

THE UN MISSION IN MALI: A BRIEFING PAPER

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This is a briefing paper on the effect of the current intervention in Mali, which was a response to the rebellion of 2012 in the Northern regions. Any peacekeeping operation consists of the context, local armed groups, and the intervention (International Alert, 2004). The success of an intervention is related to its effectiveness in establishing a dialogue between the conflicting parties; moreover, an intervention is considered successful if it achieves to transform the behaviours of armed groups from conflictual to peaceful, and if this has a broader effect to society (Scheers, 2008). This briefing begins by presenting the context of the conflict, the armed groups, and the UN intervention. Subsequently the advantages and disadvantages of the intervention are assessed by analysing the negotiation process, its effect on conflict, and the consequences for reconstruction. It is found that the intervention was of low efficiency, and continuous conflict did not favour reconstruction.

Context, Armed Groups and the Intervention.

The north of Mali is significantly less privileged than the south in terms of state welfare, and security provision; as a result it is deeply impoverished (Dowd, 2015). The adverse climatological conditions of the North also make the region poor on resources able to support economic development, while also make it inadequate to attract investment in the long term (ibid). Furthermore, the borders to the north with Algeria, but also the ones to Niger, and Burkina Faso are ill formed, meaningless, and unguarded; the borders are ill formed because they disconnect the capital Bamako with the northern regions; meaningless, because the Northern tribes live on both sides of the borders; and unguarded, as the Malian state has no resources in terms of military and economic potential to enforce them (Cline, 2013).

The inhabitants of Northern Mali are Tuareg and Arab tribes, and there are deep divisions between and within these tribes; this is evident from the division between the Ifoghas and the Imghad of the Tuareg (Raineri, 2015). The poor economic conditions of the region drive some of the locals to join armed terrorist organizations, that are either driven by territorial goals, such as the MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad), or are terrorist Islamic organizations whose activities

concentrate on kidnapping, or illicit trafficking across the porous borders; such organizations currently include AQIM (Al Qaeda in the land of Maghreb), MUJAO (The movement of oneness and Jihad in West Africa), and Addis ad Dine. Terrorist groups are also divided; territorial terrorist groups such as MNLA, dislike and fight against Islamic terrorist organizations, such as AQIM (Christopoulos, 2015).

The mission of the UN, called United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), aims to coordinate a peacekeeping operation consisting of a number of partners, including the Malian government; the French Army; the African Union (AU); the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the European Union (EU); and individual countries of the Sahel region, most notably Algeria (MINUSMA, 2015a). The intervention has focused on uniting the two main conflicting tribes, which are the Ifoghas and the Imghad, and did not attempt to negotiate with radical Islamist organizations (MINUSMA, 2014c; MINUSMA, 2015h). The Ifoghas are represented in the peacekeeping negotiations by a conglomeration of territorial armed groups called “*coordination*” or CMA, which include MNLA; and the Imghad are represented by a different conglomeration called “*platform*” (Raineri, 2015).

Evaluation

Evaluating this peacekeeping operation will involve assessing the quality of negotiations and peace treaties organized by the UN, and estimating whether the behaviour of local armed groups has shifted as a result of those efforts (Sheers, 2008). Overall the history of the UN operation in Northern Mali was marked by a long series of low efficiency negotiations, and short-lived peace agreements; agreements were followed by conflict, which allowed little space for reconstruction.

Negotiations were usually not completed with a consensus between the conflicting parties; The 2nd round of negotiations taking place in Algiers, which finished on the 23d of September 2014 was such a case of unproductive talks; the Malian Government and the Platform were supportive to a regional model, and the Coordination argued strongly on a federal model for the administration of Mali (MINUSMA, 2014b). The same disagreement over federalism and regionalism continued to characterize the talks in Algeria; after the 4th round of negotiations completed in November 27, 2014, and in the negotiations launched in 16 February 2015, the agreement of the Malian government and the platform over regionalism and deployment of government troops in the north continued to be confronted by the insistence of the coordination on federalism, and the use of the name ‘Azawad’ for the northern regions (MINUSMA, 2015a). The stand of the coordination for federalism is reflective of the territorial interests of armed groups it involves, such as the MNLA.

Many times negotiations were held with representatives from either the ‘platform’ or the ‘coordination’ not participating; this has resulted to important peace treaties not being inclusive of all territorial armed groups, or being fragmented and ineffective. In the first round of negotiations in the 14th of July 2014 in Algiers the road map for the

cease of conflict was decided; however the legitimacy of the document was hurt by the fact that the delegates of the platform and the coordination rejected to discuss the terms with each other (MINUSMA, 2014a). Ineffective and partial ceasefire agreements span all the duration of the peacekeeping operation; for instance the 15th of May 2015 ceasefire agreement excluded the MNLA, which is one of the most important contributors to the coordination; it excluded other armed groups as well, but it was paradoxically characterized by the secretary general as “*a critical milestone in the inter-Malian dialogue*” (MINUSMA, 2015b). Meetings on the implementation of peace agreements were also not attended by the signatory parties; for instance on September 1st, 2015, the ‘coordination’ did not attend the first meeting of the program “security techniques” of the United Nations in protest against the fact that platform did not obey yet another ill formed ceasefire agreement agreed on the 20th of June 2015 (MINUSMA, 2015c).

Ceasefire agreements violations in all the duration of the negotiations further indicate their inefficiency; the 20th of June 2015 ceasefire agreement for instance, was brutally violated in the period from the 15th to the 17th of August, when armed groups from the coordination and platform engaged in armed conflict, and occupation of cities in the north of Mali (MINUSMA, 2015c). Generally, armed conflict, displacement, killing of innocent civilians, human rights violations, and use of child soldiers were all committed by the signatory parties of the ceasefire agreements, as well as from other armed groups (MINUSMA, 2014a; MINUSMA, 2014b; MINUSMA, 2014c; MINUSMA, 2015a; MINUSMA, 2015b; MINUSMA, 2015c; MINUSMA, 2015d; MINUSMA, 2015h).

Reconstruction

Poor security conditions were detrimental to the reconstruction process, which has not formally started (MINUSMA, 2015d; MINUSMA, 2016). Cantonment, as well as Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of armed groups was effectively stalled; the deteriorating security conditions also hindered the construction of the cantonment sites (MINUSMA, 2014a). The construction has not been successful until this day, and although the armed groups have proposed sites at late 2015, they have not yet provided lists of combatants for DDR (MINUSMA, 2015d; MINUSMA, 2016). It should be noted, however, that even if the groups do produce such lists, weapons will still be available to be bought from the black market (Christopoulos, 2015).

Success?

Violence between territorial armed groups was only most recently ceased for a 6 months reporting period; this was due to the successful direct negotiations between the coordination and the platform in Anéfis, in 27 September 2015 (MINUSMA, 2015d; MINUSMA, 2016). An optimist could argue that the UN mission’s coordinated meeting in Anéfis was successful in the melioration of the relations between the platform, and the coordination. However, many threats still persist;

poverty, lack of state services, and intercommunal fighting is still reported between the Ifoghas and the Imghad tribe; not to mention that the platform and coordination continues to employ child soldiers, and commit sex and human rights violations (ibid). One theme not explored extensively by this paper was the inability of the intervention till now to address the problem of Islamic terrorist groups, which were not included in the peace negotiations; Islamic terrorists (Addis ad Dine, AQIM, MUJAO) are a very real and undiminished threat; they have been reported to attack UN mission convoys usually using explosive devises, posing a direct threat to the reconstruction process (ibid).

As seen in *Table 1*, contrasting the number of lives of peacekeepers lost in Mali to other peacekeeping operations illustrates further the failure of the mission. In an 8 month period the rise of deaths of UN peacekeepers in Mali was the steepest in comparison to all other missions launched after 2010.

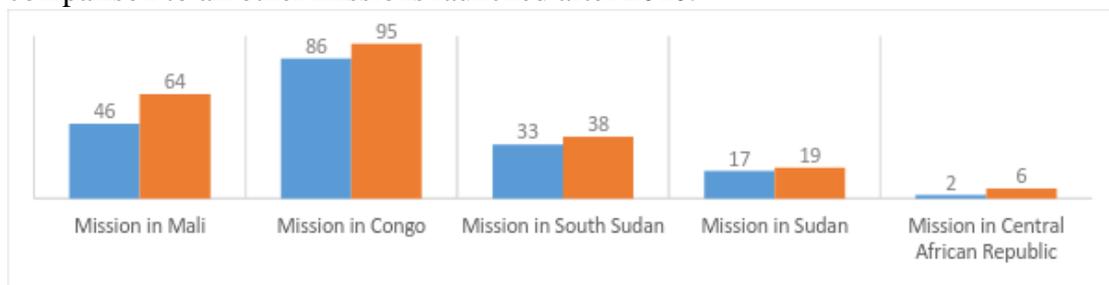


Table 1. Total UN mission¹ fatalities from 31 January 2015 (blue) to 31 August 2015 (orange). (MINUSMA, 2015e; MINUSMA, 2015g)

Conclusion

The mission succeeded in stopping the coordination and the platform from fighting each other, this however does not indicate a sound and well-coordinated intervention. Most of the negotiations were of poor quality; not followed by consensus; hardly ever direct; they were not inclusive enough to all the territorial armed groups; and they were always followed by violations which impeded the reconstruction process; evidently successful cantonment and DDR has not yet taken place. Presently that Islamist terrorists continue to operate; the society remains deeply divided between the Ifoghas and the Imghad tribe; and insecurity, unemployment, poverty, lack of basic services, banditry, and all sorts of human rights violations still persist. This analysis concludes that the intervention was to a large extent unsuccessful, costing the lives of peacekeepers, and not building effectively towards the reconstruction process that can improve social conditions.

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¹ This graph includes only peacekeeping missions of the UN that started after 2010 and the figures represent the total number of deaths since the launching of each mission respectively.

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