

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 24 December 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the concept note for the fifth thematic discussion of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations in 2015, held on 31 July, on the theme “The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA): a ‘peacekeeping operation’ within a counter-terrorism setting” (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex were brought to the attention of the members of the Security Council and issued as a document of the Council.

(Signed) Mahamat Zene **Cherif**
Chair

Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations



Annex to the letter dated 24 December 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Concept note for the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations thematic discussion on the theme “The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali: a ‘peacekeeping operation’ within a counter-terrorism setting”, 31 July 2015

On 31 July 2015, Chad, as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, will hold a thematic discussion on “The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA): a ‘peacekeeping operation’ within a counter-terrorism setting”. The discussion will bring together Security Council members and a broad range of Member States, including countries involved in efforts to stabilize Mali. Dmitry Titov, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Smaïl Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, Mick Lorentzen, Director of the Division of Regional Operations of the Department of Safety and Security, Alexis Lamek, Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, and Sékou Kassé, Permanent Representative of Mali to the United Nations, have been invited to brief the Working Group.

Context

The Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was signed recently by the Malian Government and the main armed movements present in the north of the country.^a This political agreement represents yet another important step on the way to sustainable peace in Mali. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which has been deployed in Mali since April 2013, played an important role in the process leading to the signing of this agreement and is expected to play an equally important role in its implementation.

In spite of these advances on the political front, Mali is still facing very serious security issues. Indeed, a number of terrorist^b and criminal groups are operating in the northern part of the country, while formerly stable regions in central and southern Mali are now also affected by insecurity. Furthermore, the capital city, Bamako, is also under the growing threat of terrorist attacks.^c Guerrilla operations, suicide attacks, car bombings and incidents involving improvised explosive devices are increasingly frequent occurrences in various parts of the country. The asymmetric threats posed by these groups seriously jeopardize hard-earned gains.

^a On 20 June 2015, the Agreement was signed by the Coordination des mouvements de l’Azawad, an umbrella group of separatist movements, marking the start of implementation.

^b The list established and updated by the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities indicates that there are 24 entities associated with Al-Qaida in Africa, including 7 that are active in Mali.

^c Five persons died in an attack perpetrated by an armed group on a restaurant in the heart of Bamako on 7 March 2015 and an important weapons cache was subsequently found in the capital city, raising fears of sleeper cells.

The total number of casualties from hostile acts since the beginning of MINUSMA deployment amounts to 42 peacekeepers killed and 166 wounded. Improvised explosive devices represent the main security threat for MINUSMA personnel, with such devices being responsible for more than 60 per cent of the dead and more than 90 per cent of the wounded. However, there is an increasing trend of more sophisticated attacks, such as ambushes and vehicle-borne suicide attacks. More worrying than the figures are the trends: of the 61 improvised explosive device incidents reported during the period from January to May 2015, nearly half targeted or had an impact on MINUSMA. Alongside MINUSMA troops, United Nations civilian personnel are also subject to collateral risks, since extremist groups identified the United Nations as one of their strategic targets. It is fair to state that currently the context in which MINUSMA is deployed is one of the most unstable for a United Nations peacekeeping operation.

Mali: a peacekeeping or a peace enforcement setting?

Against this backdrop, some start to question whether Mali still qualifies as a peacekeeping environment when there is so little peace to keep. In its report entitled “Uniting our strengths for peace: politics, partnership and people” (see A/70/95-S/2015/446), the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations differentiated between peace implementation and conflict management mandates/settings. Arguably, MINUSMA is tooled with a peace implementation mandate, but it is deployed in a conflict management setting. This discrepancy poses serious problems because the concepts, tools, mission structures and doctrine developed for peace implementation are ill-suited for such conflict management environments.

Terrorist and criminal groups such as those operating in Mali thrive in unstable settings. Therefore, it is not surprising to see terrorist and criminal groups collaborating on an ad hoc basis. Their ideology and the profits they gain from trafficking make them less amenable to peace talks. They therefore tend to consider peace efforts as a threat and are much less inclined to embark on political processes and peace negotiations. The blurred lines between terrorist and criminal groups make it difficult to determine if the threats directed towards MINUSMA are ideologically or criminally motivated.

Operation Barkhane — which succeeded Operation Serval, launched in January 2013 — is deployed by France in order to neutralize terrorist elements operating in the Sahel region, including in Mali. Operation Barkhane is mandated to carry out counter-terrorism tasks and it is — along with the Malian defence and security forces — on the frontline of the fight against such groups.

The European Union Training Mission in Mali, launched on 18 February 2013, is in charge of training the Malian defence and security forces in order to help them to regain authority over the national territory and neutralize spoilers. Since 15 January 2015, the European Union has been deploying the European Union Capacity-Building Mission in Mali, aimed at reforming the police, gendarmerie and national guard of Mali.

For its part, MINUSMA is not engaged in offensive counter-terrorism operations. Since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2227 (2015) on 29 June 2015, it has been mandated to support, monitor and supervise the implementation of the ceasefire arrangements; support the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali; exercise good offices, confidence-

building and facilitation at the national and local levels; protect civilians and stabilize the key population centres; promote and protect human rights; contribute to the creation of a secure environment for projects aimed at stabilizing the north; protect United Nations personnel, notably uniformed personnel, and installations and equipment; and assist the Malian authorities in protecting from attack the cultural and historical sites in Mali. MINUSMA nonetheless evolves alongside — and at times collaborates with, even if not for offensive operations — Operation Barkhane and the Malian defence and security forces. Furthermore, its mandate includes tasks such as the protection of civilians and of United Nations personnel, which may require preventive actions that could be linked indirectly to counter-terrorism and peace enforcement.

The impacts of the violent setting on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

If the debate on whether Mali should or should not be considered a peacekeeping environment remains open, it is impossible to deny the very concrete impacts that asymmetric threats have on every aspect of the Mission's mandate.

Operational impacts

Asymmetric threats harm the operational effectiveness of MINUSMA mainly by restricting the capacity and the willingness of uniformed and non-uniformed personnel alike to move out of their bases. As a result, it diminishes the occurrence of interactions between mission staff and local actors and endangers the implementation of crucial mandated tasks, such as the protection of civilians and ceasefire monitoring. Asymmetric threats also endanger logistical supply chains, jeopardizing the capacity of MINUSMA to hold on to or to conduct patrols in certain remote areas. Lastly, this kind of threat tends to increase the number of operational caveats put forward by the contingents already deployed.

Political impacts

Operational difficulties usually have political consequences, and the aforementioned operational impacts of asymmetric threats on MINUSMA can — and, to a certain extent, already do — undermine the credibility of the Mission in the eyes of the local populations and of some of the groups involved in the political process. Furthermore, such threats also discourage Member States from contributing troops to the Mission, owing to the degradation of the security situation.

Financial impacts

Asymmetric threats entail measures that prove expensive, such as protection measures. They also require training — for instance, on how to deal with improvised explosive devices — and specialized equipment for the personnel on the ground, while furthering the need for costly enablers for Mission-support activities, such as aircraft for personnel transport or casualty and medical evacuations. At times, asymmetric threats force MINUSMA to consider the redeployment of mission assets to safer areas. Lastly, such threats often result in the destruction of infrastructure and equipment.

The way forward

The Security Council has an important role to play in supporting MINUSMA in adapting to the security hardships that the Mission faces in Mali. Open for debate are a number of recommendations the Council could consider:

(a) Intensify consultations with the Mission's actual and potential troop-contributing countries and police-contributing countries in order to find effective and innovative ways to strengthen capacities and increase their interoperability;

(b) Ensure that the rules of engagement and the concept of operations of MINUSMA are well understood by all troop-contributing countries and police-contributing countries, as well as the risks of deploying personnel on the ground. Military contingents and police units should be ready to respond to complex security situations: caveats should be as limited as possible and they should be communicated to the Force Commander in a timely manner;

(c) Encourage bilateral and multilateral initiatives aimed at training and equipping the Malian defence and security forces for asymmetric environments, including in counter-terrorism operations;

(d) Encourage bilateral and multilateral initiatives aimed at training and equipping actual and future MINUSMA military contingents and police units for asymmetric environments;

(e) Support regional initiatives aimed at improving the security situation, including with counter-terrorism tasks, through the Nouakchott Process on the enhancement of security cooperation and the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan region;

(f) Further increase the focus of the Mission's political efforts to improve the political conditions in Mali in order to try to move the situation from a conflict management to a peace implementation context;

(g) Step up efforts to better communicate with the Malian population the clear division of labour and the distinction of roles between MINUSMA and the other international actors involved in security-related tasks in Mali, most notably Operation Barkhane, and the Malian defence and security forces;

(h) Further increase the awareness of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the financial impacts of the Malian setting on the Mission's budgetary needs;

(i) Further engage with the Government of Mali on ways to develop internal capacity to address present and future security challenges in a post-MINUSMA environment.