultaneous operations. According to the French, Barkhane is a post-Serval regional response to a problem characterized as transnational. The structure is said to respond to a triple logic: 1) partnership with the G5 Sahel; 2) support for MINUSMA; and 3) adaptation of the military response to a transnational threat.

The Barkhane mission must be understood over the long term, if not as a permanent military apparatus. It is a matter of "cutting the lawn," as the military expression goes; it is about containing a terrorist threat that cannot be totally eradicated and always comes back (Guichaoua 2015). Barkhane is also the military aspect of a European strategy to manage the "flow" of illegal immigrants and illicit trafficking (drugs, narcotics, weapons, etc.) coming from the Sahel and which could destabilize Europe, according to officials in Brussels and elsewhere (four interviews, Paris and Brussels, April 2016; two interviews, European Union, Bamako, Feb. 2017; see also Dworkin 2016; Lavallée and Volkel 2015).

The Centre FrancoPaix report by Emmanuel Goffi (2017) concludes that "Barkhane has reached its limits" and that its "[military] effectiveness...is seriously burdened by the lack of a clearly defined political strategy". The statement by President Emmanuel Macron that French forces will stay until the terrorists have been eradicated foreshadows a permanent military intervention posture in the Sahel that MINUSMA will have to put up with (Charbonneau 2017a).

The MINUSMA mandate provides a legal cover to Barkhane operations. Since the Licorne intervention in Ivory Coast, the French government has been actively seeking international legal legitimacy to justify its military operations in Africa (Goffi and Bouterin 2011; Bannelier and Christakis 2013). The tactical doctrine of the French army

⁷ This rhetoric of a new strategic approach based on partnership, appropriation and support for the construction of African capacities is not new. Already in 1960, Jacques Foccart used the same words to justify continuous French military presence in Africa despite the countries' independence. These narratives are part of the long history of Franco-African military cooperation that was born of decolonization (Charbonneau 2008; Granvaud 2009).

states: “the law of armed conflict considers terrorist actions as an illegal method of combat. This means that the Force is legally protected in its coercive actions against terrorists” (Army 2010, 17). By defining Barkhane’s targets as terrorists, the French army interprets international law as a legitimate justification for the use of force. By associating MINUSMA with French military operations, as Mateja Peter writes (2015, 355), “the Security Council in essence authorized an intervention brigade, just not under UN command”.

In other words, MINUSMA’s robust posture is largely provided by the Barkhane force, while the latter is authorized by MINUSMA’s robust mandate without being under UN command. This division of labour therefore offers legal coverage to the Barkhane operation and saves MINUSMA the trouble of having to justify the use of force. This is not without consequences for the conflict resolution efforts.

In the context of a permanent French military presence in the Sahel authorized by the Security Council,⁸ the MINUSMA force seeks to produce “joint effects” (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 1, 2017). The mandate does not allow for joint operations with Barkhane, but authorizes Barkhane’s support to the UN mission while “*Reaffirming* the basic principles of peacekeeping, including consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force, except in self-defence and defence of the mandate” (CSNU 2017, 1).

In practice, reaffirming these fundamental principles is not sufficient, nor is it simple. MINUSMA’s “robust” posture must be directed, particularly, towards the objectives of supporting state authority and the peace process. Support to state authority necessarily contradicts or at least challenges the principles of consent of the parties and especially, the principle of impartiality. There is strong consensus around the promotion of re-establishing state authority as a solution to the conflict, at least among the international stakeholders and a number of researchers (Sears 2017). To do this, whether it is the people from MINUSMA or Barkhane, there is consensus on the fact “that we must go in”, “that the country must be cleaned up” in order to create a secure space for dialogue, the peace process and the reconstruction or transformation of the Malian state (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 9, 2017). This consensus does not mean that the UN should do the “cleaning”. The partners must do it, hence the “division of labour” between MINUSMA and Barkhane and, perhaps eventually, the G5 Sahel force.

From the perspective of French military officers, the division is clear:

The division of labour is clear between MINUSMA and Barkhane. It is totally complementary. From the outside, everything seems ambiguous even though everything is clear. The duplicity of some actors does not call into question our respective missions. Both

⁸ Describing the French military presence as permanent is not an exaggeration, despite the repeated declarations that “France has no vocation to stay.” The French military never left the African continent after decolonization and Barkhane is planning to stay for the next 15 to 20 years, according to French military personnel.

missions help FAMAs [Malian Armed Forces] to take back lost territory (Interview, New York, 9 mars 2017).

The French army “targets people who are operational in terrorist actions and who have documented ties. When there are proven operational ties, you can be targeted” (Interview, French diplomat, Bamako, Feb. 2, 2017). Even if this is the case, the division of labour is not as simple, as it must always assume the ability or capacity to distinguish GAS members from GAT members. This distinction is problematic in Mali (Boutellis and Zahar 2017; Charbonneau and Jourde 2016; Sandor 2017). Porosity between groups is likely to continue as long as the peace process does not succeed (Interview, researcher, Paris, April 15, 2016).

The “division of labour” results in situations that are recognized as at the least problematic, but whose lessons seem difficult to integrate in practice. For example, the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) must avoid terrorist infiltration while relying “a great deal on local information” despite the UN verification process (Interview, MINUSMA, Bamako, Feb. 7, 2017). Another example is the MINUSMA mandate to support the redeployment of Mali’s defense and security forces. The latter cooperate on a bilateral basis with Barkhane, particularly in the struggle against terrorism, thus placing the division of labour before its contradictions.

The division of labour between MINUSMA and Barkhane resolves the legal aspects of intervention in Mali for both forces. MINUSMA can state that it is maintaining its impartiality and Barkhane receives legal legitimacy from the Security Council. However, the division of labour separates and creates a distance between practices on the ground, strategic and political considerations, and Malian perceptions of the international intervention. Although MINUSMA looks like a stabilization operation and adopts a robust posture, it is, in fact, ineffective and vulnerable with regard to the security situation. However, through its mandate, it grants the Barkhane force a “license to kill in the Sahel” (Bigot 2015).

The counter-terrorism question

Who is the enemy in Mali? Who are Barkhane’s targets? What are the targets of the robust force? These questions are crucial. They highlight not only the problems in identifying the actors in Mali, but also the underlying premises that legitimize the use of international violence. First, there are multiple problems distinguishing terrorists from non-terrorists in Mali, which the Department of Peacekeeping Operations acknowledged in 2015:

In practice, distinguishing between ‘terrorist’ and ‘non-terrorist’ groups may be difficult – not least in Mali – given the fluidity of allegiances between transnational ‘terrorist’ groups and autochthonous groups with local grievances. Belonging to a so-called terrorist group may also be a seasonal activity, or be driven by limited livelihood alternatives, raising questions over whether individuals purported to belong to such groups can or should be considered ‘terrorists’. Labelling individuals or groups as terrorists in itself can be used as a

political strategy to undermine credibility, weaken grievances, and limit their participation in negotiated solutions to conflict (UN DPKO 2015)

The problem arises in part from the disputed nature of the very concept of “terrorism”. “Terrorism” and “terrorist” are not stable categories. As Lisa Stampnitzky (2013) states, the concept of terrorism is imbued with moral judgement regarding violence that is deemed intolerable.⁹ This is a judgement that inscribes the limits of state authority and legitimate violence. Regardless of the political cause defended, the objectives sought or the causes of the conflict, the label “terrorist” immediately authorizes the use of violence by the state against “terrorists”. Combined with the concept of “war”, as in the “war against terrorism”, the language of war becomes indiscernible from “a broader strategy to legitimize violence” which in turn restricts if not excludes non-military alternatives for countering terrorism (Mégret 2002, 364).

This is not an academic question. The emphasis placed on the terrorist threat in Mali may distort the analyses of the conflict (Shurkin, Pezard and Zimmerman 2017), just as the threat may be overlooked in the peace process (Boutellis et Zahar 2017). In Mali, the links, for example, between the GAS and GAT are not clear and are the topics of major debates (Sandor 2017). The Bamako government does not always differentiate between jihadists and Tuareg rebels, implying that they are essentially the same thing (Interviews, Bamako, Feb. 2017; see also Guichaoua 2017). Since the start of the mission, Bamako has asked MINUSMA to impose the rule of law and to fight the “terrorists” in the north (Nougayrède and Châtelot 2012). As a member of the government said: “the UN should do its job and destroy these terrorists” (Interview, Bamako, April 8, 2015). A narrative of vengeance against the insurgents and the terrorists from the north, without distinction, remains alive and well in Bamako (International Crisis Group 2015).

The question of identifying the enemy is therefore very sensitive politically. It is directly tied to the possibilities of resolving the conflict as it authorizes who can participate in the resolution process. The Malian government will probably never agree to an autonomous Azawad or “northern Mali”, much less an independent country, especially if the people in the north are associated with terrorists. Peacekeeping operations have always had to manage *spoilers*; those actors who sabotage or interfere in the peace processes in order to undermine or take advantage of them and thus maximise their interests. The terrorist may be conceived as an exceptional type of *spoiler*, except that the categorization as “terrorist” defines him or her as an illegitimate actor against whom force is always legitimate and authorized.

It is not MINUSMA’s mandate to define the enemy. Peacekeeping is distinct from other types of military operations due particularly to the fact that it does not designate an enemy (Levine 2014). This is defined elsewhere: New York, Paris, Bamako and beyond;

⁹ We have only to observe the debate in Mali on whether or not Iyad Ag Ghali ought to be included in the peace talks to see the difference this type of judgement makes, although he is identified by the international forces as being a terrorist. Whether or not he would be prepared to dialogue, negotiate or lay down arms is an entirely different matter.

through the peace process and outside of it. That being said, identifying the enemy as a “terrorist” in Mali results in significant consequences for the mission.

Conflict resolution and management in Mali

From the perspective of the international intervention in Mali, emphasis has clearly been placed on the threat posed by terrorist groups in the Sahel (Charbonneau and Jourde 2016, Erforth 2015, Shurkin, Pezard and Zimmerman 2017; Wing 2013). This emphasis produces an implicit policy program of actions that promote military and security solutions to the detriment of development or other solutions that could lead to the resolution of the conflict. (Michailof 2015, Richmond and Tellidis 2012). And yet, all the stakeholders that I met with and interviewed, whether international or Malian, acknowledged that the problems in Mali go well beyond terrorism.

Nonetheless, in Mali, counter-terrorism is conceived as the necessary condition and prerequisite for peacekeeping. The division of labour between MINUSMA and Barkhane is, in other words, a division between (political) conflict resolution and (military) conflict management. Barkhane manages the violence in order to create the political space for MINUSMA (and other international partners) to work for conflict resolution. However, as shown by the peace and conflict literature, conflict management is often an obstacle to their resolution as it suppresses the motivations or pressures on actors to resolve their conflict (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2016).

For example, the various points of view regarding DDR objectives and the reforms of the Malian army vary depending on judgments expressed about the insurgents/terrorists. Overall, within the Malian government, there is a more detailed and rich knowledge of the actors that goes beyond the dichotomies between the good and the bad, the terrorists and the other. The same government must also cooperate with international actors. Cooperation and coordination are possible where interests converge. This sort of coordination or convergence is, unfortunately, fragmentary. Hence, incentives to implement the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Accords are weak and often conflicting with a political economy that feeds on international commitments. The very significant financial investments supporting the peace process make the status quo appealing. The process thus becomes more important than the purpose.

Moreover, the growing militarization of international engagement and the proliferation of military actors in Mali and the Sahel (Reeve and Pelter 2014), with Barkhane potentially strengthened to 5,000 soldiers (Guibert 2017), a growing US military involvement (Okeowo 2017, Schmitt 2017), the creation of the G5 Sahel force and, possibly, the deployment of a Senegalese quick reaction force within MINUSMA (Jeune Afrique 2017), highlight the problem of international and regional coordination in managing the conflict. Even more importantly, it consolidates and performs the binary division between legitimate actors and terrorists to the detriment of understanding and solving the political problems: which peace for Mali, which state, which political regime and what foundation for building the Malian nation?

In principle, this militarization is not very useful for answering these questions, just as it will not be used for imposing peace on Mali beyond pursuing “terrorists”, because that would involve war, potentially for all actors involved. The MINUSMA-Barkhane military posture is largely confined to containing the effects of the conflict. The impact on the peace process is therefore limited, if not counter-productive. The absence of state administration, army and government officials in the northern part of the country is in part filled by the presence of blue helmets, French soldiers and soon soldiers of the G5 Sahel. Therefore, there is no urgency or incentive in the short term for the Malian state to establish its authority in the north of Mali. Moreover, the foreign military presence justifies and validates the narratives of all parties (including the Malian state and the GAS) regarding a war against terrorism. This creates a vicious circle: the international military presence authorizes its intervention on the dual basis of the Malian conflict and its “terrorist” roots and makes itself a necessary condition for restoring the Malian state, while its very presence undermines the return of the Malian state. It is not surprising that French generals claim that they will be in Mali and the Sahel for the next 15 to 20 years (Guibert 2017). Nor is it surprising that the representatives of the Malian state complain about the violation of their sovereignty (Interview, Malian diplomat, August 2017).

In this context, when international and national interests coincide with the use of the “terrorist” conceptual framework, a relatively smooth window of cooperation appears. This relative ease in finding common ground makes it all the more difficult to ask the critical questions, and even harder to answer them. At the core is the thorny issue of the distinction and identification of the legitimate parties with which it is possible to make peace, and those with whom the only option is war. Taking into account the historical experience of Mali’s administrative and political elites means considering that there is, was and will be a significant overlap between the various groups of armed actors. (Sandor 2017; Sears 2017).

The extent to which international actors can ostensibly impose their “war against terrorism” analytical framework must be taken seriously, but without ignoring the agency of the Malian state and other Malian actors in adopting, resisting or adapting to this framework. In the various sectors of Malian administration and government, there are different assessments of the problems and of the solutions to be put in place (Baudais 2016). Even if everyone agrees that the problems in Mali go beyond the threat of terrorism, there is no consensus on the significant needs, the necessary reforms or the road map to follow. How can there be negotiation or the forming of a consensus if the “war against terrorism” framework prevents debate?

Beyond the peace process, the question is about knowing the extent to which international interventions since 2012 have changed and will change the trajectories of Malian institutional and political development. The attempts at resolution, reconciliation and reform since 2013 are less ambitious than those of the 1990s. The “war against terrorism” imposes conditions of possibilities, that is, it prescribes a series of limits for resolving the Malian conflict, for reforming the state and the foundations of the Malian nation. These limits are based on forms of governance that are extraterritorial, internationalized and non-state-centric.

Conclusion and recommendations

The basic challenge is to determine what the use of international force in Mali is supposed to achieve or accomplish. The stabilization of Mali, to the extent that it is implemented by the UN or by Barkhane, redefines MINUSMA's purpose toward counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism. It might be said that UN peacekeeping should adjust to counterinsurgency or counter-terrorism (Boutellis and Fink 2016), but such a move would inevitably cross the line separating peacekeeping from other types of military operations. Stabilization in Mali places the mission in a particular position, caught between its mandate as an impartial mediator and that of supporting the reestablishment of state authority (Karlsrud 2015).

As Rhoads wrote, the principle of impartiality in peacekeeping is a form of authority that enables peacekeepers to judge and to act on the basis of this judgement without prejudice, preference or special interest (Rhoads 2016, 25-26). If a mission's impartiality is called into question, so is its authority. The debates over the changes to be made or not to the principles and practices of UN peacekeeping operations (see Daniel 2017; Hunt 2017; Mégret 2015; Rudolf 2017) are in part founded on a particular understanding of conflict violence as illegitimate, criminal or immoral. Where the language of war against terrorism is used to explain violence, there is little interest in addressing the root causes of conflicts or reaching a compromise (Luckham 2017; Richmond and Franks 2009). Within this framework, the use of force thus becomes a non-political act, perceived as impartial as long as the force aims to protect civilians and save the (innocent) victims of illegitimate, criminal or immoral violence.

In Mali, the terrorist question has much weight in discussions about the conflict and the possibilities of resolution (Charbonneau 2017b; Shurkin, Pezard and Zimmerman 2017; Wing 2013). The emphasis placed on the terrorist challenge takes away MINUSMA's capacity for impartial judgement to the benefit of the stakeholders who designate and identify the terrorists. When MINUSMA participates in this identification, as when ASIFU develops "target packages" (Karlsrud 2017, 1224), it greatly undermines its own capacity to resolve the conflict by becoming an actor in the conflict.

So, the problem is not that MINUSMA is robust and that it is permitted to use force. The use of force can be impartial, after the necessary judgment for its legitimate use. This is what distinguishes peacekeeping from other military operations (Levine 2014). The problem stems from the fact that the prism of the war against terrorism cancels its impartiality and thus its authority as an impartial actor and guarantor of the peace process.

On the basis of the analysis, we recommend that MINUSMA strive to regain its impartiality. To so do:

- MINUSMA must be disassociated from Operation Barkhane, or the French forces must be integrated into the UN command. The integration of the French forces

- into the UN command, although unlikely at this point, would serve to limit war operations.
- MINUSMA and its partners must stop emphasizing the war against terrorism in order to focus on the fundamental political questions at the core of the conflict (see Sandor 2017; Sears 2017). The groups and individuals identified as “terrorists” can be considered as *spoilers*. The issue of spoilers is complicated, but the UN has experience in this regard and the concept is not as prejudicial as that of terrorist.
 - MINUSMA’s capacities for preventing or mitigating the effects of terrorist *acts* must be reinforced but must not participate in a war against terrorism. In the latter case, if the French and African forces continue this war, an exit strategy for MINUSMA must be considered.

These recommendations are at the strategic and diplomatic levels, which make their implementation very difficult, if not impossible. Yet, they seem essential for resolving the conflict in Mali rather than encouraging the ongoing militarization of a region.

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About the Centre FrancoPaix

Following the 15th Francophonie Summit and the Resolution on crisis situations, crisis resolution and peacebuilding in the French-speaking world, the Raoul-Dandurand Chair in Strategic and Diplomatic Studies set up the Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix (in conflict resolution and peace missions) in order to support the strategic objectives of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) in conflict prevention and management.

Inaugurated in January 2016 with the financial support of the OIF, the mission of the Centre FrancoPaix includes:

- The promotion of scientific research and university training in French in the field of peace and conflict studies, in particular conflict resolution, conflict management and peace missions;
- The promotion of scientific research and university training about conflict resolution and conflict management in French-speaking countries, particularly in Africa;
- The production and diffusion of scientific research that focuses on conflict resolution and peace operations, particularly through knowledge production activities with policymakers and practitioners in the field;
- Enabling intellectual exchanges and the flow of knowledge by promoting mobility, innovation and collaboration between institutions, university researchers and students from the “Global North” and the “Global South”.

The Centre FrancoPaix in Conflict Resolution and Peace missions aims to promote scientific research, academic training and the development of conflict resolution research in the Francophonie. The CFP is funded in part by the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

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