

Case Study 5

The Political Strategy of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Mali

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This case study was developed to inform *The Political Practice of Peacekeeping* by Adam Day, Aditi Gorur, Victoria K. Holt and Charles T. Hunt - a policy paper exploring how the UN develops and implements political strategies to address some of the most complex and dangerous conflicts in the world.

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In 2012, a crisis developed when secessionist armed groups took control over northern Mali and began moving toward the centre of the country, triggering a French military intervention. In response to the crisis, the Security Council authorized the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The mission was deployed when the situation in Mali was unstable, before a final comprehensive peace agreement had been signed, and the mission was initially consumed largely with operational matters. Nevertheless, the mission facilitated the holding of elections and supported an Algeria-led political process that ultimately brought about the signing of a peace agreement in 2015. The Algiers Agreement was hailed as a major turning point for the country and made the centrepiece of MINUSMA's political work, but the mission has struggled to support its implementation due to delays by the Malian Government and signatory armed groups. Moreover, the Agreement dealt with only a limited set of grievances and actors. In particular, it did not include groups designated as terrorist armed groups, which have continued to perpetrate violence in northern Mali, and did not address grievances in central Mali. In 2019, in response to high levels of violence in central Mali, the Security Council instructed MINUSMA to treat managing the violence in central Mali as a second strategic priority, alongside the implementation of the Algiers Agreement. Insecurity remains a very serious problem in Mali; at the time of writing of this study, Mali has just experienced a military coup in part driven by dissatisfaction over the president's security and governance record.

This study traces MINUSMA's political strategy as these developments unfolded—how it was developed, what factors shaped it and how it changed over time. It draws on a desk review of reports of the UN Secretary-General, UN Security Council resolutions, Mission Concepts and expert analysis. It also draws on interviews conducted with MINUSMA personnel in person in Bamako in August 2019 as well as interviews conducted with key informants remotely in May and June 2020.

The study begins with a brief background on the conflict in Mali and the events leading to the deployment of MINUSMA. It then analyses how the Security Council approached the development of MINUSMA's political mandate, focusing on three key points in time: the moment when the mission was first deployed to respond to the crisis in Mali in 2013, the moment when the parties to the conflict signed the Algiers Agreement in 2015 and the moment when the Security Council introduced an additional strategic priority for the mission to address rising threats in central Mali in 2019. These moments were selected as having prompted or marked significant change for the mission's political strategy. The study then analyses how mission leaders in the field developed a political strategy for MINUSMA, looking at the types of objectives they sought to achieve, the processes they used to formulate their strategies and how their strategies were supported by the UN Secretariat (particularly the Integrated Operational Teams or IOTs at the UN Department of Peace Operations that support missions from New York) and the Security Council. Finally, the study offers a brief summary of some key findings about political strategy that can be drawn from examining the Mali case.

I. Background

In 2012, a crisis engulfed Mali that took the world by surprise. Though it was a poor country and had experienced several uprisings by its Tuareg population in the recent past, it was not viewed by most outsiders as fragile or at high risk of violent conflict. Like many of its neighbours, Mali was a former French colony. In addition to exploiting Mali's wealth, French colonial rule had also set in motion divisions between south and north Mali by creating "a ruling class almost exclusively composed of majority black southerners."¹ After its independence in 1960, Mali was governed by a succession of autocratic leaders. Yet, since 1992, when the country held its first multiparty elections, Mali had been seen as a relatively stable democracy.

This stable appearance masked a very serious problem of poor governance and in 2012 several factors combined to turn that problem into a full-blown crisis. These factors included the marginalization of the Tuareg population and other minority groups that lived in the north and centre of the country; the absence of rule of law and governance mechanisms in the north of the country, which created room for violent extremist groups and a flourishing illicit trafficking network; and the movement of weapons and trained fighters into Mali in the aftermath of the 2011 crisis in Libya.

In January 2012, a Tuareg armed group called the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) led an effort to take control over parts of northern Mali, seeking to create an autonomous State as an alternative to the political repression and marginalization they had experienced from the Malian Government in Bamako. They were supported in their operations by temporary allies in the form of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa—groups that were broadly speaking motivated by the desire to impose

Islamic fundamentalist ideologies.² The Malian Government was unable to quash this rebellion and maintain control over northern Mali.

The weak State response led the population to lose confidence in the Government and the Malian army conducted a coup that removed President Amadou Toumani Touré from power. The northern coalition expanded its operations to control northern Mali and, in April 2012, announced the creation of the independent State of Azawad. The coalition then fell apart as the Islamist groups started to impose a fundamentalist interpretation of sharia law on unwilling populations in the towns they controlled. The Islamist groups took over MNLA-controlled towns and began to expand their territory further, moving toward central Mali.

These developments caught the Security Council off-guard and it hastened to respond. In July 2012, the Council adopted a resolution on Mali which identified the restoration of constitutional order, the protection of territorial integrity and countering terrorism as the major problems needing to be addressed in Mali.³ Discussions began about a regionally-led military intervention to respond to these problems. In August 2012, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) shared a concept paper with the Security Council for a regional military intervention in Mali. While some Council members, including France, supported this idea, others preferred to try "a more vigorous diplomatic effort towards the separatists in the north" first.⁴ Through the second half of 2012, debates continued at the Council about the nature of the military intervention by ECOWAS, the speed at which it should be authorized, whether a Council resolution should be under Chapter VII (Action with Respect to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace and Acts of Aggression), whether a UN Special Envoy for the Sahel should be appointed, and the legitimacy of the Malian



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transitional authorities and their authority to request such an intervention.⁵

Despite these disagreements, in December 2012, the Council authorized the African-Led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), with a mandate to “contribute to the rebuilding of the capacity of the Malian Defence and Security Forces ... support the Malian authorities in recovering the areas in the north of its territory under the control of terrorist, extremist and armed groups and in reducing the threat posed by terrorist organizations ... [and] support the Malian authorities in maintaining security

and consolidate State authority.”⁶ The same resolution also established the United Nations Office in Mali (UNOM), a small “multidisciplinary United Nations presence” tasked with supporting the security and political processes.⁷ In January 2013, at the request of the Malian authorities, France deployed a military intervention, dubbed Operation Serval, to contain and roll back the spread of violent extremist groups which had begun expanding into central Mali. Finally, in late April, the Security Council authorized MINUSMA to absorb UNOM and take over from AFISMA as of 1 July 2013.⁸



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II

Political Mandate in the Security Council

This section analyses how MINUSMA's political mandate was approached within the Security Council. It focuses its analysis on three key moments for the mission's political strategy: the initial deployment of the mission, the signing of the Algiers Agreement in 2015, and the introduction of a second strategic priority focused on central Mali in 2019. Although the mission has been controversial and provoked disagreement within the Council in several areas, these disagreements have largely been over matters of security, principle or finances (such as how robust the mission should be, how to clarify the line between peacekeeping and counter-terrorist efforts and whether the mission's outcomes justified its cost).

For the most part, the Council has been united on the political objectives the mission

should endeavour to meet. The Council has been very unified in its support for the Algiers Agreement as the framework for the mission's political engagement since 2015, despite the Agreement's considerable limitations. However, the Council's decisions have sometimes been influenced by France's interests in supporting its counter-terrorist mission in the region, and it has sometimes missed opportunities to pressure the Malian Government to implement its commitments under the Algiers Agreement. Over time, disagreement emerged between the US and France over whether and to what extent the mission should address the violence that emerged in central Mali, particularly after 2016. Although this was not the conflict with which the Council was originally concerned when it authorized MINUSMA in 2013, it became clear to the Council over time that it was a conflict

that could derail peace in Mali and one that the mission could not ignore. The section traces the discussions within the Council over MINUSMA's political mandate as these developments unfolded.

Firefighting (2013)

The African Union (AU), ECOWAS and the Malian authorities had requested that a UN peacekeeping operation should eventually take over from AFISMA. Council members agreed that a UN mission was needed, but disagreed over how quickly it should be authorized, where it should operate (largely in the north, or with a strong presence also in Bamako) and how robust or offensive its mandate should be, including against violent extremist groups.⁹ These negotiations were occurring at the same time as the Council authorized an offensive "Force Intervention Brigade" as part of MONUSCO, raising the prospect of a similar offensive force in Mali. One of the strongest voices in these discussions was France, which wanted to make sure a UN peacekeeping operation was in place to ensure that Operation Serval could withdraw without a lengthy deployment and without a relapse into violence.

In March 2013, the Secretary-General produced a report with two options for a UN mission in Mali: strengthening the existing political mission to operate alongside AFISMA, or authorizing a robust UN peacekeeping mission that would subsume UNOM and take over from AFISMA, and operate alongside a parallel counter-terrorism force.¹⁰

The Security Council preferred the second option, and negotiations began over the mandate of the peacekeeping mission. The Council was relatively united, but a few contentious issues emerged. One bloc of Member States, led by France, urged the transition to a UN mission as soon as possible, while another bloc, led by Russia, believed more time was needed to develop a clear assessment of the situation on the ground.¹¹ Russia, Argentina, Guatemala and Pakistan also called for a clearer elaboration of the mission's tasks and a reaffirmation of the basic principles of peacekeeping, both in an

effort to ensure that the mission would not be interpreted as a counter-terrorist mission or some other new and more offensive type of peacekeeping mission.¹² France advocated the concept that there would be a clear division of labour, with the mission securing population centres and protecting civilians in the north and Serval conducting counter-terrorist operations, but many Member States were concerned about the risk that the mission's operations would creep toward counter-terrorism.¹³

In late April, the Security Council authorized the MINUSMA. The mission's original mandate listed the stabilization of key population centres and support for the reestablishment of State authority throughout the country as the mission's first task. The second task in the mandate was for the mission to support the implementation of the transitional road map, including the national political dialogue and the electoral process.¹⁴ The transitional roadmap constituted the backbone of the mission's political engagement in this mandate, since there was no peace agreement nor a clear peace process for the mission to support.

In June 2013, the interim authorities and two Tuareg armed groups signed the Preliminary Agreement on the Presidential Election and Inclusive Peace Talks in Mali in Ouagadougou ("Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement"). This was an agreement brokered by Burkina Faso that provided a framework for short-term measures (such as the return of the Government to the north and an inclusive dialogue to address grievances of northern communities). Importantly, it provided for a ceasefire long enough for presidential and parliamentary elections to be held in Mali in July and August, giving the mission a window of opportunity to support elections. In the absence of a longer-term and more comprehensive peace agreement, the Security Council viewed the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement as the main political framework for the mission's engagement during this initial period. The agreement also included a commitment that political negotiations aimed at a comprehensive peace agreement would begin within 60 days of the installation of a new president, explicitly tying the political process to elections.

In practice, the strongest political priority for the Security Council was for the mission to facilitate the holding of elections as quickly as possible.¹⁵ The Council saw elections as critical for a return to constitutional order and to ensure the legitimacy of the Malian Government as a party in future peace talks.¹⁶ France also saw elections as a major objective for the deployment of Operation Serval, and there was strong pressure within the French Government to ensure that elections in Mali were held as soon as possible.¹⁷ The Council also expected the mission to support other aspects of the transitional roadmap and use its Good Offices to promote dialogue, though it did not expect that a peace agreement would materialize very soon.¹⁸

Though the Council listed a set of tasks for the mission to support the transitional roadmap, experts noted that there was not an overriding concept for the role MINUSMA would play in the broader political process.¹⁹ In July 2013, as AFISMA transitioned to MINUSMA, security conditions in Mali were highly volatile. A great deal of the Council's attention was occupied with the issue of MINUSMA's operational capacity. However, in its June 2014 resolution renewing MINUSMA's mandate, the Council requested the Secretary-General to develop "benchmarks to assess progress on the implementation of the priority tasks of MINUSMA's mandate" and to report on progress toward those benchmarks every three months.²⁰

The mission and the Malian Government agreed to develop these benchmarks jointly.²¹ The benchmarks were developed around three categories: "security, stabilization and protection of civilians; support to the national political dialogue and national reconciliation; and support to the restoration of State authority throughout the country, the reconstruction of the Malian security sector, the promotion and protection of human rights and humanitarian aid."²² The Council has over time found these benchmarks a valuable way to keep track of the mission's and the parties' progress; to clarify the Council's expectations and reduce misunderstandings between the UN and the Malian Government; and to help the Council identify ways to use its political pressure strategically to advance areas that were lagging.²³

In July 2014, France ended Operation Serval and the next month replaced it with Operation Barkhane, a counter-terrorist force deployed in Mali as well as several other Sahel countries.

Implementing the Algiers Agreement (2015)

In January 2014, the Algerian Government initiated a political process with armed groups in northern Mali, with the goal of brokering a peace agreement. These talks continued even as the parties continued engaging militarily on the ground. In May 2014, government forces attempted to launch an operation in the northern town of Kidal but were defeated and pushed out by a coalition of armed groups. This confrontation and the Government's retreat significantly altered the parties' negotiating positions and influenced the Algiers process.²⁴ The armed groups now organized themselves into two coalitions: the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), primarily comprising armed groups that had fought against the Government in 2012, and the Platform, primarily comprising armed groups that had not clashed militarily with the Government.²⁵

In May and June 2015, the Government and the Platform and CMA armed group coalitions signed the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process ('the Algiers Agreement').²⁶ The Agreement captured parties' shared commitments to recognizing Mali as a unified State, more decentralized decision-making power for the north, greater representation of the north in the national Government, reducing economic inequality between the south and the north, and initiatives for national reconciliation and accountability for human rights violations committed during the armed conflict.

Yet, the parties were unable to reach agreement on specific details in many critical areas. As Boutellis and Zahar note, while it "covered the broad outlines of the changes required to achieve a durable solution in Mali, a number of its provisions were framed in aspirational terms and left much to be clarified during implementation."²⁷



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These unspecified details included how ex-combatants would be disarmed, demobilized, reintegrated and reinserted; the Agreement envisioned mixed units of Malian armed forces and former armed group members, but without a clear plan for how these would materialize.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the signing of the Algiers Agreement represented a major achievement and a pivotal shift for the mission's political focus. The Security Council renewed MINUSMA's mandate in June 2015 and listed the mission's first two tasks as supporting the ceasefire between the Government, CMA and Platform, and supporting the implementation of the Algiers Agreement.²⁸ It also authorized the mission to receive at least 40 additional military observers to monitor the ceasefire.²⁹

The Agreement also calmed some of the earlier Council debates about whether it was appropriate to deploy a UN peacekeeping mission to a context like Mali. The signing of the Agreement demonstrated the important value that a UN peacekeeping mission could bring,

and the presence of a clear political framework for the mission's future work reassured Council members that there was a political solution at the heart of the mission's work.³⁰

Despite the signing of the Algiers Agreement, insecurity persisted in the north. In April 2017, the AU Peace and Security Council authorized the G5 Sahel Joint Force, a mission comprising personnel from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.³¹ The mission's mandate included combating terrorism and organized crime in the Sahel and supporting the restoration of State authority.³² This mechanism has struggled to become operational and has sometimes been a source of tension between France and the US on the Security Council. France sees the G5 Sahel Joint Force as providing critical support to Operation Barkhane and perhaps facilitating an exit strategy for Barkhane.³³ Although all Council members support the G5 Sahel Joint Force, France has pushed (with support from the Secretariat) for it to be funded through a UN support package, while the US has strongly argued for it to be funded through bilateral assistance.³⁴

Shifting to the Centre (2019)

In 2015, though violence was relatively low, some personnel within MINUSMA began to see serious challenges emerging in central Mali. By early 2016, MINUSMA's leadership had become very concerned about the situation in central Mali, and conveyed to the Council via the Secretariat that this conflict would likely require attention from the mission.³⁵ The Malian Government, however, was highly resistant to the idea of the mission engaging in the centre; it did not consider the stakeholders in that violence to be politically significant and wanted the mission to focus its efforts on the parties in the north, which could potentially pose a threat to Bamako.

The Council was initially reluctant to put heavy political pressure on the Malian Government to allow the mission to take greater action in the centre. In 2016, it added new language to MINUSMA's mandate, instructing the mission to adopt a "more proactive and robust posture to carry out its mandate."³⁶ In 2018, after attacks against civilians in the centre had grown to alarming levels (see Fig. 1 below), the Council added support to the restoration of State authority in central Mali as the second "priority task" for the mission (after support to the implementation of the Algiers Agreement).³⁷ However, Council mandates continued to identify support to the implementation of the Algiers Agreement as the mission's sole strategic priority.

Within the Council, France in particular was concerned that adding a new focus in the centre would detract from the mission's efforts in the north, which would also undermine Operation Barkhane. Although the US was receptive to the argument that the mission should take greater action in the centre, it had also raised repeated questions about whether MINUSMA's value was commensurate with its cost and raised concerns several times about supporting a lengthy mission deployment in Mali. The challenges in central Mali were related to complex intercommunal conflicts that were unlikely to be resolved by a short intervention, which created some confusion with regard to the US position.³⁸

Other Council members and Secretariat representatives were also concerned that the centre presented greater unknowns and risks of complication.³⁹ For example, much of the violence in central Mali was perpetrated by militias, many of which were affiliated with specific communities and which originated as self-defence groups. In order to protect civilians in central Mali, it was conceivable that the mission might have to disarm those militia groups—but the Council had not expressed any position on militia groups in Mali.⁴⁰ There were concerns that the mission may get itself involved in activities with a high risk of unintended consequences.

The very high and rising number of civilian casualties in the centre ultimately made the pressing needs there too alarming to overlook. In particular, the shocking massacre that killed more than 157 civilians in the Fulani-majority town of Ogossagou in central Mali in March 2019,⁴¹ three months before MINUSMA's mandate was due to be renewed, convinced stakeholders that mission needed to act in the centre. Finally, in June 2019, the Security Council authorized a resolution that added a second strategic priority for MINUSMA: to "facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive politically-led Malian strategy to protect civilians, reduce intercommunal violence, and reestablish State authority, State presence and basic social services in Central Mali."⁴²

Even after consensus was reached about adding central Mali as a new strategic priority, there was disagreement between the US and France over how the two should be prioritized against each other. France held strongly that the north should remain the most important strategic priority, while the US raised questions about whether the centre (the arena for the greatest violence) should be treated as a higher priority.⁴³ Ultimately, the mandate somewhat confusingly listed the north first as the "primary" strategic priority and the centre second as the "second" (not "secondary") strategic priority, making it ambiguous whether the Council was rating them as equally important or identifying the north as a higher priority.⁴⁴



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III

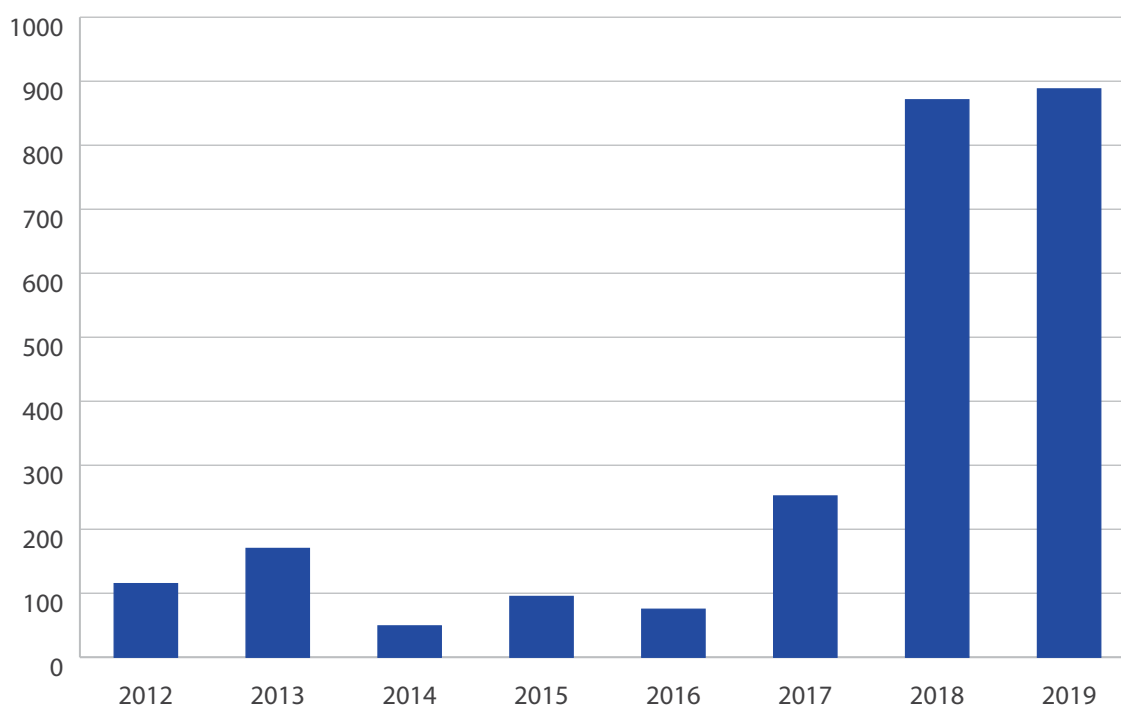
Political Strategy in the Field

MINUSMA has faced enormous challenges with supporting a transformation of the conflict in Mali, despite relative unity within the Security Council in support of the mission. The mission was able to define and execute clear short-term political objectives despite volatile security conditions when it first deployed, but had limited influence or role in the Algeria-led political process. After the signing of the Algiers Agreement in 2015, the mission had a clearer framework for its political engagement, but the Agreement's limitations and weaknesses made supporting its implementation very difficult. The Malian Government and signatory armed groups have been extremely slow to execute their commitments on the administration of northern Mali, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, and other critical components of the Algiers Agreement. These

challenges have been exacerbated by rising violence related to issues that are not addressed by the Agreement: attacks by violent extremist groups in northern Mali and complex violence perpetrated by a range of actors in central Mali. MINUSMA has tried to adapt its political strategy to deal with the violence in central Mali, but it remains unclear whether these efforts will succeed, and whether and how the mission could play a political role in managing violence perpetrated by violent extremist groups in the north.

This section examines how MINUSMA defined its political strategy through these events, focusing on the same three key moments examined in the previous section. The analysis in this section is informed by trends in violence as recorded by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). This data is based on figures published

Fig. 1: Civilian Fatalities from Direct Targeting in Mali



Data taken from ACLED. These figures include “all events in which civilians were the direct or only target of violence” recorded in the ACLED database (<https://acleddata.com/curated-data-files>).

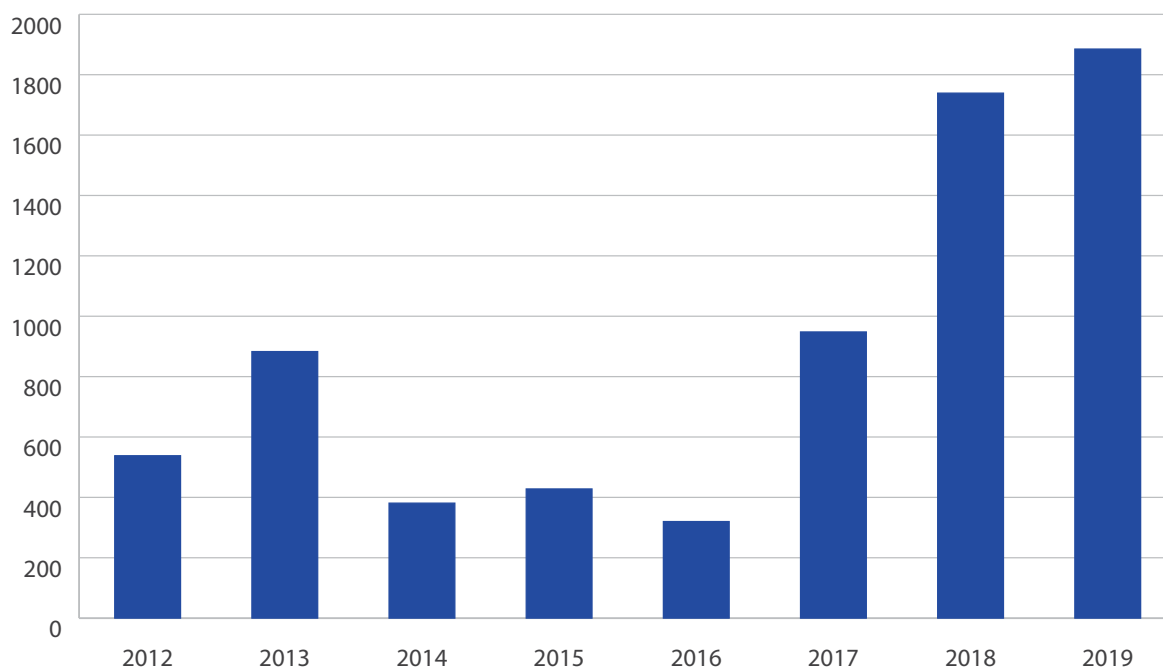
in “news reports, publications by civil society and human rights organizations, and security updates from local and international organizations.”⁴⁵ The ACLED methodology skews toward more conservative fatality estimates, and real fatalities are likely higher than what is captured in the ACLED database. The ACLED data shows high fatalities in 2012 that grew significantly in 2013; civilian fatalities from direct targeting events also grew from 2012 to 2013 but remained a relatively low share of overall fatalities as civilians were not particular targets during this period. Fatalities fell in 2014 and remained relatively low through 2016 but increased in 2017 to levels slightly higher than 2013 fatalities. In 2018, fatalities surged to roughly double their 2013 levels, and rose slightly higher in 2019. Civilian fatalities from direct targeting constituted a significant proportion (roughly half) of the 2018 and 2019 fatalities, demonstrating a shift in violence toward more deliberate attacks against civilians.

Firefighting (2013)

When the mission first deployed, much of its work was focused on operational issues, including securing sufficient troops and assets and deploying them to towns in the north. The parties to the conflict were still engaging in violent clashes and the path to a comprehensive peace agreement was unclear. As a result, the mission had limited capacity to develop a political strategy.⁴⁶

Although the mission did not have a written political strategy, it did have a few clear political objectives. The mission’s earliest political efforts fell into three major streams. First, there were efforts to ensure that elections could be held and the transitional authorities replaced with a legitimate elected government. Despite immense logistical, security and political challenges, the mission was able to support presidential elections

Fig. 2: Fatalities in Mali



Data taken from ACLED. These figures include all fatalities recorded in the ACLED database (<https://acleddata.com/curated-data-files>).

in July and August 2013 and legislative elections in November and December 2013, which were considered free and fair with strong turnout.

Second, the mission worked to monitor ceasefires and intervene in clashes to encourage parties to adhere to the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement and other ceasefire arrangements. This was related to the elections stream, in that it was partly done to ensure a sufficiently secure environment for elections to take place in 2013 but went beyond that. In accordance with the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement, MINUSMA was appointed to chair the Mixed Technical Commission on Security, responsible for monitoring hostilities and a ceasefire, as well as the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, responsible for monitoring the implementation of the preliminary agreement.⁴⁷ A stalemate emerged in early 2014 as the Malian Government pushed armed groups to disarm but appeared reluctant to fulfil its political commitments per

the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement. These tensions boiled over in May 2014 when clashes in Kidal between the Malian defence and security forces and the MNLA armed group nearly derailed peace talks, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) teamed up with Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, President of Mauritania and Chair of the African Union, to negotiate a ceasefire.⁴⁸

Third, the mission's Political Affairs Department led an inclusive dialogue to understand why previous attempts at political processes to address grievances in northern Mali (including an earlier Algiers Agreement signed in 2006) had failed, and what could be done to make the next peace agreement successful. To do this, it organized discussions bringing together ex-combatants, representatives of different political parties, representatives of civil society groups including women's and youth associations, academics and administrators that had

participated in the previous Algiers process. The goal was to develop a common understanding among these different stakeholders about why previous attempts at peace had failed, and what should be done differently this time around.⁴⁹

The mission saw this effort as especially critical to ensure the viability of a future peace agreement because many key stakeholders at the time said that they distrusted the Algerian Government as a mediator and wanted a stronger role for other international actors.⁵⁰ The Secretariat supported this initiative including by providing additional capacities, including a dedicated staffer from the Department of Political Affairs who conducted regular visits to Mali to help frame the process.⁵¹ These efforts led to a more inclusive framing for the Algiers negotiations than past attempts, but ultimately had limited impact since Algeria ultimately asserted a leading role in the political process and MINUSMA's leadership was not able to define an influential role for itself.

These lines of effort accorded with the Security Council's expectations. The Council was particularly impressed with MINUSMA's and others' successful efforts to ensure that elections could be held, despite serious doubts about the logistical feasibility of elections in 2013.⁵² Although there was no prospect of a signed peace agreement until 2015, the Council did not expect the mission or the other actors on the ground to be able to achieve a peace agreement during the volatile years of 2013 and 2014.⁵³

In October 2013, the mission developed its first Mission Concept, which laid out four priority tasks: supporting the political transition and the restoration of constitutional order; stabilizing key population centres in the north; protecting civilians and promoting human rights; and catalysing early recovery in the north.⁵⁴ With respect to the first task, the Mission Concept identified supporting parliamentary and local elections as the most immediate priority (presidential elections had already been held when the Mission Concept was drafted), and supporting dialogue between the Malian authorities and armed groups in the north as the other major line of effort. These priorities were consistent with the mission's activities on the political front during its early deployment.

Implementing the Algiers Agreement (2015)

The holding of presidential and legislative elections in 2013 ensured that there was a legitimate Malian Government to participate in negotiations. In early 2014, Algeria initiated a new political process to resolve the conflict in the north. MINUSMA was not in the lead in this political process. Algeria was the "lead facilitator" during the negotiations, while the UN was only one of several co-facilitators alongside the AU, ECOWAS, The European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria.⁵⁵ This left the mission with very little space to influence the substance of the Algiers process. Given these limitations, the mission instead chose to take full advantage of its technical and supporting roles in the process.⁵⁶ This included, for example, conducting informal meetings with the parties and working through side channels to ensure the parties understood proposed components of the agreement.⁵⁷

The mission recognized that, notwithstanding its limited role in the Algiers process, it would be called on to play a large role in the implementation of the flawed agreement.⁵⁸ This put the mission in a difficult position, as Boutellis and Zahar argue, since taking the lead came "with the risk of being faulted for either doing too much or not doing enough."⁵⁹ It is worth noting that the mission's leading role in implementation was mainly operational in nature; its political influence, even at the implementation stage, was limited. For example, in the committee structures created to oversee the implementation of the Agreement, MINUSMA was assigned only to co-chair the subcommittee on security and defence.⁶⁰ Although MINUSMA had been widely expected to chair the overarching committee, Algeria made a last minute push for this role and MINUSMA's leadership at the time did not successfully challenge this move.

Political support from the Security Council, especially through Council visits to the field, helped the mission pursue its political strategy during this period. For example, while both the Council and the mission had attempted to press



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the newly elected Malian Government for a road map of how they would lead the country out of the crisis, they did not receive one until the Council arranged a visit to Mali in February 2014.⁶¹ However, the Council also missed opportunities to support the mission's political role during this period. For example, the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement established a leading role for MINUSMA in launching the subsequent political dialogue, but when Algeria and the newly elected president of Mali pushed the mission into a more supporting role in the Algiers Process, the Council did not back the mission with strong political pressure.

In August 2015, Koen Davidse was appointed Deputy SRSG and in December 2015, Mahamat Saleh Annadif was appointed SRSG of MINUSMA. These leadership changes also had a significant impact on the way the mission developed and implemented its political strategy. His predecessor had a mixed relationship with Algeria, sometimes perceived as too close to the country and not sufficiently asserting MINUSMA's interests. SRSG Annadif struck a delicate diplomatic balance—on one hand, recognizing

Algeria's leading political role as a regional powerhouse and as a long-time mediator of conflicts in Mali, with institutional memory and long relationships, and on the other hand, persuading the Governments of Algeria and Mali that MINUSMA also had a valuable role to play in support of the process.⁶² Annadif is described as having a very clear political vision and a particularly strong talent at maintaining access to a wide range of stakeholders.⁶³ On the other hand, he is described as not emphasizing the managerial dimensions of his role, placing less importance on written strategies and structured delegation of effort within the mission.⁶⁴

The signing of the Algiers Agreement was a defining moment for MINUSMA's political work. The agreement became a central pillar around which to build the mission's political strategy, which was welcomed by the mission, the Secretariat and the Security Council. In November 2016, the mission led the development of a new Mission Concept, in consultation with the Secretariat, to reflect the centrality of the Algiers Agreement. The new concept identified three "core objectives" for MINUSMA to achieve over



the subsequent 24-36 months: (1) a “sustainable, credible, and inclusive peace process to hasten the implementation of the peace agreement;” (2) security, including support for the deployment of the Malian defence and security forces; and (3) full operational capacity for the mission itself.⁶⁵

A detailed description of the first objective included a dizzying number of tasks: supporting the parties to develop benchmarks and timelines, using Good Offices to build consensus on institutional reform, promoting inclusivity of the process, providing technical support to the parties on mediation, DDR, security sector reform (SSR), rule of law, human rights, reconciliation, justice, and elections, continuing support to facilitate future elections, coordination with international partners to ensure a common approach, raising awareness of the peace agreement with key stakeholders, supporting the establishment of interim authorities, supporting the effective presence of the State, supporting stabilization and recovery in coordination with the UN Country Team, and supporting interim security measures.⁶⁶

In practice, MINUSMA’s strategy to support the implementation of the Agreement can be described as having two main prongs. The first prong focused on promoting ownership and buy-in of a range of stakeholders on the implementation of the agreement. This effort can be thought of as a kind of retroactive effort at inclusiveness, since the mission had had very limited impact on making the Algiers process inclusive prior to the signing of the Agreement. Many of the stakeholders that the mission had held workshops with prior to the Algiers process were unhappy with the Agreement, in part

because they were not included in the process. These stakeholders included many members of Parliament and youth associations, both of whom were critical to implementation. The mission was ultimately able to persuade members of political parties to tour the country to meet with diverse constituencies, explain the contents of the Agreement and discuss the possible roles they could play in its implementation.

The second prong focused on using the SRS’s Good Offices and the mission’s technical capacities to ensure that the Malian Government (and particularly the Parliament) and the interim authorities in the north had the right incentives and capacities to implement their commitments so that parties would maintain faith in the agreement.⁶⁷ The mission worked with the interim authorities to build their governance capacities, and worked with the Government to strengthen its institutions (e.g. to establish mechanisms foreseen by the Agreement and strengthen capacities of their members such as the members of the truth and reconciliation committee).⁶⁸ This line of effort also included preparing Members of Parliament to assess the implementation of the Agreement. Whereas MINUSMA had at first been making presentations to Parliament about progress on implementation, the Malian Parliament was able to establish an *ad hoc* committee tasked with monitoring implementation, which has so far presented its findings twice.⁶⁹ The mission’s efforts on this front also included technical and political support to DDR and SSR efforts required to implement the Agreement.

Despite MINUSMA’s many efforts to create a conducive environment for the Algiers



Agreement's implementation, the parties were extremely slow to act on their commitments, causing stakeholders to question whether the Agreement was still relevant. The Agreement hinged on the political will of the Malian Government, and "called on Malian State institutions to take all necessary measures to adopt the regulatory, legislative, and even constitutional changes needed for implementation."⁷⁰ Yet the Malian Government delayed and resisted many of these required actions. Some of the delays were caused by security conditions or weak capacity, but others were caused by a lack of political will on the part of a Government that did not feel ownership over the Agreement. Where the Government did act to implement the Agreement, it sometimes did so without sufficient consultation with the other parties.⁷¹ Meanwhile, clashes between, and fragmentation among, the armed group signatories caused insecurity that derailed the implementation of the Agreement and shifted armed group leaders' attention toward competing over perks rather than securing peace dividends for their constituencies.⁷² As Boutellis and Zahar argue, the parties tended "to understand Mali's problem through either a security lens (for the Government) or a political-institutional lens (for the armed groups)," leading each to prioritize very different aspects of the Agreement and causing mistrust and major blockages on implementation.⁷³

In 2018, an independent strategic review of MINUSMA led by Ellen Margrethe Løj noted considerable challenges with the Agreement's implementation. It recommended, among other things, that the mission should "refocus on its political role, support of the peace

process and stabilization and develop a pact for peace between the Government, the Security Council, the UN and international partners, and supporting a national dialogue."⁷⁴ The review also highlighted the lack of coherence between the mission's political and military strategies and activities as a major problem. Looking more broadly at the challenges MINUSMA had faced, the review raised critical questions as to whether a peacekeeping mission was the right political tool to address the conflict in Mali. The review was perceived as highly controversial by many in the mission, the Secretariat and the Security Council (including France). Despite fierce opposition by some members of the Council (including the US), the Secretariat decided not to publish the review and only to adopt some of its recommendations. The controversy raised questions about how open-minded or adaptable the UN system could be about political strategy.

One recommendation of the review that was adopted was for the mission to refocus on its political role. In October 2018, the Government of Mali and the UN signed a pact for peace which was "intended to serve as an accountability tool against which the UN Security Council expected to witness significant progress in the implementation of the Algiers Agreement."⁷⁵ The report of the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network argues that this initiative may have spurred progress on DDR later that year.⁷⁶ The recent redeployment of the Malian defence and security forces to northern Mali has quelled some concerns from the Council (particularly from the US) about the mission's slow progress on the political front.⁷⁷ The mission has somewhat expanded its outreach to address roadblocks on implementation. For example, the mission had



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observed that despite the progress made, there was growing resistance to the Agreement from some segments of society, including religious leaders and intellectuals.⁷⁸ It has therefore been reaching out to these influential figures (including from neighbouring countries) and bringing them together for discussions on how to strengthen Mali—both for the country's own sake and for the region's.⁷⁹

The Algiers Agreement was successful by one important metric: namely, stabilizing the situation in northern Mali. Although the Agreement's signatories violated their ceasefire commitments on a few occasions, they have not relapsed into large-scale violence. Nevertheless, as Figures 1 and 2 above illustrate, violence increased significantly in Mali after 2016. The Agreement left largely unaddressed three major issues that were important drivers of violence in Mali. First, it did not deal with political marginalization and lack of responsive governance in central Mali, an issue that is now being addressed through a separate strategy for the centre (much of the increased violence in Mali after 2016 was concentrated in

central Mali; this challenge is discussed further in the next section). Second, it did not address the organized crime and illicit trafficking that constituted a major motivation for armed groups to engage in violence as well as an enabler that allowed armed groups to fund their violence.⁸⁰

Third, the Agreement did not address the problem of terrorism in northern Mali. Violence in northern Mali has increased in recent years—not because of fighting among the Agreement's signatory parties, but because of attacks by violent extremist groups. Groups designated as “terrorist armed groups” were not invited to be part of the Algiers process. Even if there had been strong political interest from the Malian Government and international stakeholders to include them, their inclusion would have been incompatible with the most basic terms of the talks since these groups refused “to accept a solution that is commensurate with preserving the secular sovereign State of Mali.”⁸¹ Thus a distinction has been drawn, whereby MINUSMA supports a political solution to address the grievances of the “compliant armed groups,”

while the French counter-terrorist operation Barkhane and the G5 Sahel Joint Force support a military solution to address the “terrorist armed groups.”

This approach has not proven successful—partly because of the very limited operational capacity of the G5 Sahel Joint Force but also because these groups are complex, fragmented and fluid in their goals, allegiances and compositions. These “blurred lines between different groups render categories, like compliant armed groups (CAGs) and terrorist armed groups (TAGs), such as used by some in MINUSMA, artificial.”⁸² The strengthening and expansion of violent extremist groups in Mali since the signing of the Agreement negatively affected its implementation (for example, the mixed patrol unit established pursuant to the Agreement in Gao suffered a serious attack that slowed the rollout of these units)⁸³ as well as contributing to threats against civilians in central Mali, forcing the mission to spread its resources over a wider area. After mounting public pressure, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita announced in early 2020 that his Government had commenced talks with influential figures from violent extremist groups and was open to further discussions with al-Qaeda linked groups so that “by one means or another, some kind of appeasement can be achieved.”⁸⁴ These plans were of course been derailed by the coup in August 2020 that ousted President Keita – but even with a new government in place, it is unclear whether and how MINUSMA could support political engagement with extremist groups.⁸⁵

In addition to these limitations, the agreement also created several unintended consequences for the mission’s political work. First, the mission has shaped its political strategy around supporting the implementation of a peace agreement whose viability is highly questionable. This puts the mission in a fragile position. One of the main criticisms of the Algiers Agreement’s implementation is that it has become too mired in technicalities (such as the creation of committees and subcommittees) and too little focused on delivering meaningful outcomes. While the mission and its partners have tried to find creative ways to exert pressure on the parties, five years later, the Agreement’s implementation remains extremely slow and inconsistent. Provisions of the

Algiers Agreement related to DDR and SSR have proven particularly challenging to implement. The Malian Government has strongly resisted the reforms required on its end for these agendas, the mission has had limited leverage to influence the Government, and the Security Council has not consistently exerted strong pressure on the Malian Government on these issues to add political weight to MINUSMA’s advocacy.

Some critics contend that the Algiers Agreement is fundamentally unviable and continuing to push for its implementation is a wasted effort.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, there is a widespread belief that negotiating a new and better peace agreement is not possible in Mali and would, in fact, be counter-productive to attempt, and so the mission has remained focused on trying to support (and urge the parties to adhere to) the Algiers Agreement. Thus, although the Algiers Agreement has provided the mission a much clearer roadmap for what it should try to achieve politically, it could also be seen as an example of a situation where having a peace agreement has locked the mission (and the conflict parties) into an unviable process.

Second, the Algiers Agreement may have contributed to a greater disconnect between the mission’s efforts to support political solutions and its efforts to protect civilians. The Algiers process succeeded in getting the parties to largely abide by their ceasefire agreements. Fighting that has occurred since the signing of the Agreement has largely been among parties that were not signatories to the agreement. This has had the unexpected side effect of contributing to the existing disconnect between the activities undertaken by the mission’s uniformed components and its political efforts. Before and during the Algiers negotiations, the mission’s military component was regularly intervening to protect civilians from, and deter violence by, parties to the Algiers process. In other words, the mission was using its uniformed capabilities to keep the parties committed to the Algiers process. Since the signing of the agreement, the opportunities for the mission to use its uniformed capabilities to support a specific political outcome have been less obvious.

Third, the implementation of the Algiers Agreement has at times been in tension with the mission’s other political activities related to the



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strengthening of the State. In theory, the Algiers Agreement helped bring together the mission's two main lines of effort: supporting the political process and supporting the restoration of State authority. In practice, the Government resisted implementing provisions of the Agreement related to governance reform and accountability, while strongly advocating for the restoration of State authority outside the framework of the Algiers Agreement. The central question of the Algiers process was how to approach power-sharing between the Malian Government and the CMA and Platform armed group coalitions. The Agreement addressed this issue in part by creating interim authorities who would be selected through consensus by the signatory parties, and who would administer contested areas to provide a more inclusive form of governance. Due to the Malian Government's strong resistance to reforms aimed at more inclusive and accountable governance, the mission has found tensions arising between its work to support the Algiers Agreement, on one hand, and its efforts to support the deployment of Malian Government authorities, on the other hand. The deployment of government authorities

in the absence of reforms has not been popular with the Malian people. As the report of the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network notes, "the population's satisfaction with the Government, while initially increasing in most regions after the deployment of MINUSMA, decreased almost everywhere after the Algiers Agreement."⁸⁷ The mission's efforts in support of the State have particularly caused problems as it has expanded into the centre, since abuses by Malian defence and security forces have made the State highly unpopular in those areas.

MINUSMA's Mission Concept was revised in August 2019. The new Mission Concept recognized the limitations of the Algiers Agreement, noting that it "lacks buy-in from large segments of the population," and that critical reforms envisioned by the Agreement had not been implemented.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the Mission Concept continued to identify supporting the implementation of the Agreement as the mission's first strategic objective and said that MINUSMA would promote political solutions in line with the Agreement in addressing "all aspects of its mandate," as a guiding principle.⁸⁹

Shifting to the Centre (2019)

Despite the clear framework for political engagement provided by the Algiers Agreement, violent clashes in Mali did not stop; on the contrary, they increased significantly after 2016. Most of this increased violence originated in central Mali. The causes of violence in central Mali are complex and overlapping, but mainly relate to: disputes over land rights, including disputes between farmer and herder communities with affiliated militia groups over access to land for growing crops and grazing cattle, and cycles of retaliatory violence between these communities; human rights violations perpetrated by Malian defence and security forces against communities in central Mali; weak presence of the State in central Mali and its failure to deliver basic services; and the spread of violent extremist groups from the north into the centre, where they have offered communities protection and basic governance and thus secured some popular support.

The mission had attempted small-scale responses to manage the violence in central Mali, despite strong resistance from the Malian Government, in the years before the 2019 mandate made it a strategic priority; it already had a protection of civilians mandate that enabled this work. In the lead-up to the 2019 mandate renewal, as it heard that the second strategic priority was likely to be introduced, the mission began actively planning for the major logistical and political effort that would be required.⁹⁰ The Council knew about these efforts; as one Council member said, “In a way, I think it helps for MINUSMA to be ahead of what the Council does, and for the Council to validate the mission’s actions.”⁹¹

In light of the introduction of the new strategic priority, a new Mission Concept was developed for MINUSMA in 2019. While developing Mission Concepts is always a consultative process, this marked the first time that the IOT rather than the mission took the lead in developing the Mission Concept.⁹² This shift was in line with a broader trend across peacekeeping missions to have IOTs lead on the development of Mission Concepts, linked to the Action for Peacekeeping reform

initiative. In deference to the field’s leading role on politics, while also respecting the idea of the “primacy of politics,” the IOT’s Mission Concept was kept short and strategic-level, with a brief section outlining political strategy and guiding principles.⁹³ The Mission Concept treated the mission’s two strategic objectives—support to the implementation of the Algiers Agreement and support to the development and implementation of a strategy in the centre—as two separate initiatives, with separate lines of effort.⁹⁴

The mission’s political approach in the centre echoed its effort in the north to build the capacity of the relevant authorities. In order to encourage national ownership (and in light of the Government’s previous reluctance to allow the mission to engage in the centre), the mission requested the Malian Government to develop a national strategy for the centre, which the mission could also use as a framework for its own engagement. Pursuant to this strategy, the Government created a permanent secretariat to manage issues related to the centre.

The mission knew from its earlier experience supporting interim authorities in the north that the secretariat would very likely lack the capacity it needed to carry out its work. It worked with the secretariat to provide human resources, support on strategic communications (for example, help organizing a press conference to launch the Government’s strategy for the centre) and support for outreach to key stakeholders.⁹⁵ At the same time, the mission also worked to build civil society capacity to raise awareness of what was happening in the centre and hold the Government and armed actors accountable. This line of effort included training and mobilizing journalists, supporting radio broadcasts in multiple languages describing the Government’s strategy for the centre, and establishing community watchdog groups to monitor the implementation of the strategy.⁹⁶

The mission and the IOT engaged in close communication, including through bimonthly meetings, to support the mission’s shift to the centre. These meetings allowed the mission to share progress updates with the IOT to inform discussions within the Secretariat and among Member States in New York. They also allowed the IOT to share views from the Council,

offer a more strategic-level perspective, and pose questions that challenged the mission's assumptions. For example, the IOT noted that the mission had made progress in supporting the Malian Government to create a secretariat to manage issues in the centre, but that the structure had little operational capacity. This prompted the mission to think more carefully about how it could ensure that the strategy for the centre was Malian-led while also avoiding the issues with slow implementation that had caused so many difficulties in the north.⁹⁷

The mission's expansion into the centre has contributed further to the disconnect between the mission's support to the implementation of the Agreement and its other lines of effort. One mission representative said that the mission had a number of different strategy documents whose development was led by different mission components, including a political strategy, a communications strategy, a police strategy and a military strategy, that were articulated in separate documents and implemented through separate processes with little coordination.⁹⁸ The mission continues to face challenges in bringing together the activities of its uniformed and civilian components behind unified political goals,

particularly in light of the different dynamics and separate mission responses in the centre and the north.

MINUSMA has also struggled to translate its strategic priorities into more actionable plans. The mission tried to address that problem when translating its new Mission Concept into a mission plan. In doing so, it took advantage of its unusually large strategic planning unit (which also has the benefit of integrating military and police planners alongside its civilian planners). It also took advantage of being an early implementer of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment System (CPAS), a Secretariat initiative to help missions more systematically plan for their activities and track their own progress toward achieving their objectives. The strategic planning unit translated the Mission Concept into a clear mission plan, identifying six priority areas for the mission, designating an individual to oversee progress on each area.⁹⁹ It developed a set of outcomes under each priority area in order to track progress using the CPAS framework.¹⁰⁰ This process helped the mission to define its priorities and manage its different components contributions toward achieving them.



IV

Key Findings

MINUSMA's political efforts have been remarkably successful in some ways. Its support for the holding of elections in 2013 meant that there was a legitimate State authority to participate in the Algiers process. The Algiers Agreement itself has largely held—despite significant delays and shortcomings in its implementation, the armed group signatories and the Government have largely respected their ceasefire commitments and have attempted to resolve their grievances through political engagement with each other. By supporting the Algiers Agreement, the mission has a large extent thus helped to contain the conflict that originally provoked the international community's concern in 2012.

Yet, the political outcomes of the mission's work can also be heavily criticized. As the time of writing, Mali is undergoing significant political turmoil, with a military coup that forced President Keita out of office. The coup

was preceded by protests by tens of thousands of people in Bamako and around the country demanding the president's resignation.¹⁰¹ These developments highlight the enormous gap between what the population demands and what the Malian Government and the international community, including MINUSMA, have been able to deliver. The rising violence in Mali from 2017 onwards raises the question whether it was wise for the Council and the mission to make the Agreement such a central focus of the mission's efforts. This section highlights some key findings from the study regarding MINUSMA's political strategy.

1 The primacy of politics can still happen without peace agreements

MINUSMA did not have a clear political strategy when it first deployed. Armed groups and



government actors were still engaged in violent clashes and it was not clear what shape a peace agreement might take. Nevertheless, the mission was able to define political objectives that would allow it to create space for a political process: facilitating elections so that the political process would have legitimate government representation, monitoring ceasefire violations to keep the parties engaged in talks and leading an inclusive dialogue to understand the necessary elements of success for the future political process. Ultimately, these efforts paved the way for the Algiers Agreement, which became the defining focus of the mission's efforts from 2015 onward.

2 A peace agreement may not bring peace

The mission has pushed consistently and from many angles to convince the parties to implement their commitments, but progress has been very slow and security has deteriorated significantly since the signing of the Agreement. Violence has increased significantly both in the north (perpetrated by violent extremist groups) and in the centre (perpetrated by self-defence militias community groups, violent extremist groups, and Malian armed forces). In other words, the Algiers Agreement was successful at reducing violence between the signatory parties, but not at reducing violence overall. Neither the extremist violence in the north nor the much of the complex violence in the centre are conducive to being resolved through additional peace agreements. MINUSMA is not the first peacekeeping mission to find itself managing violence from very different

sources and with very different dynamics than the original conflict that it was deployed to resolve. The mission's experience highlights that there are risks attached to building a political strategy too closely around support to a specific peace agreement, when that peace agreement deals with a very limited set of the drivers of violence.

3 The pros and cons of an agreement with a narrow scope

There may be very good reasons for one peace agreement not to try to address all issues that have triggered or may trigger violent conflict—in particular, trying to make the peace agreement comprehensive may require the inclusion of so many parties and grievances that the process becomes dysfunctional. The obstacles to reaching the Algiers Agreement were already so numerous that it likely would not have been constructive to also add in the grievances and constituencies related to the conflict in the centre. For these reasons, developing two separate processes for the north and the centre may have been preferable. However, the Algiers process became such a major focus for all the stakeholders—including the Government, the Security Council and the mission—that mission was unable to address the challenges in the centre until they already constituted a crisis. By the time the mission started treating the centre as a strategic priority, ethnic divisions had been reinforced by traumatic massacres, self-defence militias had taken root and violent extremist groups had cultivated support among communities. The international community correctly diagnosed that there were problems of corruption, poor



governance, political marginalization and impunity driving violence in the north. Yet, it did not push hard to address those same problems in the centre until skyrocketing civilian casualty figures forced the issue. In retrospect, the Security Council could have pushed the Government to engage in a political process for the centre soon after the Algiers Agreement was signed.

4 Who gets a seat at the table?

The mediators responsible for developing the Algiers Process made the decision to exclude violent extremist armed groups. This decision was very reasonable given that many violent extremist groups had no interest in negotiating with the Government, and also that these groups' objectives were not compatible with the continuation of a secular Malian State. But many MINUSMA personnel acknowledge the reality that the groups are overlapping and fluid on the ground, the goals of Malian-origin violent extremist groups are often quite different from the goals of groups with foreign origins, and individuals may be affiliated with more than one type of group. Attacks by violent extremist groups against the State, compliant armed groups, and MINUSMA have increased in the north and these groups have also expanded their influence in the centre. The Malian Government, Operation Barkhane, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force have been unsuccessful at resolving the violent extremist threat through military means. The Malian Government has recently taken some initial steps to engage with violent extremist groups politically, but it remains very unclear where this dialogue will lead and what role (if any) MINUSMA will play.

5 Implementing a peace agreement from the margins

MINUSMA's leadership during the development of the Algiers process was not able to push back against Algeria and assert the leading role that had been established for the mission by the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement. The mission worked to identify useful contributions it could make to the process in the absence of that leading role—for example, by conducting outreach to the parties to reduce misunderstandings, advocating for greater inclusiveness during the process, monitoring ceasefire arrangements while talks progressed, identifying pitfalls that have undermined past processes, and conducting outreach to diverse stakeholders after the signing of the Agreement to encourage more inclusive awareness and buy-in. However, these efforts have had limited impact. For example, the Algiers process was not considered very inclusive and repeated many of the mistakes that caused past processes to fail—in part because the mission did not have a leading role in the negotiations. Since the signing of the Agreement, SRSRG Annadif was able to define a role for MINUSMA in supporting its implementation and persuade Algeria to accept that role. This means that the mission is playing a leading role in supporting the implementation of an agreement over whose contents it had little influence. In short, the mission is in the position of being (partly) blamed for failures to implement the Agreement but had little opportunity to set it up for success.

6 **Aligning mission components behind a common political vision**

For much of its deployment, MINUSMA has faced serious challenges with unifying its work around a political strategy. It has struggled to connect its political efforts with its military operations and it has also struggled to connect its work in support of the Algiers Agreement with its other lines of effort, particularly the protection of civilians. In part, these difficulties have arisen from the complexity of its many tasks, some of which can be in tension with one another. For example, its work in support of the Malian State have caused tensions with its efforts to protect civilians from violence perpetrated by the State in the centre, and to support interim authorities in the north. Even where its activities are not in conflict, like many large multidimensional missions, MINUSMA has struggled to line up its civilian, military and police capacities behind a unified political strategy. The mission's recent efforts to adopt CPAS and link this to strong planning efforts through its strategic planning unit may help strengthen planning and coordination processes and enable the mission to unify its many lines of effort around a political strategy.

7 **Council divisions on security and finances but unity on politics**

MINUSMA has provoked several heated disagreements within the Security Council, including on the mission's relationship to counter-terrorism efforts and whether it should expand its efforts to the centre. But by and large, the mission has enjoyed a unity of vision from the Council, especially with regard to its political strategy. Most of the Council's disagreements on MINUSMA have related to security issues (e.g. whether and when it was appropriate for the mission to deploy while violence was still active) or financial matters (e.g. whether the mission was delivering value for money, whether its resources should be reduced, whether funding for the G5 Sahel Joint Force should come from the UN or from bilateral sources). Council members were united behind the Algiers process and have remained committed to the Algiers Agreement, and once the Council was able to

agree that the mission should act in the centre, it has supported the mission's political approach to managing violence in central Mali. Given that Council members have much stronger interests in Mali than in many other African peacekeeping contexts, this unity on politics is remarkable. One important area of disagreement that emerged in recent years over politics was the question of whether the mission should remain focused on the implementation of the Algiers Agreement as the political focus of the mission, or whether it should also treat the deterioration of security in central Mali as a high priority. The rising rates of violence against civilians in central Mali eventually brought about consensus within the Council that the mission should treat transforming that conflict as a strategic objective even though it was not the conflict on which the Council was originally focused when it authorized MINUSMA. At the same time, many of the Council's decisions on MINUSMA have been driven by the interests of France, including its interest in supporting its own parallel counter-terrorist force. These interests have influenced the Council not to pressure the Malian Government as strongly in some areas as it could have, in order to enable strong security cooperation, including against violent extremist groups in northern Mali. Although MINUSMA has benefited from the Council's unity, it could have benefited further from stronger political pressure from the Council to influence the Malian Government when the mission encountered political roadblocks.

8 **Strategic use of political pressure to move unwilling parties**

The international community has been strategic in its efforts to maintain pressure on the parties to support the Algiers process. These efforts range from small and precise (e.g. the rapid ceasefire negotiation by MINUSMA's SRSB and the AU Chair in 2014 to prevent the derailing of the Algiers talks) to more strategic and comprehensive (e.g. the signing of the pact for peace in 2018 to refocus the Malian Government and the mission around their political commitments). MINUSMA has also enjoyed several visits from the Security Council, which have helped spur movement from the parties on important issues. (This can, however, be a double-edged sword; one MINUSMA official estimated in 2019 that the

mission received approximately one delegation a week and that the number of visits seriously taxed the mission's capacity.)¹⁰² However, as noted above, the Security Council has at times been reluctant to use its political weight to pressure the Malian Government—including to implement some of its reform commitments under the Algiers Agreement and to allow the mission to act more quickly to prevent the crisis in central Mali.

9 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is not a new idea in peacekeeping, but in the past the Council mainly requested benchmarks in the context of mission transitions, as a way to measure the mission's progress toward a point when it could exit. MINUSMA's benchmarks were introduced early on and have helped give the Council a clearer sense of what progress has been made and where the roadblocks are. They are also seen as useful for the mission, the Malian Government, and the parties to the conflict, because they clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations as well as reducing uncertainty. At the time of writing, the Council was considering introducing additional benchmarks for the challenges in central Mali, which might also help to put political pressure on the Malian Government to implement its national strategy for the centre.

10 The overlooked role of organized crime

There is broad consensus that violent conflict in northern Mali is inextricably bound up in organized crime and illicit trafficking. Trafficking revenues enable armed groups to fund their violent activities and motivate young people to join armed groups. Conflicts over control of trafficking routes frequently trigger violent clashes. MINUSMA's activities touch on this challenge tangentially (e.g. its human rights section may report on violations that occurred in the context of organized criminal activity, or its police component might support training on border protection), but in general the mission has no mandate to address this issue—either through support to the implementation of the Algiers Agreement or through its other mandated tasks. The exclusion of this issue

from MINUSMA's work is not because other actors with stronger comparative advantages are already addressing it. In theory, the G5 Sahel Joint Force has a mandate that includes addressing organized crime, but its operations are extremely limited. It may be that issues like organized crime and corruption, which touch on the Government's financial management, are considered too sensitive for UN peacekeeping missions to address.

11 The problem of missing peace dividends

MINUSMA has worked hard to promote national ownership of both the Algiers Agreement (including mechanisms to oversee and evaluate its implementation) and the response to violence in the centre. However, the parties have not made much progress in moving beyond technicalities toward delivering meaningful outcomes. The Malian people have seen few peace dividends either in the form of improved security or in the form of access to basic services. The severe delays, especially on the Malian Government's side, in implementing the peace agreement have created anger and mistrust among the population toward the Government and the mission. Although MINUSMA has tried to use Quick Impact Projects managed through its stabilization and recovery section to deliver improvements to some areas, these small-scale efforts cannot compensate for the failures of the parties to deliver the expected peace dividends. UN agencies, funds and programmes are much more significant actors than MINUSMA in supporting peace dividends; however, coordination between the mission and the UN Country Team could be improved to better address the issue of peace dividends, including through the office of the Deputy SRSG/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator. There are also a range of non-UN actors—including regional powers and donors such as the African Development Bank and the EU—that share responsibilities for delivering peace dividends and could benefit from better strategic coordination with the mission and the country team. Notwithstanding the mission's limited influence over this issue, losing the support and trust of the population will have knock-on effects for the mission's ability to implement its mandate.

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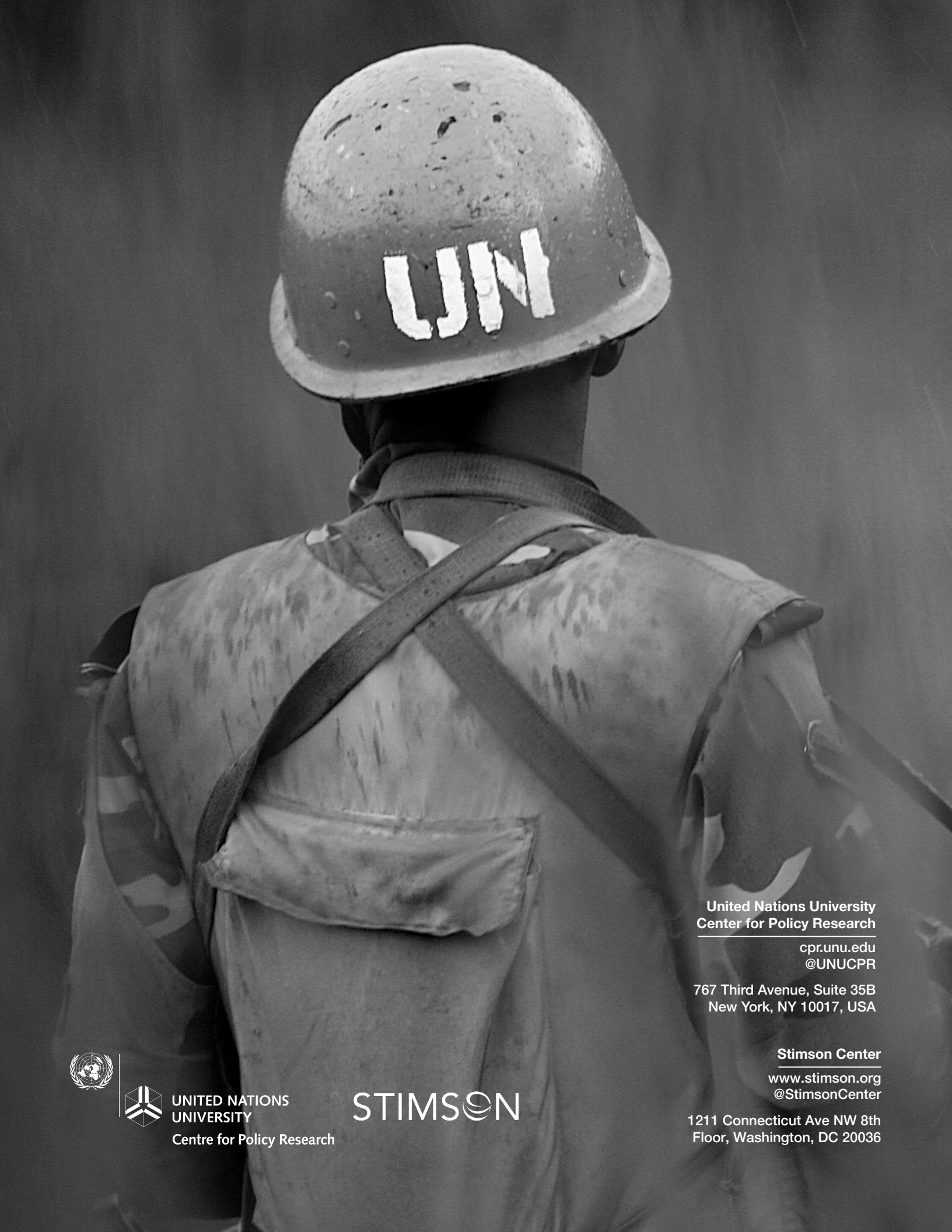
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