



Security Council

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Adaptation and authorized strength of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [2584 \(2021\)](#), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General, in the light of the growing level of insecurity and physical violence against the civilian populations in central Mali, to provide, no later than 15 July 2021, a report on the progress of the force adaptation plan implementation and recommendations on the force levels and ceiling of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) uniformed personnel, including planning assumptions and estimated costs, suggesting deployment phases and providing a detailed description and a timeline for the necessary new infrastructure works, information on how that would extend the field capability of MINUSMA and how it would accompany a Government-led strategy for the centre, and expressed its intent to discuss the Mission's force level on the basis of that proposal.

II. Mission adaptation

2. The MINUSMA force adaptation plan is aimed at enabling the Mission to deliver on its mandated strategic priorities, in particular the second priority, concerning the central region of Mali. In keeping with Security Council resolution [2518 \(2020\)](#), in which the Council underscored the importance of adequate medical and other critical capabilities for peacekeeping operations to remain agile and effective in implementing their mandates and to enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers and mission protection, great strides have been made by the Mission to adapt to the evolving and highly complex threat environment and to become more agile, more mobile and more flexible, with more tailored units and enhanced capabilities. Efforts continue under the adaptation plan to strengthen mobility and flexibility so as to address urgent and expanding needs with regard to protection of civilians. The mobile task force is now operational and is increasing its operational tempo. Despite some challenges linked to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic restrictions and the political crisis in Mali, significant infrastructure acquisition and construction for Mission adaptation will be completed by early 2022, further strengthening the Mission's dynamic posture and reach in central Mali.



3. Significant gaps remain, however, in requirements for enabling capabilities, primarily aviation and medical assets, which are critical to ensure greater ability with regard to troop projections and enhancing peacekeepers' safety and security. More broadly, these capability shortfalls, which substantially constrain the effectiveness of MINUSMA in delivering on its priorities, include military medium utility helicopter units, attack and armed helicopter units, forward surgical teams, a quick reaction force company and fixed-wing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and unmanned aerial system capabilities. Some medical, helicopter and aerial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities are anticipated to be deployed by the beginning of 2022. The ongoing deployment to Mopti of a level II hospital, as well as the forthcoming deployment of an armed helicopter unit and a medium utility helicopter unit with an integrated aeromedical evacuation team in early 2022, will significantly increase the Mission's capacity to anticipate and respond to threats against civilians, as well as its ability to provide reliable medical support to peacekeepers. The fact that the personnel for all three of the above-mentioned incoming units will hail from the same troop-contributing country is expected to result in further interoperability and efficiency gains, including with respect to casualty evacuation timelines. However, the Secretariat is still seeking pledges for attack and armed helicopter units meeting the Mission's requirements for northern Mali. In an increasingly challenging security environment, additional air assets are urgently needed to enable the Mission to deliver on its mandate. I reiterate my call on Member States to support the adaptation plan when considering contributions and the Mission's budget, in keeping with their commitments under the Action for Peacekeeping framework, as well as in the spirit of the provisions of resolution [2518 \(2020\)](#) on the safety and security of peacekeepers.

III. Extension of field capabilities and support to a Government-led strategy for central Mali

4. Considering the increasingly complex challenges MINUSMA is facing, the growing level of insecurity and physical violence against the civilian population in central Mali and, more broadly, the expanding terrorist threat, scaling up the Mission's uniformed personnel capacity would enhance its ability to protect civilians in central Mali and create further space for the peace process in the north. It would also enable the Mission to consolidate its positions in remote locations in northern Mali, such as Aguelhok and Ber, which are under regular threat of attack. Such consolidation is a key requirement for continued and effective support for the implementation of the Mission's mandate. The deployment of additional capabilities would also further enhance the Mission's ongoing efforts to strengthen base defence, counter the threat posed by improvised explosive devices and continue to strengthen its casualty evacuation capacity given recent complex attacks against its bases and continued attacks against patrols and convoys.

5. In order to generate the desired impact on the ground, in particular in terms of improved security conditions, an increase in the authorized strength of MINUSMA should be accompanied by: (a) a concomitant and clear commitment from the Malian authorities to step up their efforts to stabilize central Mali; and (b) renewed determination of the parties to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali to deliver on their obligations, in particular the completion of the accelerated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. Equally important is the need for political stability in Bamako, to ensure the successful completion of the political transition, which is expected to culminate in the holding of free, fair and transparent elections by February 2022. Efforts to combat impunity also remain essential to stemming the

violence in the centre, and more needs to be done by the authorities to follow up on their commitments in that regard.

6. The prevailing environment of insecurity and instability in northern and central Mali, resulting from deep-rooted political and governance issues and further compounded by increasing violent extremism and transnational organized crime, requires more than the deployment of additional uniformed personnel. There is a need to enhance other aspects of the multidimensional response mandated by the Security Council. As outlined in my most recent report on the situation in Mali (S/2021/519), absent a strong and coherent vision of the Government and a reinforced presence of the State, the Mission will not be in a position to make a sustained difference on the ground. Increased national ownership and the necessary political will remain essential for the Mission to make progress. It is encouraging that the transitional authorities have expressed their determination to expedite both the implementation of the peace and reconciliation agreement and the stabilization of the centre and that they have taken some practical steps in that respect.

7. An increased focus by the Government on both the situation in central Mali and on the peace and political processes more broadly would enhance the overall effectiveness of the Mission. For the centre, this would require a Malian-led and clearly articulated stabilization vision and strategy to protect civilians and reduce intercommunal violence, anchored by concrete steps to re-establish a State presence, legitimate authority and the delivery of basic services. A designated and effective government mechanism for the centre, with high-level political support, would also be essential to ensure implementation. Additional uniformed personnel and capabilities would expand the Mission's reach and mobility and enhance its ability to support the authorities in implementing such a strategy. It should be coupled with additional concrete efforts to increase the capacity, deployment and operationalization of the Malian Defence and Security Forces in such a way as to provide support for, but avoid the substitution of, Malian efforts, in close cooperation with international and regional partners.

8. The proposed increase in uniformed personnel would complement the Mission adaptation plan and further strengthen a proactive, robust, flexible and agile posture, while reinforcing ongoing efforts to enhance peacekeepers' safety and security. In the centre, the additional uniformed capacities would be used to expand the reach and mobility of the Mission in an integrated manner, through a forward operating base concept. That concept involves an integrated, reinforced and provisioned temporary operating base, currently being used by the Mission, that can be projected from main bases to areas of interest for up to three months, to protect civilians and support a Malian-led stabilization strategy, while providing a higher level of protection to Mission personnel than temporary operating bases.

9. The effective and expanded reach of capabilities and integrated activities will be complemented by increased community engagement and a focus on the prevention of conflict with local populations in areas of developing tensions. The forward operating bases will therefore be able to host mobile teams for relevant civilian substantive components, enabling an integrated MINUSMA presence in priority areas, in order to deliver on the mandate in a comprehensive manner. Additional duty stations would need to be established, with further civilian capacities, to enable community outreach and engagement, including through interpreters, community liaison assistants, coordination officers and communication specialists.

10. The deployment of additional MINUSMA peacekeepers would be an important sign of the steadfast support of the international community to the Malian people and the stabilization of the subregion. To ensure that such deployment achieves a decisive and sustainable impact on the ground, it should be accompanied by a new round of

dedicated consultations on central Mali with transition authorities and local communities on the development of the comprehensive and politically led strategy requested by the Security Council. Those consultations would, inter alia, be aimed at ensuring that the comparative advantages of MINUSMA, the United Nations country team and all other partners are fully leveraged as part of the broader efforts being made to prevent the continued deterioration of the security situation. A strong and proactive communications campaign would be required, to help to build a shared vision for the restoration of State authority and the rule of law in central Mali, mobilize sustained Malian leadership and manage expectations about deployment timelines.

IV. Recommendations on the force levels and ceiling of Mission uniformed personnel

11. The recommended increase in MINUSMA troop and police levels and ceiling would require the deployment of an additional 2,069 uniformed personnel, consisting of 1,730 military personnel, 300 formed police unit personnel and 39 individual police officers. The proposal is aimed at expanding, in an integrated manner, the reach and mobility of MINUSMA operations, taking into consideration, notably, the safety and security of personnel, the absorption capacities of the Mission and the requirement to couple additional troop and police strength with a Malian-led stabilization strategy in the centre, in order to foster synergy and ensure impact durability.

12. To ensure a continued integrated approach and to enable the effective deployment of additional troops and police, existing civilian staff would be temporarily deployed in support of forward-leaning military and police operations, notably from Mopti and Bamako offices. Additional substantive personnel deployed as interpreters, community liaison assistants, coordination officers and communication specialists would also be required. A commensurate increase in security personnel would be necessary to ensure that relevant safety and security protocols are maintained. Similarly, additional civilian support personnel would be needed to facilitate the planning and implementation of camp expansions, further deployments and other work, to ensure adequate and timely absorption capacities in support of the increased uniformed personnel. An assessment of the additional resources required would need to be conducted to ensure that supporting and security capacities are commensurate to the tasks envisaged.

A. Military personnel

13. Noting that additional troops must have the requisite mindset, training and equipment to successfully operate in the Malian context, the following additional capacities, totalling 1,730 military personnel, are proposed:

(a) To enhance force capability to conduct flexible protection of civilians responses in the centre, three quick reaction force companies (750 personnel in total), equipped with the required mine-protected vehicles and supported by a combat engineer company (107 personnel), could be used both as response forces and as key components in the implementation of the forward operating base concept, which is an alternative to setting up new camps and permanent presences in areas of concern;

(b) Owing to the often-impassable terrain and large distances involved, helicopters are essential for troop projections, both in response to emerging situations and to perform casualty and medical evacuations. Two military utility helicopter units, with up to 10 helicopters in total (260 personnel in all) for Mopti and Douentza, supported by an aviation support unit (30 personnel) in Douentza, are proposed, to

provide the flexibility needed to respond to threats against civilians, while permitting routine access and presence operations to continue;

(c) To strengthen the Mission's capability to support the operationalization of reconstituted Malian armed forces units and the monitoring of the peace and reconciliation agreement under Operation Farrier, while at the same time reinforcing the Mission's positions in Sector North, a quick reaction force company (200 personnel) is proposed, to be based in Kidal and Aguelhok, as feasible;

(d) In Sector West, the existing base defence mechanized infantry company could be reinforced (60 personnel) to meet current statement of unit requirements, which would enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers in exposed locations, such as Ber and Goundam, and allow infantry units to dedicate more time to protection of civilians and other tasks;

(e) To enhance the safety and security of personnel and ensure efficient resupply capacities, capabilities aimed at countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices should also be considered. To that end, MINUSMA would use five explosive ordnance disposal teams (80 personnel in total) to support the freedom of movement of mobile task force troops and an additional combat convoy company (243 personnel) to enhance the Mission's capacity to conduct convoy escort duties, in order to facilitate the supply and functioning of all MINUSMA key installations.

B. Police personnel

14. Given that additional police personnel are also needed to create greater freedom of movement for MINUSMA personnel and national security forces in support of the protection of civilians, the restoration of State authority and the fight against impunity, additional capacities totalling 339 police personnel are proposed.

15. The above-mentioned additional capacities of United Nations police personnel would be deployed in alignment with the deployment plans for Malian security forces, including for community policing and expected territorial police support requirements, as follows:

(a) To strengthen protection of civilians and complement military operations, 60 additional formed police unit personnel with special intervention team capacity in both Douentza and Mopti (total of 120);

(b) With a view to capitalizing on the stabilization of the south-eastern Gao region, including the general area of Ansongo, and support the extension of the rule of law, an additional 80 formed police unit personnel in Gao and 20 in Ménaka (total of 100);

(c) To strengthen mobility and the operational tempo in support of the restoration and extension of the rule of law, 20 additional formed police unit personnel in Timbuktu, 40 Goundam and 20 in Mopti (total of 80);

(d) To directly support community policing initiatives and the establishment of the territorial police envisioned under the peace agreement, 13 individual police officers each in Timbuktu, Mopti and Gao (total of 39).

C. Support implications

16. Considering the complex security situation and the challenges involved in expanding existing or constructing additional infrastructure, the deployment of additional personnel and enablers would require time and significant Mission support resources. It would entail both reprioritizing ongoing projects and mobilizing

resources for infrastructure projects, staffing, air assets, information and technology equipment, vehicles and other equipment.

17. Possible challenges in land acquisition, transportation constraints (in particular in northern Mali) and the need for adequate engineering capacities are of particular concern. Additional infrastructure, such as new accommodation, hangars, helipads, warehouses, workshops and Field Technology Section installations, would be required to absorb, support and enable the increase in uniformed personnel, as would measures to reduce the Mission's impact on the environment. That will require both logistic movements and projects relating to horizontal and transitional works, namely, upgrades to existing infrastructure and new construction with regard to field defence, water and wastewater systems, the power network, bunkers and boreholes, ammunition stores and internal roads. The surge in operational load and requirements for 24/7 air operations in Mopti and Douentza will require the establishment of a new aviation subunit in Douentza in the form of a sub-air region and the strengthening of the existing air region in Mopti through the establishment of a regional air operations centre that will exercise operational control over air assets in Sector Centre.

18. Transportation to Sector North is increasingly complicated and time-consuming owing to security risks and road conditions. Warehouse capacities would need to be increased in Kidal and Timbuktu, respectively, and quantity and time-related limitations for food and non-food items would arise, depending on the end destination. The proposed additional combat convoy company will support delivery to meet the increased need for supplies.

V. Timelines for construction and force and police troop generation

19. The deployment timelines will depend on force generation and absorption capacities to accommodate the arriving units. Most units being deployed will be expected to deploy with tentage to accommodate their troops for at least six months while accommodation construction is finalized. Although it is expected that land acquisition for the Douentza camp expansion should not pose significant challenges, the further expansion of the Mopti camp may require political support. The following assumptions are being considered to estimate the critical expansion and construction timeline for the Mopti camp:

- (a) Land acquisition in Mopti: three months;
- (b) Solicitation for horizontal and transitional works: three months;
- (c) Mobilization time for contractors: one month or more;
- (d) Horizontal and transitional works: three months;

(e) MINUSMA would be prepared to receive some additional personnel in Mopti starting in December 2021, in accordance with the military and police component plans and given the current work being done in support of the Mission adaptation plan.

20. Bearing in mind the urgent needs with regard to the protection of civilians in central Mali and on the basis of the estimated time it would take for the Mission to be ready to receive the new capabilities set out herein, it is anticipated that those new capabilities could be deployed between December 2021 (the formed police unit personnel, the explosive ordnance disposal teams and the base defence mechanized infantry company) and January 2023 (the airfield support and medium utility helicopter units). Those estimates are best-case scenarios, assuming that land is allocated in Mopti within the three-month period stated above and that troop-

contributing countries swiftly make pledges that meet MINUSMA statement of unit requirements. Force generation for MINUSMA is all the more complex than for other peacekeeping missions because, in order to mitigate security risks against peacekeepers, the Mission's statement of unit requirements are the most demanding in terms of counter-improvised explosive device systems and other protective equipment. Units currently registered in the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System do not meet MINUSMA-specific requirements. Should the Security Council decide to increase the Mission's authorized strength, the Secretariat would enhance its force-generation efforts through targeted engagement so as to encourage troop-contributing countries to procure the equipment required or to consider joint deployments. The United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial Conference to be held in December 2021 in Seoul would also provide an opportunity to mobilize Member States on MINUSMA-specific requirements and to encourage pledges aimed at filling capability gaps.

VI. Observations

21. In 2019, the Security Council added a second strategic priority to the mandate of MINUSMA without considering additional resources to the Mission. The adaptation plan has significantly strengthened the proactivity, robustness, flexibility and agility of the Mission's posture. However, in the absence of substantial progress in the implementation of the peace agreement and a national strategy to stabilize the centre, insecurity has further worsened, with extremist groups now expanding their operations into southern regions.

22. Against that background, I welcome the intention of the Security Council to re-examine the authorized strength of MINUSMA. An increase in uniformed personnel would strengthen the Mission's ability to protect civilians in central Mali, enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers and help to improve overall performance. It should be accompanied by a Malian-led and clearly articulated stabilization vision and strategy to protect civilians. In keeping with the shared commitments under the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, I count on the Council's steadfast political support and the commitment of Member States to ensure that the Mission is adequately configured and resourced in order to help to address the growing level of insecurity and increasing physical violence against the civilian populations in central Mali.