



Security Council

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Letter dated 27 December 2019 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Security Council resolution [2480 \(2019\)](#) on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), by which the Council requested me, addressing perspectives from all relevant actors, including my Special Representative for Mali, in consultation with the Force Commander, to provide the Security Council with a letter focusing on: (a) information on security challenges in Mali, progress in mission operations, troop performance and rotations, and an update on the coordination of security responsibilities; (b) an update on the integrated strategic framework and related transition plan, as well as a possible exit strategy, for the Mission on the basis of improved security and political conditions, and of progress in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

Security challenges in Mali and Mission operations

As outlined in my report [S/2019/983](#), which contains a thorough assessment of the situation in northern and central Mali, MINUSMA continues to play an essential role in supporting the parties to advance political solutions, while adopting a more robust, flexible and mobile posture to support the stabilization and restoration of State authority and protect civilians in those regions.

The Mission has reinforced its presence in central Mali. Within the framework of Operation Oryx, it put added focus on areas where civilians are most under threat in central Mali, including in Bandiagara, Bankass and Koro *cercles*. The deployment of temporary operating bases allowed the Mission to strengthen its engagement with communities in the most vulnerable areas in central Mali. MINUSMA also supported the establishment of an early warning mechanism involving 207 localities in 49 municipalities in central Mali.

The redeployment of the reconstituted Malian Defence and Security Forces remains critical to move the peace process forward and to facilitate the return of other State officials to northern and central Mali. In order to rapidly meet this objective and to counter the expansion of terrorist activity, the Malian armed forces have deployed units that often lack mobility and strength to bases that do not offer adequate protection, which increases the vulnerability of the units.

Despite announcements by the authorities to this effect, the number of national defence and security forces deployed to the centre has not increased significantly. Furthermore, the Malian armed forces lost two strategic positions in the north,



following the attacks on and subsequent withdrawal from their camps in Indelimane and Anderamboukane to Ménaka.

Against this backdrop, MINUSMA recently conducted a pilot operation to reinforce the positions of the Malian armed forces in remote locations, including through the strategic deployment of air assets and the airborne insertion and extraction of special forces in a short time frame. Through the full implementation of the adaptation plan, the Mission would be able to implement similar operations in all sectors.

In order to support a more flexible, integrated approach to implementing the Mission's mandate and to assess progress made by the Mission towards achieving its objectives, MINUSMA has begun implementing the comprehensive performance assessment system, an operational planning and performance assessment tool. The system will allow MINUSMA to more quickly adapt its plans in response to changes to the local context and to collect data and analysis on mission impact over time.

Troop and police performance

For United Nations peacekeepers, Mali is one of the most challenging and dangerous operational environments. Effective action to improve mission performance and address related challenges is therefore particularly important, considering the link between the safety and security of peacekeepers and mandate implementation. I would like to commend the commitment of the MINUSMA troop- and police-contributing countries and the sacrifices of uniformed and civilian personnel operating in this most challenging environment. Their sustained commitment is crucial to ensure the effectiveness of MINUSMA and the full implementation of its mandate.

Constantly evolving security threats, however, call for enhanced performance and, ultimately, adaptation. Only a mission that retains the ability to adapt to new realities is able to deliver on its mandated tasks in such a highly dynamic environment. As outlined in my most recent report (S/2019/983) and in keeping with my Action for Peacekeeping initiative, enablers play an essential role in ensuring robust and effective mandate implementation and bolster peacekeeping performance.

MINUSMA needs capable and efficient enablers, including airlift capability, highly mobile and rapidly deployable ground units, enhanced intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, enhanced medical support facilities and qualified uniformed personnel. I call upon all Member States to support the adaptation plan presented in my most recent report and actively contribute to the generation of such specialized capabilities.

Effective leadership, the Mission's ability to deliver in an integrated manner, the mindset of commanders and their willingness to take risks, the preparedness of units, and their flexibility and ability to engage with local communities are all essential to peacekeeping performance. Despite limitations in terms of training and being underequipped, some MINUSMA troops have demonstrated the most courageous and robust engagement in northern Mali under very difficult circumstances at great personal risk and sacrifice.

In spite of the challenging environment, there are many examples of outstanding performance and committed leadership in MINUSMA. In July, three MINUSMA units were among those recommended to be awarded premiums for exceptional performance.

Building on efforts to enhance the safety of its personnel and as part of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, MINUSMA has taken concrete measures to

improve mission performance, address related challenges and further enhance the security of United Nations peacekeepers.

Effective community engagement is a critical factor in successful mandate implementation in Mali and in gaining the trust of local populations. A contingent that was temporarily deployed to central Mali was able to establish effective relationships with local communities in the centre through its specific use of interpreters. It received more timely information from the communities on threats and unsafe areas and faced fewer instances of patrols being blocked by local protesters. The community-oriented policing programmes of the United Nations police continued to facilitate the redeployment of the Malian security forces, thereby building confidence in the population and contributing to the Mission's situational awareness. Efforts are under way to put added focus on community engagement, including in the Mission's regular performance evaluations and training efforts.

In the light of increasing demonstrations and public unrest, well-trained and professional formed police units are essential to ensure a successful de-escalation of public disorder situations. During three consecutive days of demonstrations in front of the Mission's base in Sévaré, Mopti Region, the United Nations formed police unit and individual police officers responded firmly but with restraint and managed to protect the base from being taken over without inflicting civilian casualties.

In order to improve protection for individual police officers, MINUSMA is enhancing protective equipment for its officers, strengthening crowd-control training for police and military components, reinforcing perimeter security and increasing patrolling.

MINUSMA made further progress in enhancing protected mobility, which remains essential to mandate implementation in northern and central Mali and protecting civilians. The Mission launched a series of counter-improvised explosive device operations, aimed at detecting and removing improvised explosive devices placed in and around roads.

In the centre, since the launch of the Mission's fifteenth such operation in May, no deaths, injuries or equipment damage due to explosions of improvised explosive devices have been recorded on the highest risk axis, a segment of the Mopti-Douentza road. Overall, the Mission's proactive and targeted strategy for countering the use of such devices supported the delivery of predeployment and in-mission training and mentoring through the Mine Action Service and the provision of specialized equipment, and the improved operational readiness of the troops resulted in MINUSMA detecting and neutralizing more improvised explosive devices than ever before, effectively reducing the risk and number of related fatalities, including the number of troops killed.

In an effort to improve efficiency and response times, MINUSMA reviewed its procedures for casualty evacuation and is in the process of revising its standard operating procedures. Since October, a series of pilot exercises indicated that the simplified procedures and delegation of authority markedly reduced evacuation timelines following receipt of a notification.

Challenges

In spite of these encouraging trends, performance continues to be hampered by instances of training and capabilities shortfalls, a lack of understanding of the Mission's mandate and the rules of engagement, undeclared caveats or unwillingness of some commanders to take risks or comply with orders. Such cases have a negative impact on the performance of MINUSMA and need to be addressed.

In some instances, the Mission's ability to ensure performance was hampered by caveats and national controls, including cases of units refusing to escort civilian convoys. Similarly, on a few occasions, troops refused to perform tasks involving the disposal of explosive ordnance. Efforts are under way to provide these troops with further training and equipment. When these incidents occurred, the Mission took immediate action, communicated incidents of refusal to follow orders to Headquarters and recommended the repatriation of one unit commander for the refusal to follow orders on grounds of national caveats. The Secretariat informed the Member States concerned.

I would like to reiterate that every troop- or police-contributing country must communicate, during the negotiations over possible deployment, any national caveats regarding the use of contingents. The decision process in selecting forces will take those caveats into account, including whether to proceed with the deployment. Additional caveats cannot be accepted after deployment.

In one case, a contingent has continued to deny access to the part of the United Nations camp it is occupying, which hinders the access of MINUSMA emergency response teams to airport facilities. I would like to reiterate that all contingents deployed in a United Nations peacekeeping operation are an integral part of the Mission under the authority of the Head of Mission and that non-adherence must have consequences.

Equipment shortfalls continued to hamper performance. Several armoured personnel carriers are not operational owing to, inter alia, damage from improvised explosive devices or the lack of the required level of mine protection. The Secretariat continues to work with the troop- and police-contributing countries to address such gaps and enhance operational mobility.

The reduced intelligence capabilities and the lack of required air assets, following the departure of several units, limited the Mission's capability to obtain appropriate situational awareness in due time and to respond swiftly to emerging situations, including in cases where civilians are under threat, such as in Lerneb, Timbuktu Region, or in the centre. These gaps continue to negatively affect the Mission's capacity to fully implement its mandate.

Several contractors are struggling to supply the required transport capabilities, including through losses incurred due to attacks involving the use of improvised explosive devices. The lack of load carriers that are suitable for the prevailing road conditions and can be sourced through the local inland transportation and freight forwarding market negatively affected the delivery of contingent-owned equipment and the deployment of new military and police capabilities in the second half of 2019. MINUSMA is taking measures to secure necessary contracts and employing aviation assets, where necessary, which comes with added costs, in order to address the situation and re-establish uninterrupted supply to its remote operating bases.

Troop rotations

In order to ensure timely contingent rotations and deployments, MINUSMA depends on a combination of its own air and ground transportation and on contracting such services, as well as on secure supply routes. While a single contingent troop rotation mainly requires air transportation, MINUSMA has a limited network of airfields that can accommodate fixed-wing transport aircraft. In order to improve the situation in northern Mali, MINUSMA contributed to the construction of a new runway in Kidal.

Coordination of security presences

The Instance de Coordination au Mali has proven to be an effective forum to coordinate the activities of all security presences in Mali, including the Malian Defence and Security Forces, the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, the French forces, the European Union training mission in Mali and MINUSMA. During one of its most recent meetings, participants agreed to progressively include security stakeholders.

Integrated strategic framework and transition plan

The development and implementation of the integrated strategic framework had a positive impact on overall mission performance and contributed to a more coherent, resource-effective and integrated response by the United Nations to the highly dynamic and constantly evolving security situation. Integrated planning was guided by the mandated strategic objectives of MINUSMA, and the framework is based on a joint conflict analysis that recognizes the correlation between gender dynamics and drivers of conflict. The Mission and the United Nations country team designed projects to support the peace process and the stabilization of the centre, taking into account their specific context, physical presence, operational capability and comparative advantages. The implementation of the framework resulted in the prioritization of a number of joint projects and changes in resource allocation.

In central Mali, integrated plans are focused on six areas of intervention in support of the Government's revised stabilization strategy for the centre: political engagement and participatory governance, stabilization and security, humanitarian assistance and development, social cohesion and reconciliation, human rights and the rule of law, and communication. Integrated efforts by MINUSMA and the country team leverage the Mission's comparative advantage and, in particular, its relationship with political actors in Bamako and its ability to provide security and access in remote and hostile areas, as well as the country team's technical expertise and competencies. In Mopti, MINUSMA is collaborating with the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on a project funded by the trust fund in support of peace and security in Mali to promote access to health care for displaced persons and communities affected by intercommunal violence.

In Timbuktu, the Mission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees implemented six joint projects funded through quick-impact projects and a project funded through the trust fund in support of peace and security in Mali with the objective of facilitating the reintegration of returning refugees and strengthening social cohesion between displaced and host communities. These efforts support host and displaced communities by providing access to water and to income-generating activities and are an important contributing factor to the reintegration of over 2,000 refugees, who had fled to Mauritania following the 2012 conflict. MINUSMA also collaborated with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, including on two joint projects in Timbuktu to promote the protection of cultural heritage.

The projects support the Government's decision to reopen the University of Timbuktu, and the development of a specialized course on the restoration of cultural artefacts with the aim of countering violent extremism through education and the provision of skills and employment opportunities to youth.

In Gao, MINUSMA is collaborating with UN-Women on a project promoting the economic empowerment of women and enhancing their participation in the community.

A key challenge in the effective coordination and implementation of the framework remains the lack of physical presence of the country team in certain field locations, such as Ménaka and Kidal, and partial representation in other field offices owing to the security situation. Nevertheless, agencies, funds and programmes conduct field visits and operate through implementing partners. Taking into account the highly complex security situation, the Mission will need to continue to provide logistical and security support to the country team for a gradual transition, particularly on joint activities, as relevant. As such, the redeployment of the Malian Defence and Security Forces and an enhanced State presence, as well as their acceptance by local communities, remain prerequisites for an effective and sustainable transition to the country team and Government institutions.

Possible long-term exit strategy of the Mission

As part of the development of the mission concept, MINUSMA is defining a desired end state, which identifies necessary minimum requirements in terms of political and security conditions, progress in the implementation of the Agreement and improvement of the overall security situation that would allow for a gradual withdrawal of the Mission. Increased capacity and effective deployment of the Malian State, in particular its national defence and security forces and State administration, and of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, and state authorities, will be prerequisites of any possible exit strategy for MINUSMA.

In keeping with my directive on transitions, and in line with the agreed planning framework for the integrated strategic framework, a workshop with the Mission and the country team was held in Bamako from 5 to 7 November to develop a transition calendar identifying timelines and significant milestones for the transition process in Mali. The workshop concluded that any transition planning in Mali at the current juncture should focus on modalities for the United Nations to work more efficiently and coherently to achieve mandate implementation and make progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, including by enhancing the capacity of key actors that will support Mali in the long term. MINUSMA is operating in a unique threat environment, which makes it more difficult to apply lessons from other transition contexts, including those in Liberia, Timor-Leste and, most recently, Haiti.

The consequences of a premature withdrawal of MINUSMA could be devastating for Mali and negate the efforts of the United Nations in the country thus far, given the current vacuum of state authority, in the context of which multiple armed groups are vying for power and there are various armed conflicts along community lines.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) António **Guterres**
