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Prioritizing and Sequencing Peacekeeping Mandates: The Case of MINUSMA

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STIMSON

On May 8, 2018, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop to discuss the mandate and political strategy of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). This event was the eighth in a series of workshops examining how the activities included in peace operations' mandates can be better prioritized, sequenced, and tied to a political strategy.

This meeting note was drafted collaboratively by IPI, the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report. It summarizes the main points raised in the discussion under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution and does not necessarily represent the views of all participants.

Introduction

In June 2018, the UN Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Ahead of the renewal, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has commissioned an independent, strategic review of MINUSMA to inform the secretary-general's recommendations to the Security Council on the mission's mandate.

In this context, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop on May 8, 2018, to discuss MINUSMA's mandate and political strategy. This workshop offered a platform for member states and UN actors to develop a shared understanding and common strategic assessment of the situation in Mali. The discussion was intended to help the Security Council make informed decisions with respect to the strategic orientation, prioritization, and sequencing of the mission's mandate and actions on the ground.

The first session of the workshop focused on the conflict dynamics and the current state of the peace process in Mali. Experts discussed potential ways to address the challenges facing the political process, including the peace agreement's lack of inclusivity and relevance to non-signatory armed actors, the deterioration of the security situation, and weak state legitimacy. In the second session, participants discussed the Security Council's objectives in Mali and how to strategically prioritize the mission's activities in order to achieve these goals.

With a focus on providing support to the political process, the extension of state authority, security sector reform, and to other security actors, participants discussed how the Council could reflect these strategic priorities in the upcoming MINUSMA mandate. Several participants also highlighted potential tensions among mandated tasks, noting the need to consider more closely how each fits into the mission's political strategy in order to achieve the Council's strategic objectives.

Conflict Analysis

Three years after the signing of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, participants noted that many key provisions remain unimplemented. Threats posed by violent extremists and intercommunal violence exacerbate an already tense political environment, impeding the political process and the restoration and extension of state authority. These violent dynamics have claimed the lives of civilians, Malian security forces,

MINUSMA peacekeepers, and French forces. Instability threatens to undermine the free and fair presidential elections scheduled for July as well as regional and municipal elections that are expected to take place later in the year.

OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PEACE AGREEMENT

According to workshop participants, the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, which emanated from negotiations held in Algiers, has lost traction and is facing several challenges.

Participants debated whether the current peace agreement was sufficiently inclusive but required more proactive support to maintain the commitment of its signatories, or whether, given its shortcomings, a new, broader agreement should be negotiated. Although participants largely agreed that the Security Council should continue to support the existing peace accord, noting that Malians are the only people who can demand a new agreement, many expressed concern about its limitations, such as lack of inclusivity. Signatories to the accord demonstrate weak support for it, and small, often merely symbolic progress is frequently followed by setbacks.

A major challenge that was identified as an impediment to implementation of the peace accord is that signatories have differing expectations and priorities. For example, the Malian government, with the support of MINUSMA, has prioritized implementation of security provisions aimed at restoring territorial control in the north. Other signatories, however, want to focus on implementing measures that strengthen governance provisions, such as decentralization, the redistribution of national resources, and increasing the inclusivity of security institutions. Differing priorities and expectations have made dividends slow to materialize, which, in turn, has weakened signatories' confidence that the accord will secure their interests. Thus far, MINUSMA's support for implementation of the agreement has been predominantly technical, and efforts have not sufficiently encouraged signatories to address their differing expectations and pursue national consensus around fundamental questions regarding the role of the state.

Participants also highlighted how the exclusion of important stakeholders' views is hampering the

peace agreement. Rifts between signatory group leaders and local fighters in the north threaten to undermine the peace process if armed group leaders cannot compel their constituents to adhere to the terms of the agreement. In addition, populations that were excluded from the Algiers negotiations are looking for ways to increase their political leverage to ensure their needs are also met. Meanwhile, regional extremists are capitalizing on the grievances of excluded communities to advance their own interests. For example, in central Mali, Fulani communities that were excluded from the peace agreement have turned to extremist groups for protection and to increase their access to services and bargaining power relative to signatory armed groups.

Deteriorating Security Situation

Participants pointed out that the small progress made in the implementation of the peace agreement in Mali has not translated into increased security for communities on the ground. Over the past year, Mali has experienced increased violence against civilians, peacekeepers, and national and foreign security forces. These volatile security dynamics have impeded MINUSMA's ability to deliver on its mandate.

Participants drew attention to the fact that increased violence in the north and the center regions stem from different, though interconnected, dynamics. In the north, instability has risen in part from lack of confidence in the peace agreement and the fracturing of armed groups. Increased violence in the center is often driven by intercommunal tensions and conflicts over land and local resources. MINUSMA has sought to address the drivers of this violence by supporting local mediation processes, but these efforts often yield only local-level stopgap mechanisms that are unsustainable in the absence of broader institutional change.

A common theme regarding increased violence in both the north and center of the country is the regionalization of the conflict and the growth in influence of extremists. Regional extremist groups have strengthened their foothold in West Africa, and are leveraging community tensions and unaddressed grievances to grow their capacities and strike progressively ambitious targets.

Some participants also noted that a hardening and increasingly polarized political discourse has the potential to worsen the security situation on the ground. Public dissatisfaction with the Malian

government is high and radicalization is increasing among groups that did not take up arms during the conflict, but were excluded from the peace process and feel politically marginalized by the government, like the Fulani. These groups may resort to the use of violence in order to earn a seat at the negotiating table.

Perceived Illegitimacy of the Government

The Malian state remains weak or absent throughout much of the center and north of the country, while in other areas it is receding further. This has created a governance vacuum in which communities are aligning themselves with armed groups to access security and justice, which is otherwise absent. Where the government does have a physical presence, its lack of utility in the eyes of the population has further eroded state legitimacy and encouraged communities to turn to armed groups for governance and services.

The legitimacy of the Malian state is also undermined by its own predatory behavior toward its population, as noted by several participants. In its attempts to counter growing terrorist threats, Malian security forces are alleged to have been involved in extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests and detentions. These incidents further erode the legitimacy of an already weak and poorly-trusted government.

Implications for MINUSMA's Mandate and Political Strategy

Increased insecurity in Mali and the challenges facing the peace agreement and the extension of state authority require MINUSMA to refocus its efforts on bolstering the political process and improving governance. Participants articulated that both the Security Council and mission leadership have a role to play in ensuring that MINUSMA's mandate and political strategy are adequately prioritized and sequenced to achieve the Council's objectives in Mali.

Prioritizing and Sequencing MINUSMA's Mandate and Activities

In anticipation of MINUSMA's upcoming mandate renewal, workshop participants suggested that the Security Council should provide the mission with

clear and coherent strategic priorities that are based on the Council's overall objective in Mali. While it was noted that the mandate renewal was more likely a process of refinement than of significant reformation, a few participants observed that several assumptions underlying MINUSMA's deployment had not held, including compliance with a robust political agreement and rapid establishment of security space for the political process to take hold.

Considering the current context and MINUSMA's comparative advantages relative to other international actors on the ground, one potential political strategy proposed for the mission would be to focus on creating a political and security environment that is conducive to: (1) the delivery of peace dividends to the people of Mali, and; (2) the reform of state institutions to be more inclusive and legitimate. To achieve this, the Security Council should strengthen and expand MINUSMA's role in the political process.

Participants also discussed strengthening language in the Security Council resolution regarding force generation for the mission in order to address continuing gaps in critical capacities, and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the various international security partners in Mali and the surrounding countries, including the European Union Training Mission (EUTM), Operation Barkhane, and the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5).

Beyond changes to the language of the mandate, participants suggested that the prioritization and more precise sequencing of mission activities on the ground could be led by the special representative of the secretary-general. It was also suggested that the special representative should oversee all mission components and examine how the work of each directly contributes to advancing the political process, protecting civilians in high-risk areas, and securing the mission's exit strategy. They should target their actions accordingly.

STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND MINUSMA'S ROLE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

The government of Algeria, instrumental in brokering the comprehensive peace agreement for Mali, has de facto stepped back from its lead role in Mali's political process. To fill this void, participants raised that it is both necessary and opportune for MINUSMA to expand its political role beyond

good offices to take a more active leadership role in the ongoing political process. Specifically, MINUSMA should focus on supporting greater inclusivity in the political process and on implementing the governance provisions of the peace agreement.

The exclusivity of the peace agreement is one of the biggest challenges to the political process and the restoration of stability in Mali. MINUSMA should strengthen its efforts to promote avenues for non-signatory actors, both armed and unarmed, to participate in the implementation of the peace agreement. Inviting groups like the “Coordination des Mouvements de l’Entente” to observe meetings of the Commission Technique de Sécurité is an example of the type of activities that should be prioritized and potentially expanded.

MINUSMA, alongside the Security Council and other member states, should also significantly increase pressure on conflict parties to live up to their commitments under the peace agreement. Participants suggested that good offices and high-level diplomacy should be complemented by the credible threat of sanctions against parties that fail to demonstrate the political will to adhere to the terms of the accord. MINUSMA’s efforts to support the arrest and prosecution of violent spoilers on the ground would also complement these efforts to recommit parties to the peace process.

In addition, MINUSMA should seek to link its own local mediation work, as well as the local mediation work of its nongovernmental partners on the ground, to broader national-level political processes. Participants noted that local-level mediation mechanisms, while effective stopgap measures to prevent violence in the short run, are ultimately limited in their ability to address the drivers of violence when not supported by broader institutional change. Considering its influence both at the local and national levels, MINUSMA should use high-level diplomacy to ensure that local grievances uncovered by its mediation efforts are heard and addressed by national decision makers.

BOLSTER STATE LEGITIMACY AND UTILITY

According to several participants, from the outset the UN has underestimated the role of poor governance in fomenting violence and instability in Mali. Unequal resource distribution, political and

economic marginalization of key groups, and poor service and justice provision have fueled insurgency, and, in some cases, radicalization. Armed elements have capitalized on people’s unmet protection, justice, and service needs. Thus far, many participants observed, MINUSMA’s support to the peace agreement has focused too heavily on the security elements of the accord, at the expense of broader governance and institutional reforms.

In response, the Council should instruct MINUSMA to prioritize support to efforts that promote good governance, both within the context of the peace agreement and in areas and contexts beyond the purview of the agreement. These efforts include decentralization, increasing the inclusivity of state institutions such as through security sector reform, redistributing resources, and assisting the state in demonstrating its utility and building its legitimacy through the provision of security, justice, and other basic services like health and education. This should take priority over extending the symbolic presence of the state and is particularly important for maintaining and expanding the state where it is still present.

This strategy will need to be flexible enough to address the differing sources of mistrust in the state in different areas of the country. In the north of the country, extension of state authority will require tangible progress on the decentralization of governance and the redistribution of national resources. In the center of the country and in other areas where intercommunal violence is prominent, the approach should focus on livelihood protection and the provision of justice and reconciliation services. Participants suggested that extension of state authority in this region should not be driven from Bamako, but from local points of entry where the authority and legitimacy of the state currently stops or is contested.

Improving the legitimacy of the state will also mean supporting efforts to hold the state accountable for wrongdoing. Given MINUSMA’s mandate to support the Malian defence and security forces, the mission is well placed to contribute to increasing accountability for human rights violations.

SUPPORT SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

Security sector reform (SSR) is critical for making progress on the peace agreement, supporting the

state to build its own legitimacy, and working toward an exit strategy for the mission. While SSR is a long-term agenda that will take decades to make sustainable progress, it is important for the mission to identify specific areas of SSR to support that can deliver short-term gains to the Malian population. MINUSMA should therefore help the Malian government develop a national SSR strategy. It should also identify areas of SSR that peace agreement signatories are keen to implement (such as the allocation of military quotas) and use those as leverage to make progress on the areas that will provide peace dividends to the population.

HIGHLIGHT FORCE GENERATION

Five years ago MINUSMA was deployed under the assumption that it would be outfitted with the necessary capacities and equipment required to successfully achieve its mandate. Many participants lamented that this has not yet come to pass. Despite language from the Security Council in previous mandates urging member states and the Secretariat to expedite the identification and deployment of all necessary capacities, MINUSMA's troop levels remain below the authorized troop ceiling and its logistical capacity remains inadequate.

At the request of the secretary-general, in 2017 the Council increased its engagement on strategic force generation in Mali, but substantial gaps persist. As such, the Security Council should reiterate its deep concern regarding the need to fill gaps and strengthen MINUSMA's operating capacity. As stressed by many participants, it should also renew its call for member states to support the mission's procurement and deployment of the capacities needed to operate in an increasingly complex and volatile environment.

CLARIFY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

During the meeting, Mali was described as a laboratory of joint international interventions. MINUSMA operates alongside the EUTM in Mali, the Algerian-led and African Union-supported mediation process, the broader UN political strategy for the Sahel region, the G5, and French military forces. The Security Council should

therefore consider options to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the mission with respect to other actors on the ground in order to ensure efficient coordination of response efforts and avoid the potential for these partners to work at cross-purposes with each other.

Conclusion

In the face of a deteriorating security situation and upcoming presidential elections in July, the Security Council should use MINUSMA's mandate renewal to clarify its objectives and strategic priorities for the mission. These priorities should aim to create a political and security environment in which the government of Mali can pursue institutional reforms and national actors can deliver services and peace dividends to the Malian population.

As a matter of priority, the Security Council should strengthen and broaden MINUSMA's role in the political process, expanding MINUSMA's activities beyond support to the peace agreement to empower the mission to devise a more inclusive political process that engages both signatory and non-signatory actors. The Council should also strengthen its call for member states to support procurement and deployment of the capacities and equipment required for MINUSMA to succeed and should consider clarifying MINUSMA's role in security provision relative to other security actors on the ground.

MINUSMA's leadership should then prioritize and sequence its activities to best achieve the objectives outlined by the Council, taking into consideration the realities on the ground in Mali. It should do so by increasing pressure on signatory armed groups to fulfil their commitments to the peace agreement, increasing opportunities for non-signatory actors to participate in the political process, linking local-level mediation efforts in the center of the country to broader national decision-making, focusing on building the legitimacy and utility of the state, and prioritizing support to the reform of security institutions.

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