



Scan to know paper details and  
author's profile

# What Can we Learn from the UN Mission in Mali. Contribution to the Future of Peacekeeping

*C.J. (Kees) Matthijssen MSS*

## INTRODUCTION

The Sahel-region is facing a major crisis that we hardly seem to notice, because the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza are drawing much more of our attention. It is not only a pity, but also could turn out to be a strategic mistake. The stability in the region is strongly affected by jihadist motivated movements, such as Islamic State (IS). In addition, there are geopolitical influences in the region, such as Russian involvement e.g., that are not necessarily adding to better stability. In the period 2022-2023 I was the Force Commander in the *Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali (MINUSMA)*. Although the mission was mandated for Mali, the situation in Mali cannot be seen separate from the increasing problems in the entire Sahel-region.

*Keywords:* NA

*Classification:* LCC Code: JZ6374

*Language:* English



Great Britain  
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573382

Print ISSN: 2515-5784

Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities & Social Science

Volume 25 | Issue 9 | Compilation 1.0





# What Can we Learn from the UN Mission in Mali. Contribution to the Future of Peacekeeping

C.J. (Kees) Matthijssen MSS

*Author:* Lieutenant general (retired), *Former Force Commander MINUSMA.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Sahel-region is facing a major crisis that we hardly seem to notice, because the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza are drawing much more of our attention. It is not only a pity, but also could turn out to be a strategic mistake. The stability in the region is strongly affected by jihadist motivated movements, such as Islamic State (IS). In addition, there are geopolitical influences in the region, such as Russian involvement e.g., that are not necessarily adding to better stability. In the period 2022-2023 I was the Force Commander in the *Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali (MINUSMA)*. Although the mission was mandated for Mali, the situation in Mali cannot be seen separate from the increasing problems in the entire Sahel-region.

In this article I will share my views on lessons we can draw from MINUSMA especially in the context of the UN's work on the future of peacekeeping. I sincerely recognize the fact that I cannot be extensive and I also strongly voice upfront that we should do thorough in-depth analysis on all the lessons coming from MINUSMA before drawing conclusions. The UN has taken care of the latter with an independent study 'The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities'<sup>1</sup> published in November 2024. This study was a starting point for a trajectory leading up to a ministerial conference 13-14 May this year on the Future of UN Peacekeeping. MINUSMA unfortunately has

ended in December 2023 because the Malian government has asked the UN to end the mission.

I will first say a few words about the complexity of the situation in Mali, followed by the background of the UN mission MINUSMA and its mandate. After that I will discuss some relevant lessons emerging from my experience as Force Commander, before giving my thoughts on the future of peacekeeping.

## II. THE COMPLEXITY IN MALI

The origin of MINUSMA's presence in Mali goes back to the violent uprising in 2012 in the north of the country by a variety of groups, mainly Tuaregs, aiming for independence. They felt marginalized by the Malian government, understandable since the Tuaregs were hardly represented in the government and government institutions. This lack of inclusion is one of the more fundamental problems in Mali. This uprising by the way, was already the fourth since Mali became independent in 1960. This uprising was dealt with by the Malian government with help from France and the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)-organized military mission sent to support the government of ECOWAS member nation Mali against the rebels in the North. A little later, in early 2013, the Malian government formally asked for UN assistance to restore stability in the country.

The context and circumstances in which MINUSMA has operated were extremely complex, caused to a significant degree by the numerous actors and various layers of conflict in Mali. During my tenure as Force Commander, I have identified four layers of conflict. The first one, basically the origin of MINUSMA's presence, had to do with the three entities that have signed the

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/study-on-future-of-peacekeeping-new-models-and-related-capabilities>.

Algiers Peace Agreement (APR) in 2015, the *Signatory Armed Groups (SAGs)*: the Malian government, *La Coördination des Mouvements de Azawad (CMA)*, being the movement that sought independence for the North, and *Plateforme*, the movement that favors Malian unity, but does want the government to better take care of the North. The relationships were difficult mainly because trust was lacking, with the consequences of friction and a lack of progress in the implementation of the peace agreement.

A second layer concerned the terrorist and/or jihadist motivated groups that tried to expand control over huge areas in Mali, with two main movements playing an important role. The first is *Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM)* – which consists of various decentralized operating groups affiliated to Al Qaeda, who seek to build a Sharia-based state and to expel Western influences. The second movement is *Islamic State in the Sahel Province (ISSP)* – which operates in the eastern part of Mali, but also in the northern part of Burkina Faso and the western part of Niger, the so-called Liptako-Gourma region. ISSP has an affiliation with IS ideology in the Middle East. It uses brutal and excessive violence, including killing innocent civilians in villages, to control large areas in the Sahel. Both movements have expanded their influence significantly in the past years causing the deterioration of the security situation. They both, each in their own way, exploited a lack of economic opportunities as well as ethnic and social divisions among the population. Furthermore, both movements clash with one another regularly. For various reasons, these movements have never been part of the peace process.

The third layer is the intercommunity violence. The Malian population consists of various ethnic groups. Some of them are having conflicts, such as the Fulani and the Dogon, that every now and then lead to armed clashes. The intercommunity tensions run across all other layers. The Malian government unfortunately focused too much on fighting terrorism without paying sufficient attention to communal reconciliation or the state's other vital functions. The final layer of complexity is everything related to illegal

trafficking or what I call the black economy. Especially drugs trafficking has increased through the years of instability. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated in last year's report *Drug trafficking in the Sahel* that '...trafficking is well implanted in the Sahel countries and continues to undermine peace, stability and development in the region, not least because it benefits armed groups, fuels competition between them and undermines the legitimacy of state institutions through corruption.'<sup>2</sup>

An important actor that did not always make things easier is the Malian government. Since the coup in May 2021 president Assimi Goita has been leading the transitional government. The beginning of 2022 marked an important change in its attitude in international cooperation, not only towards the UN but also to ECOWAS, neighboring countries and other nations. It has become more strict and more demanding in wanting to be respected for their sovereignty, the choices that they make and the vital interests of Mali. This in itself is not unique since any government would want the same. But that is why it is very important to try to understand why the Malians act as they do. Underneath is a strong desire to leave the colonial past behind and anything that is perceived like it. Anything that even looks like colonial behavior is reacted upon. The Malian government does not want to be told what to do and what not to do. It wants to be treated respectfully and on a basis of equality. With this in mind, I do note that there is still a willingness to cooperate if indeed the above is taken care of.

In addition to all of this there are three more fundamental factors causing major challenges. The first is poor governance at all levels and the lack of inclusivity in it. A second one is climate change and the third is the growth of the population. Like many African nations, Mali has a relatively young population due to the fast growth of that population. Mali's GDP growth per capita has been relatively weak over the past years, with a short, but significant negative dip to -8.7% during Covid-19. In 2022 there was a positive

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Drug Trafficking in the Sahel*.

growth again, but still no more than 0,3%<sup>3</sup>. The lack of economic perspective brings additional challenges for a huge young generation, also making them vulnerable for jihadist ideology.

### 2.1 The Mandate

In 2013 the UN Security Council decided to mandate MINUSMA based on a request from the Malian government for support to restore stability. The first mandate, under Chapter VII of the Charter of the UN, had no less than about 35 tasks. The main focus was on restoration of State authority, facilitating the peace process, supporting the transition towards transparent and inclusive elections and demanding the rebel armed groups to put aside their arms and cease hostilities, including to engage in an inclusive negotiation process under the condition that they cut off all ties with terrorist organizations.

The implementation of the peace agreement, once it was signed, was the priority in MINUSMA's mandate. The agreement included arrangements on disarmament of former combatants and integration in the formal Malian security institutions. The mandate further included Protection of Civilians, authorizing, if needed, the use of all necessary means to protect civilians. I have assessed the mandate as a robust mandate, providing enough room for us as a mission to do our work.

Since 2013 the mandate has been evaluated and extended annually in June. In addition to the priority in the mandate, mentioned above, a second priority was added in 2019. This was the support to restoring State authority in Central Mali. The main reasons behind this decision were the deterioration of the security situation in the central part of Mali due to increased control of terrorist/jihadist armed groups mainly affiliated with JNIM. Despite the importance of this task, the Council failed to add additional means to the mission. The mission was asked to readjust its posture within own means. The Force had to develop a Force Adaptation Plan in which means for Central Mali were generated within the troop

ceiling by reducing numbers elsewhere. One of the main implications was that the other sectors, North, West and East, had less troops available to maintain presence in their regions, stretching battalions even more to their limits.

In addition, those reductions were implemented quite fast, but unfortunately it took much more time before the new troops for the newly created Sector Centre were generated and/or could be accommodated. The consequence was that the Force has operated for more than three years after the Council's decision, with about a thousand troops under its authorized troop ceiling of roughly 13,500 soldiers. Even when I started my tour in January 2022, I found out that the Force Adaptation plan was not completed yet. A specific example, amongst others, is the Quick Reaction Force for Sector Centre which arrived from Bangladesh after summer in 2022, more than three years after the Force Adaptation Plan was developed. This unit's deployment was delayed several times due to delays mainly in construction of the required infrastructure for the unit.

With a changing attitude of the Malian government and the Wagner Group entering the theatre, mandate discussions brought more political emphasis on human rights, freedom of movement for the mission and the presence of Wagner in itself. This increased political pressure did not make it easier for the mission to maintain a workable relationship with the Malian authorities, which was crucial for the mission to be able to execute its tasks and to be effective. We needed to find a proper balance between the political reality and the reality on the ground.

### III. LESSONS FROM MINUSMA

MINUSMA may well be the most complex mission the UN has ever done. The mission is far from the more classic UN peacekeeping missions: the complexity of the environment, multiple actors including hostile and extremist actors using asymmetric tactics, a 360-degree threat to the peacekeepers, the assertiveness of the host nation authorities and influential geopolitical actors. I called it 'another way of peacekeeping'. For these reasons, there is a lot to learn from MINUSMA's

<sup>3</sup> World Bank Group, "GDP per capita growth (annual %) – Mali."

experiences, especially to determine the future of peacekeeping. In this section, I will describe a few lessons that, in my view, need to be looked at more in-depth because of their relevance for the future of peacekeeping.

### 3.1 Mandate

The good thing about a UN mandate is its comprehensiveness and the fact that it is discussed and renewed annually in the UN Security Council (UNSC). This provides the opportunity to look at the progress periodically. Nevertheless, there are three aspects that deserve improvement.

The first is the mandate's clarity. A UN mandate is always a political compromise in the UNSC, which explains that often some of the tasks tend to be unclear, being subject to multiple interpretations. Because of its origin in a political environment, I recognize the fact that mandates may not always provide the clarity that is needed on the ground. Still, the better the clarity the more effective the mission can fulfil its tasks while enhancing unity of effort with other actors. In the end, it is up to the mission to translate the mandate into executable tasks for mission components. For those reasons it may be useful to consider to include a consultation with the mission leadership in the process of mandate's decision-making. This is a way in which the mission leadership could provide their interpretation of the mandate and check with the council's intentions. This could help to optimize clarity.

Secondly, the mandate contained an extensive list of tasks for the mission. On the one hand that makes it very comprehensive, on the other hand, the question is whether it is not too much for a mission to handle. More focus, based on realistic objectives could help in terms of feasibility and credibility. A dialogue with the host nation, prior to final decision-making in the UN Security Council, could add to that and even more it also could lead to a more context specific approach. In that way a mandate could be more tailored to the needs in the conflict affected state. This may also help to set more realistic objectives, to better

manage expectations and it will benefit the relationship with the host nation from the start.

The third aspect has to do with the lack of any future perspective on the horizon of the mission. Mandates hardly refer to a (potential) end state. Defining an end state including related conditions under which a mission will be terminated will help to bring more focus for mission execution. In addition, it would help in the annual discussion in the Council to put the mission's progress in the perspective of the conditions for termination in the future.

### 3.2 Mindset

The UN collectively has an impressive experience with peacekeeping missions. This experience brings a collective mindset about peacekeeping. In a rapidly changing world bringing significant challenges and changes in the peacekeeping environment as well, adapting to this new reality is essential. As stated before, MINUSMA was far from the more classic peacekeeping. That is why there is a need to adjust the peacekeeping mindset.

The core principle of impartiality is absolutely still valid, but it needs to be seen in the context of the mission to adapt to the right application of the principle. In the Malian context remaining impartial has been more difficult than ever. The mission was by many perceived to be leaning too much to the signatory armed groups (CMA and Plateforme). In the eyes of the latter the mission was perceived to be too supportive to the Malian government.

This leads to the question whether MINUSMA was always able to be impartial, or whether MINUSMA could be perceived as impartial in supporting the Malian authorities. From my own relationships with the other entities in the peace agreement I have learned that they often did not see the right balance in MINUSMA's approach, while they do expect this balanced approach. I always preferred to talk about a balance in our approach instead of voicing impartiality. A balance in which the mission was perceived to safeguard attention for all three entities equally in the peace agreement.

Another example is the support to the Malian Defense and Security Forces. This support could vary from providing fuel for aircraft or helicopters, to transport, to training or operational support to operations. As Force Commander I always saw the relationship with the Malian Armed Forces as a partnering relationship. Although the mandate explicitly authorized supporting the host nation security forces, the reality was that I sometimes sensed reluctance and differences in mindset in some parts of the mission with regard to impartiality and/or interpretation of the mandate on this point.

The reluctance further increased when the Malian authorities started their cooperation with the Wagner Group<sup>4</sup>, the private military company strongly affiliated with Russia. My intent has always been to continue close cooperation with the Malian armed forces including the support as mentioned above, as long as the Malian armed forces kept Wagner out of the cooperation with us. That, by the way, has always been the case. My thoughts behind my intent were that supporting and assisting the host nation security institutions should be a key element in the approach in order to maintain credibility and to show our added value in helping the nation's institutions to fulfill their responsibilities. A mission is there to make itself obsolete in the future, at the moment a host nation can stand on its own feet. Whatever we can do to help them to get there, should be done.

The process of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) unfortunately was not always helpful. Although the majority of the Malian requests were granted after the HRDDP check, the conditions that were associated with it were not always realistic or not even appropriate sometimes giving the impression of lack of trust. Those conditions sometimes asked for detailed information to be provided by the Malians. In addition, the process often took too long sometimes caused by the level of detail that was asked for which took time to get the required information on the table. Both aspects

<sup>4</sup> Later in 2023, the Wagner Group in Africa was referred to as the Africa Corps.

contributed to the loss of credibility for the mission in the eyes of the Malian authorities. For those reasons more flexibility and risk appetite on the UN and mission side could help in applying HRDDP as a useful tool enhancing the credibility of the mission. In my view we should refrain from asking too detailed information since that is not always realistic and not always necessary. I do not argue the HRDDP as such, but a more pragmatic approach based on the most essential information and, above all, trust would prevent harming the mission's credibility. Part of that is the accountability of the host nation armed forces. This is especially the case when the host state's armed forces are facing such a challenging security environment like we have seen in Mali e.g. with the uprising of the jihadist motivated armed groups.

In the process of adapting the mindset to another reality of peacekeeping, I often called our mission in Mali 'learning by doing'. MINUSMA sincerely was another way of peacekeeping that the UN has not experienced before. Flexibility of mind is essential to adapt the collective mindset to be able to collectively apply an adequate and effective approach in the mission that continuously enhances its credibility.

### *3.3 Situational Understanding*

In every conflict situational awareness and situational understanding are crucial. Awareness is about knowing what is happening, but understanding is about realizing why things are happening that way. It is more about grasping various actors' intentions and the dynamics in a country. Understanding is even more important than awareness and becomes even more essential when host nations become more assertive (as we saw in Mali). Understanding why they act as they do is crucial. I am not sure whether MINUSMA collectively always understood the Malian authorities well enough. I would not be surprised if this was a factor that influenced the relationship and caused both growing apart a bit.

Especially the strong change in the Malian attitude that started early 2022 may have been something that was underestimated. In addition,

the UN historically may have been used to have some form of authority that others should adhere to. That did no longer work in Mali. I always said that we should see the Malian authorities in the driver's seat and ourselves in the co-driver's seat. In that seat we should not tell them how to get from A to B, but we should have a good conversation in which we raise arguments that cause them to consider how to get from A to B. The better we understand that simple comparison and the better we act accordingly, the better we can collectively optimize our understanding and apply a consistent approach benefitting the relationship.

### 3.4 Human Rights

The Malian government felt that the discussions on human rights were strongly politicized. To a certain extent I could understand why they perceived it that way. Too often alleged human rights violations of Malian security actors caused other, mainly western, states to place political blame on the Malian authorities in public, sometimes even before the facts were on the table. In addition, the Malians felt that the ones that raised their voice did not have an eye for the difficult fight of the Malian armed forces against terrorism and jihadism in their country. In the context of the point that I made earlier about the Malian government not wanting to be told what to do or what not to do, it is important to understand that political opinions expressed from a distance and often through the media, only caused more frustration and thus feeding the anti-western sentiments.

Although the Malian government may not have had the credibility on their side because they did not always grant MINUSMA access to investigate alleged human rights violations, I think we still need to keep an eye on the nuances and the facts. It does not help us to be too principled in the discussion especially in the context of a changing world. In that changing world, states and also host states of UN peacekeeping operations demand more recognition of their sovereignty and on the other hand perpetrators of human rights violations become more assertive especially non-state actors. All of this results in the gradual

but steady worldwide erosion of the application of human rights standards. This influences the debates about UN peacekeeping and human rights significantly as well. Because of this development we need to find more pragmatic ways to keep human rights on the agenda with a willingness to compromise if needed in specific cases or circumstances for the sake of the longer-term objectives.

### 3.5 Logistical Fragility

Mali is a huge country and the area in which MINUSMA operated, the northern and central part of Mali, was at least the size of France. This brought enormous distances to cover in the logistical sustainment of the mission. In addition, large parts of Northern Mali hardly have any infrastructure, not only causing mobility challenges for the local population, but also for the mission. With limited availability of air transport means, most of the logistics (fuel, spare parts, infrastructural materials, food) needed to be transported by convoys that needed to cover distances up to 700 kilometers. The fragile logistical system in the mission was its Achilles heel in a very threatening environment.

UN peacekeepers were a target for hostile actors in Mali. Convoy operations were always a relatively easy target because of the size of the convoys, the unpredictability of their movements and the limitations of the terrain. The use of improvised explosive devices was the main way of operating in recent years by hostile actors. For these reasons convoy operations were also the most vulnerable operations in which MINUSMA took the most of its casualties. This significantly added to MINUSMA being the deadliest UN mission in recent history.

These convoy operations required a lot of effort mainly due to the vulnerability of the logistical system in that threatful environment. That type of environment requires a robust logistical system in which more air transport is available for logistic purposes. Lives could have been saved if more logistics would have been done by air. I recognize that it may not be possible to do everything by air, especially for the enormous amounts of fuel for

example, but the fact is that more could have been done.

That also brings me to another point that is strongly nested in the UN. For budgetary reasons a lot is driven by and dealt with based on efficiency reasons. The same applies for the logistical system causing limiting the use of air assets for logistics. I am not sure whether the costs of this are really that much higher. Ground convoys imply a lot of sunk costs, such as the units that protect the convoys and the assets that support the convoy operations, because those costs are not counted separately. Fuel for air assets is more obvious, easy to count and not seen as sunk costs.

We should not underestimate the side effects of it as well. Having the perception of the deadliest mission is not something that enhances the credibility of the mission. Furthermore, it does not make the mission attractive for member states to contribute to it. Therefore, a less vulnerable logistical system does not only pay off in saving lives and having more logistical reliability, it also contributes to a better image of the mission.

#### IV. THE LACK OF SUFFICIENT MILITARY MEANS

In a deteriorating security environment, it was more than essential that the military actors in Mali coordinated their efforts. This was done through the *L'Instance de coordination militaire du Mali* (ICMM). In this coordinating body, chaired by the MINUSMA Force Commander, the commanders of the military actors in Mali, being the Malian Chief of Defense, commander Barkhane, commander G5-Sahel Force, commander European Union Training Mission (EUTM) and Force Commander MINUSMA met periodically. This cooperation was essential to ensure that these actors complemented each other's efforts in the threatful environment in Mali.

Two developments impacted the presence of troops in Mali significantly during my tenure as Force Commander. Firstly, the withdrawal of the French operation Barkhane in August 2022 left a

void in its areas of operations. Nor the Malian armed forces, nor the MINUSMA Force were able to fill that void. As a consequence, Islamic State had more room to maneuver in the eastern part of Mali. Secondly, Mali withdrew itself from the G5-Sahel in May 2022. Although the G5-Sahel Force was not the most important military actor in Mali, it did bring another loss of military capabilities.

Although the MINUSMA Force of more than thirteen thousand soldiers looked like a big force, in a huge country like Mali, this number is relatively small, especially if one realizes the threatful environment in many areas, the Protection of Civilians mandate and the fact that the Malian armed forces are relatively small for the size of the country. In addition, at the time of decision-making in the Council (2013) the presence of the French operation Barkhane was taken into account. They could conduct counter-terrorism operations in the northern part of Mali that also brought a deterring effect on terrorist and jihadist groups. Furthermore, in the course of a deteriorating security situation no means have been added to the MINUSMA Force, not even in 2019 with the addition of the previously mentioned second priority.

This context is relevant for discussing MINUSMA's effectiveness. I want to emphasize that the military actors are not there to fight for a military solution. But they are crucial to facilitate the integrated approach. Protection of civilians and a basic level of security are important prerequisites to create or enhance stability and allow civilian efforts to restore proper governance, basic services and security.

Often it is voiced that MINUSMA was not able to prevent the deterioration of the security situation. This has nothing to do with not having a counter-terrorism mandate, as the Malians have often asked for. As I mentioned before, the mandate was robust and the Force was able to deter hostile terrorist and jihadist actors by its presence. I would say that collectively, the international community with all its actors and the Malian institutions were not able to prevent this

deterioration. One needs to take the above into account before drawing conclusions.

#### 4.1 International Dynamics

Beginning in early 2022 we have seen a more intense cooperation between Mali and Russia and, even more, we have seen the cooperation with private military company Wagner materializing. Russia's increased interest in Africa cannot be seen apart from the war in Ukraine. Political support, financial and economic gains and geopolitical powerplay are likely driving factors behind it. In addition, compared to cooperating with western nations it is easier for African nations to do business with Russia, since Russia does not impose conditionalities on cooperation, like law and order, human rights, democratic values etcetera.

The crumbling of those values in Mali caused a loss of commitment for MINUSMA in many European nations. The fact that Mali was ruled by a military junta and that the same junta started cooperation with Wagner, together with the human rights situation, caused more political concerns in many European capitals. In the course of 2022, the three remaining European countries that still contributed to MINUSMA with units, Sweden, Great-Britain and Germany, decided to end their contribution. Apart from those, there were still some other European countries in the mission, but their contribution was limited to small numbers of staff officers. The announcement from the three countries was painful because with their withdrawal the visible contribution from Europe would come to an end. MINUSMA had 60 nations from all over the world and all continents contributed to the efforts in Mali, but the continent that was the closest withdrew.

Despite the loss of interest because of the reasons mentioned, Europe's withdrawal is somewhat remarkable as well since Europe has a strong interest in the Sahel-region. Its instability affects Europe and may affect Europe even more in the future. Apart from the political considerations, European nations brought valuable capabilities and experience that contributed significantly to

MINUSMA's military force. As a Force Commander, I saw the value of those nations that strongly complemented the capabilities in the MINUSMA Force and with that contributed to the effectiveness of the military instrument within the UN multidimensional approach.

There is another consideration that Europe should realize. That is the aspect of burden sharing. Many non-western nations see that European nations have a lot of influence in the UN, by paying their contributions, having some key positions and their influence in policy-making. But they do not see those same nations sharing the burden on the ground, while non-western troop contributing countries often not only show long term commitment in difficult UN missions, but also are taking the most casualties in peacekeeping missions. In MINUSMA e.g. the majority of the more than 300 blue helmets that were killed over ten years came from African nations.

In my view the European withdrawal was not the right signal because Europe's contribution complemented other continents' contributions significantly and additionally there was definitely a European interest at stake in the Sahel-region. Europe needs to play its role in a UN context including by contributing to peacekeeping missions. That in itself is serious food for thought within Europe in the context of the future of peacekeeping.

Russia's role on the one hand and Europe's role on the other hand have influenced the mission significantly. The withdrawal of European nations weakened the mission since no replacements were offered by other nations. Russia's influence has directly and indirectly influenced the atmospherics in the country including the anti-western sentiments that also impacted the mission, apart from the effects in the UNSC.

## V. TO CONCLUDE

MINUSMA was a complex but fascinating mission in all its aspects and in an unprecedented way. That is why there is so much to learn from it and that is why a proper evaluation with a thorough in-depth analysis is essential in order to be able to

draw the right conclusions. Such an analysis should cover achievements and positive lessons as well by the way, besides things to improve. The ‘New Agenda for Peace’ that was initiated by UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres deserves to include relevant lessons from recent missions. The UN’s ministerial conference in May this year seems to have brought renewed commitment from many nations with concrete pledges aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and adaptability of peace operations in the face of evolving global challenges.

I am absolutely sure that there will be a future for peacekeeping as long as peace is at stake in so many parts of the world. Doing nothing is never an option. Although UN peacekeeping missions may not always be optimal, they do make a difference. In that regard, let us keep in mind what UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld said in 1954: ‘The United Nations was not made to take mankind to heaven, but rather save humanity from hell.’ Making the difference with peacekeeping still requires all UN member states’ commitment in an equal way. We collectively need to realize that the UN is us together. It is necessary to continuously try to identify the best possible ways to contribute to building peace in those areas that need international support. I hope this article contributes to that.

## REFERENCES

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Drug Trafficking in the Sahel* (Vienna, 2024). [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta\\_sahel/TOCTA\\_Sahel\\_drugs.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta_sahel/TOCTA_Sahel_drugs.pdf) (Accessed 18 July 2024).
2. World Bank Group, “GDP per capita growth (annual %) – Mali.” <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?locations=ML> (Accessed 18 July 2024).

*This page is intentionally left blank*