Applying the HIPPO Recommendations to Mali: Toward Strategic, Prioritized, and Sequenced Mandates

Introduction

In June 2017 the UN Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), almost two years after the signature of the 2015 inter-Malian peace agreement. To inform the discussion on the renewal of this mandate, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report co-organized a workshop on May 2, 2017. This workshop offered an opportunity for key national, regional, and international stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the situation on the ground and a common strategic assessment of the policies pursued to address that situation. The objective of the discussion was to contribute to the Security Council's evolving practice of developing strategic, prioritized, and sequenced mandates for UN peace operations.

The first session was devoted to an analysis of the evolving security and political dynamics in Mali and a discussion of how MINUSMA's political strategy could be adapted to respond to these dynamics. The second session aimed to discuss the highest-priority objectives for the mission and how to sequence them in order to advance the political strategy discussed in the previous session.

Context Analysis and Political Strategy

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The security situation in Mali remains volatile, and violence has spread from the north to the center and south of the country. The drivers of this insecurity are complex and multidimensional. The increase in violent extremist activity—so far primarily targeting representatives of the state and international forces, particularly in the center of the country—compounded with organized crime and increased intercommunal tensions, could pose a significant threat to civilians. In March multiple jihadist groups in Mali merged under a unified organized structure—Jama'ah Nusrah al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM).[1] The authority of the government and the capacity of its armed forces remain weak in most of central and northern Mali. Moreover, MINUSMA remains below capacity with regards to both the number of peacekeepers and their equipment, despite the increase in the troop ceiling and the emphasis on the mission's robust posture in the June 2016 renewal of its mandate.

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1 "Mali Jihadist Groups Announce They Will Merge: Report," Reuters, March 2, 2017, available at www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security-idUSKBN1692MY .

This persistent instability and spread of violence has in turn undermined the implementation of the peace agreement. Implementation of key measures of the agreement for the interim period following the signature has been slow. Mixed patrols—composed of members of armed groups and government forces—took place in Gao despite a January 2017 terrorist attack that killed over sixty participants in the Operational Coordination Mechanism. Interim authorities were established in the five northern regions after the parties agreed to the appointment of interim presidencies in Taoudeni and Timbuktu on April 24th, but these have yet to become operational.[2] Although the government has made it a priority and established a national commission, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process has stalled, as armed groups are reluctant to disarm with what they still perceive as limited guarantees. Peace dividends for the population are also slow to materialize in a context of persistent insecurity.

Lack of progress in the implementation of the peace agreement also stems from low levels of trust between signatories and a lack of ownership of the agreement by the parties. This has been exacerbated by the fracturing and splintering of armed group signatories and their complex relationships with non-signatory armed actors and criminal and extremist groups. Furthermore, some noted that the limited inclusivity of the peace agreement continues to be an issue in its implementation. The conference of national accord (conference d'entente nationale) organized by the government from March 27th to April 2nd in Bamako was denounced by both coalitions of armed groups (the Coordination of Azawad Movements and the Platform) as not sufficiently prepared or inclusive. The limited access to basic services has increased frustration among the population, which may also increase the risk of radicalization.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MINUSMA'S POLITICAL STRATEGY

The discussions highlighted the need for MINUSMA to operate with a flexible, holistic, and people-centered political strategy focused on addressing the current security gaps in Mali.

- **Focused on security gaps:** In addition to the lack of credible political will from the parties to advance the implementation of the peace agreement, the volatile security situation remains the main obstacle to the stabilization of Mali. The spread of violence beyond the north to the center and south (regions that were not addressed in the peace agreement) and increased intercommunal violence have exacerbated threats to civilians. MINUSMA's political strategy moving forward should focus on assisting the government in returning defense and security forces as well as basic services to all sectors of the country and on avoiding security gaps.

- **Flexible:** The security situation in Mali, as well as political dynamics between the parties and local actors, is constantly evolving. MINUSMA's mandate and resources must allow it to adapt quickly to the changing context on the ground, including focusing greater attention and resources on central Mali.

- **Both holistic and specific:** Due to the broad nature of the peace agreement itself, highlighting it as a priority in MINUSMA's mandate does very little to distinguish where the mission should focus its efforts. Specifying the key objectives in implementing the agreement would help prioritize the mission's resources. While the peace agreement and its successful implementation are critical, MINUSMA's efforts must at the same time be more holistic. The peace agreement does not address all the causes of instability in Mali. It focuses mainly on the north of the country, even though violence has since spread to other regions. It also focuses on national political dynamics but does not address some of the local and community-level dynamics or economics-related conflict dynamics.

- **People-centric:** The HIPPO report recommended that peace operations be more people-centered. The spread of violence combined with a lack of delivery of peace dividends is contributing to the lack of trust in the state and its security forces and has led to an increase in the grievances felt by the local population. These grievances have continued to undermine an

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2 Robbie Corey-Boulet, "'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back' for Stability in Northern Mali," *World Politics Review*, March 9, 2017, available at www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/21481/one-step-forward-two-steps-back-for-stability-in-northern-mali .

already fragile trust in the state's authority and made populations more vulnerable to becoming sympathetic to extremist groups. MINUSMA's political strategy should put the people of Mali at its center.

Prioritization and Sequencing

A number of participants lamented the fact that MINUSMA's mandate is so long (with a fourteen-page resolution) and that its priority of "supporting the implementation of the peace agreement" is too broad and far-ranging, highlighting the need to spell out priorities within priorities. The mandate must be more specific in determining how to prioritize and sequence the objectives and functions that contribute to the implementation of the peace agreement. With the above political strategy in mind, driven by a frank analysis of the conflict, the following objectives and tasks could be prioritized in the upcoming renewal of MINUSMA's mandate, with an overarching intention to ultimately sustain peace.

- **Restoration of state authority and building the capacity of Malian security institutions:** At the national level, the restoration and extension of state authority is of utmost importance. As the two-year anniversary of the signing of the peace agreement approaches, interim authorities are not yet fully functioning, and the capacity of the Malian security forces remains extremely limited. Even though the return of state authority cannot be carried out only through security institutions, MINUSMA's efforts must focus on extending legitimate and inclusive state authority with capable and legitimate defense forces. Such an approach will require a comprehensive strategy for security sector reform (SSR) that will build confidence in the national military forces, which has been negatively affected by human rights violations and their limited capabilities. The ability of MINUSMA to transfer some of its political and security-related responsibilities to the Malian government will free up resources and capacity to address other gaps and dynamics contributing to instability.

- **Local reconciliation and local ownership:** Considering the different sources of instability, particularly the rise in intercommunal violence and the potential threat this poses to civilians, participants remarked that prioritizing MINUSMA's local reconciliation work could complement its political work at the national level. Inclusivity and ownership at the local level are two key challenges for the peace agreement, and MINUSMA could support this by focusing on ensuring local buy-in. This people-centered approach would also serve to address local grievances that have given rise to radicalization in the country.

- **Greater focus on central Mali:** The security situation in the center of the country has worsened significantly over the past year, and security in central Mali should be treated as a correspondingly higher priority. The rise of extremism and intercommunal violence in the area poses significant threats to civilians and has jeopardized implementation of the peace agreement.

- **Flexible language on the protection of civilians:** Many mission personnel found the language in Resolution 2295 emphasizing the protection of civilians from asymmetric threats both unclear and unfeasible. Considering the dynamic and diverse nature of the threats facing civilians in Mali (including intercommunal violence), the language on protection of civilians in MINUSMA's mandate should allow the mission to adapt its approach based on how threats to civilians evolve throughout the country and where the highest rates of violence occur.

- **Analysis of organized crime:** Organized crime is extremely influential, shaping the priorities of armed groups and political-economic dynamics in northern Mali and beyond (including as an important livelihood), and could ultimately destabilize and threaten the Malian state. MINUSMA should therefore be given a more explicit mandate to analyze organized criminal activity and trends for the purposes of informing its priorities and activities. Resolution 2277 authorizing the UN mission in the Congo

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3 UN Security Council Resolution 2295 (June 29, 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2295, paras. 15, 18, and 19(d).

(MONUSCO) to collect and analyze information on the criminal networks supporting armed groups in eastern Congo can serve as an example. The inherently trans-border nature of criminal activity must also be taken into consideration.

In addition to these adaptations to the mandate, participants suggested that relevant member states and stakeholders should take up the three following priority action areas. These action areas are critical for creating conditions conducive to MINUSMA's success.

- **Address the mismatch between mandate and capacity:** In Resolution 2295 the Security Council increased MINUSMA's troop ceiling by some 2,500 troops and requested that the mission "move to a more proactive and robust posture to carry out its mandate" including when protecting civilians against asymmetric threats. The mission, however, has not received the requisite capacities and resources to implement that mandate. Some of the fatalities that have occurred in MINUSMA could have been avoided had the mission received the expected assets and force multipliers. It is imperative that the mismatch between MINUSMA's mandate and its capacity be rectified, including through the commitments made at the force-generation conference for MINUSMA from May 22–23, 2017.

- **Exercise leverage over signatories:** The Security Council and other member states should contribute bilateral support to the implementation of the peace agreement. MINUSMA is limited in its influence over the various parties to the agreement, and relevant member states and regional actors must apply pressure to incentivize them to live up to their responsibilities and commitments under the peace agreement. This would serve to build trust among its various parties.

- **Coordinate among various security forces:** In February the Sahel G5 countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) decided to establish a counterterrorism force in the region. Given the potential deployment of this force in the near future, clear communication and coordination mechanisms are needed among the various security forces operating in Mali, including MINUSMA, Operation Barkhane, the European Union Training Mission, the Malian armed forces, and now the G5 Sahel. With so many security actors operating in the same area, there is a risk of duplication of efforts and active competition if objectives are not aligned. Therefore, the Security Council and other member states involved in these interventions should ensure that there is a clear division of labor, as well as lines of communication and coordination between them.

As the interim period established by the peace agreement comes to an end, implementation must continue. It is important that the Security Council empower MINUSMA with an appropriately prioritized and sequenced mandate that will allow it to support the parties as they fully implement the agreement, and that also gives the mission enough flexibility to respond to the changing security realities on the ground, particularly in central Mali. Actors supporting peace in Mali must also work strategically and effectively to build institutions and a security situation that are conducive to the holding of free and fair presidential elections in July 2018.

Agenda

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

9:00–9:20 **Opening Remarks**
El Gassim Wane, *Assistant Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations*
Issa Konfourou, *Permanent Representative of Mali to the United Nations*

9:20–11:00 **Session 1: Political Strategy**
In this session, experts will present a brief conflict analysis, outlining the recent developments and the major threats to peace and security in Mali. They will assess the effectiveness of some of the new provisions included in the 2016 mandate, as well as the benchmarks identified in the December 2016 report of the secretary-general. Participants will then discuss a political strategy for the mission that responds to the threats outlined in the conflict analysis. By identifying the elements of a political strategy, participants will aim to outline how the capacities of the mission can be used to support the objectives of the mission. Participants will also discuss how the mission can support existing capacities for peace in order to build on the arrangements that are already working at a local level. In assessing such support, participants will look to elaborate on the roles that may be best played by the mission, the UN, regional partners, and national authorities.

Discussion questions: What is the political strategy underlying the current MINUSMA mandate? Is that political strategy still viable, or does it need to be revised? Has a balance between political and military approaches been reached? How could the mandate better allow the mission to build on what works and adapt to changing conditions on the ground? Could this be translated into a compact with the host government? What are the primary obstacles to successful implementation of the peace agreement? What can MINUSMA do differently? What mission capabilities and approaches have proven effective at influencing the conflict? What is the current understanding of local capacities and effective local arrangements for peace? What is the relationship or level of integration between such bottom-up approaches and national-/state-led efforts? How can the UN best collaborate with regional organizations in evaluating the political and strategic context in which the mission is deployed? How can the Security Council remain engaged in support of MINUSMA's political strategy?

Chair
Ian Martin, *Executive Director, Security Council Report*

Speakers
Samuel Gahigi, *Mali Integrated Team Leader, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations*
Oumou Sall Seck, *Mayor of the City of Goundam, Mali*

11:00–11:15 Coffee Break

11:15–12:50 **Session 2: Prioritization and Sequencing**
In this session, participants will identify the mission's highest priority objectives in order to advance the political strategy defined in the previous session. Participants will also discuss the sequence in which priority objectives should be undertaken. By sequencing the objectives, participants will aim to ensure that the mission is not burdened by too many tasks at the same

time. Participants will also aim to sequence objectives so that the mission is not asked to carry out certain tasks prematurely, before the conditions for their success are in place.

Discussion questions: *In considering the latest secretary-general report and subsequent developments, which objectives in the current mandate should be prioritized? What obstacles have prevented the mission from translating mandated tasks into action, and what conditions need to be in place for those tasks to be carried out? How could the mandate better allow the mission to adapt to changing conditions on the ground? Are the benchmarks outlined in the December 2016 report of the secretary-general realistic and achievable? How were they identified, and how can they be enforced? Can they be used as the basis for preparing an exit strategy, as requested by the Malian government?*

Chair
Youssef Mahmoud, *Senior Adviser, International Peace Institute*

Speakers
Koen Davidse, *Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-General, MINUSMA*
Emmanuel Suquet, *First Secretary, Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations*
Peter Oberg, *Military Advisor, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations*

Participants

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