



# Security Council

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## Letter dated 4 January 2022 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Security Council resolution [2584 \(2021\)](#) 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 Council with information focusing on: (a) progress in Mission operations, security challenges and coordination between security actors, including discussions in the Instance de coordination au Mali; (b) overall performance, including implementation of the adaptation plan, roll-out of the integrated peacekeeping performance and accountability framework and the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System, improvement and performance of the casualty evacuation system, rotations of uniformed personnel and how reported cases of underperformance are addressed; and (c) an update on the integration of all Mission components, including implementation of the integrated strategic framework and the related transition plan, in line with my road map dated 25 March 2021 ([S/2021/300](#), annex).

### Progress in Mission operations

As outlined in my report ([S/2021/1117](#)), the security situation remains precarious. In northern and central Mali, the prevalence of improvised explosive devices targeting main supply routes has had a significant impact on the Mission's mobility and security coverage. MINUSMA camps and convoys are also increasingly subjected to direct and indirect attacks, which are increasingly sophisticated, as demonstrated by the spate of attacks against MINUSMA between 3 and 9 December 2021, including an attack on 8 December on a MINUSMA convoy in the area of Bandiagara, killing seven peacekeepers and wounding three. The attacks appear to be a way for terrorist armed groups to demonstrate their continued capacity to harass national and international forces, to project their dominance over terrain and to intimidate populations. The campaign is likely further motivated by perceived successes, including the repositioning of international forces away from Kidal Region.

The deteriorating security environment is also characterized by renewed and continued attacks against civilians in central Mali, armed clashes involving radical elements and self-defence groups, as well as intercommunity violence, resulting in casualties among the civilian population, forced displacement, loss of livelihoods and the destruction of critical infrastructure, in particular bridges and telecommunication installations. Local communities have also been compelled to sign so-called "survival



pacts” with extremist armed groups. Overall, violent extremist elements have continued to expand their activities towards the south and west of the country.

These challenges notwithstanding, Mission activities continued apace in support of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, as well as essential reforms to support the transition and ongoing stabilization and protection of civilian efforts in the centre of the country. Increasingly integrated operations contributed to these efforts, supporting the Malian authorities and security forces in the exercise of their core functions. However, their limited presence, coupled with the lack of consolidated redeployment and security plans for the centre and the north, and for sustaining a security presence in these areas, resulted in gains often being short-lived and easily reversed.

The centre of Mali remains the most significant area of protection concern. Operations in this area continue to have a localized positive impact. Operation Beaver is designed to integrate the Mission’s security, protection and stabilization efforts with the support of MINUSMA police in and around Douentza, to protect civilians and to facilitate the return of State authorities. As part of the operation, following several alerts over the past months of imminent threats of attacks on the village of Petaka, MINUSMA carried out joint force and police patrols in and around the village, which helped to deter attacks and contributed to reducing attacks on the road to Douentza on market days. Operation Camel was carried out between 8 and 16 December 2021 to enhance the security of national route 15 between the towns of Sevaré and Bandiagara. It included land and air reconnaissance and deterrence activities, long-range patrols and the establishment of a temporary operating base.

The force-led Operation Buffalo Wet has continued to help in securing areas in Bandiagara, Bankass, Koro and Mopti *cercles* by providing a protective environment for local communities and enabling freedom of movement by containing and disrupting armed groups’ activities, in coordination with the Malian Defence and Security Forces. MINUSMA police contributed by undertaking coordinated patrols with the gendarmerie, as well as long-range patrols along the roads to Djenné, Konna and Bandiagara. These positive effects notwithstanding, the threat continued to migrate further to the west and south, with armed groups exploiting community fault lines. This is further complicated by the inadequate presence and limited capacity of the Malian Defence and Security Forces.

This has been evidenced in Farabougou, Niono *cercle*, Ségou Region, which is facing a humanitarian and security crisis, following an effective siege by extremist armed groups since October 2020, despite Malian armed forces being deployed in the village.

Similarly, in Gao Region, MINUSMA operations had a positive impact in Gao, Labbezenga and Ménaka, under the umbrella of Operation Seka, which began in 2019 to respond to violent incidents and continues to secure major transit routes. Daily long-range patrols are designed to ensure freedom of movement for both the United Nations and civilians, including for convoys from the Niger. MINUSMA police also continued their long-range patrols along the Gao-Ansongo axis to secure access to markets through the route. Several attacks used to occur regularly at locations on the route around Bara and Tacharane, but regular patrolling has contributed to reducing their numbers.

The mobile task force conducted its first operation in the vicinity of Ménaka and Ansongo from June to November 2021. It focused on sustained protection and security operations and was diverted to Ouattagouna in the south of Ansongo following attacks on the commune on 8 August, during which over 50 civilians were killed. The extended presence of the mobile task force in the area helped to stabilize the situation and facilitated several investigations and the provision of support to

affected communities. Owing to its robust posture, a significant decrease in the activities of extremist and criminal groups was observed during the operation. However, extremist violence and criminality increased following the withdrawal of the unit.

Until a sustained presence of the Malian Defence and Security Forces is ensured, extremist groups and criminal gangs risk returning after the withdrawal of MINUSMA at the end of these operations. Complementary Mission good offices activities are aimed at mitigating this, including the delivery of 12 projects in these areas, with the objective of facilitating mobility and upgrading facilities for the Malian Defence and Security Forces, while improving livelihoods and infrastructure for local communities in surrounding areas.

Operation Farrier continued, which is aimed at implementing measures agreed by the Technical Commission on Security to control the movement of combatants and weapons of compliant armed groups. In the context of the Permanent Strategic Framework gatherings in Timbuktu on 7 and 8 November and in Gao from 17 to 19 November, MINUSMA was able to control and monitor over 150 vehicles and 1,000 persons using checkpoints, patrols, quick reaction force and unmanned aerial vehicle monitoring. This operation was welcomed by both Malian authorities and the Permanent Strategic Framework.

To improve the safety and security of MINUSMA peacekeepers, significant efforts were expended on the reconnaissance of alternative main supply routes into Mali, given that MINUSMA convoys along the current routes remain a prime target for attacks with improvised explosive devices. A ground mission in October, Operation Northern Gate, demonstrated the viability in principle of the main supply route from Algeria into Mali, and the Mission is currently assessing its logistical feasibility. In addition, an air reconnaissance mission, Operation Western Gate, was successfully conducted in November, demonstrating the initial viability of the main supply route from Mauritania into Mali, to be confirmed during an upcoming ground operation. Discussions have been held with officials of Algeria and Mauritania and both countries have pledged to extend the necessary support.

The Mission continued its efforts to facilitate humanitarian access in both northern and central Mali. This included providing security assistance for the World Food Programme in October during its humanitarian missions to Goundam, Tonka, Niafunké and Soumpi *cercles*, and MINUSMA force and police provided security for the Ménaka airfield to facilitate humanitarian flights. The Mission also supported a humanitarian assessment to Farabougou on 8 December.

### **Coordination of security presences**

The Instance de coordination au Mali continued to serve as the main forum for the coordination of activities among security actors in Mali. Discussions on 4 October were focused on the reconfiguration of Operation Barkhane and its withdrawal from Kidal, Tessalit and Timbuktu, which has operational implications for MINUSMA, including with regard to the protection of MINUSMA personnel and installations, as a result of the limited availability of armed helicopters capable of providing in extremis support.

During the meeting of the Instance de coordination Mali-Sécurité intérieure held on 23 November, discussions were focused on the security situation in the centre; the Ménaka Without Weapons initiative; preparations for securing the elections and the deployment of female members of the Malian Security Forces to the centre and the north.

MINUSMA police, in coordination with the Centre de coordination et de gestion de crise, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the European Union capacity-building mission in Mali and the Malian Security Forces, conducted a simulation exercise on 3 October aimed at securing a polling centre following a terrorist incident and the escalation of violence.

In addition, MINUSMA police stepped up their cooperation with the Malian Security Forces, including through co-location with Malian police in 67 locations, 47 of which are in the north and the centre, which greatly facilitates technical assistance and experience-sharing. Greater effort is needed to ensure more effective investigation of the 674 criminal cases identified by MINUSMA police in the centre and the north. Only 212 have been investigated by the Malian Security Forces to date. United Nations police were asked to support the investigation of only 24 of the cases during the reporting period, in Gao (16), Timbuktu (5) and Ménaka (3).

The Mission continued its focus on assisting the redeployment and operationalization of the reconstituted units. It provided training, transportation and logistical support to the units, including the transport of 241 soldiers from Bamako to Gao on 23 August, from where they were transported to Ménaka under Operation Barkhane. MINUSMA also provided operational training to the reconstituted battalion and accompanied its first patrol in Kidal in August, with a quick reaction force on standby to intervene if necessary.

### **Mission performance**

The political and security situation in Mali remains highly complex, and the Mission continued to adapt its operations and support to the Malian Defence and Security Forces to meet the challenges. It made notable progress in relation to the Action for Peacekeeping Plus agenda, notably with regard to ensuring collective coherence behind a political strategy and strategic and operational integration. Following the renewal of its mandate in June 2021, MINUSMA revised its mission concept and developed a mission plan, which provide strategic direction to all Mission components. In line with the integrated peacekeeping performance and accountability framework, a revised Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System process is under development to monitor quarterly progress by all components and divisions under the new mission plan results framework. This will support increased Mission-wide data collection and assessment and ultimately support greater evidence-based decision-making by senior leadership and the exercise of internal accountability for the delivery of mandated results.

MINUSMA peacekeepers continued to robustly repel hostile attacks, in particular in Aguelhok where there were 26 attacks between July and December alone. A platoon reinforced Aguelhok on a rotational basis from Kidal or Tessalit. The Mission also undertook significant efforts to enhance camp protection. Further measures are envisaged as part of the adaptation plan, including transforming a reserve battalion into a more mobile quick reaction force. A commercial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance asset is also expected to arrive in Kidal in the first quarter of 2022.

In parallel, MINUSMA enhanced its good offices efforts to address concerns expressed by segments of the population, carrying out three integrated trust-building missions to Aguelhok, meeting with local authorities, community leaders, signatory armed groups and civil society. Trust fund and quick impact projects are also being implemented, focusing on water supply, electricity and income generation.

Protection of civilians is among the areas in which the Mission demonstrated improved performance and accountability. For instance, in early 2021, it began to leverage its temporary operating bases as forward staging points for civilian mission

components to join ongoing operations and remain overnight in areas where they are not present under normal circumstances. This has enabled the civilian components of MINUSMA to launch and conduct activities, including dialogue, community engagement and investigations in otherwise out-of-reach areas. Positive impacts include the signing on 8 October of a local peace agreement between two communities in Ogossogou, where some 200 civilians were killed in attacks in March 2019 and February 2020. In addition, following a threat against civilians in Tassiga, Gao Region, on 1 December 2021, the Mission's early warning and rapid response mechanism was activated, resulting in the force establishing a temporary operating base in the area.

These efforts notwithstanding, significant limitations remain, as demonstrated by the massacre on 8 August of over 50 civilians in Ouattagouna, Gao Region, and the attack on a bus on 3 December in Songo, Bandiagara, in which more than 30 civilians were killed. Lessons learned include the importance of early activation of the early warning and rapid response mechanism; improved joint field-level analysis and integrated processing of information; enhanced analysis of trends, including cross-border dynamics; and critical force enablers, as envisioned in the adaptation plan, among others.

In relation to integrated analysis, joint efforts are under way to harmonize data entry and verification of protection of civilians and other incidents in the United Nations situation awareness geo-enterprise information management system, which is mainly used to track security-related incidents. Early warnings, which assist the Mission in achieving a more concrete representation of threats against civilians, are also now included in the system. Greater data coherence across sections and components will improve patrol planning to areas of concern and help to assess the medium- to long-term impact of the MINUSMA police or force presence, avoid duplication of effort and help all components to better synergize their activities.

The Mission continued to take steps to improve the number of women personnel, which is critical for effective engagement with the population across all sectors. Under the Elsie Initiative, improvements include the provision of toilets in accommodation for female personnel from troop- and police-contributing countries, the provision of safe recreational facilities and the construction of hard-wall structures in place of prefabricated accommodation. MINUSMA police submitted a proposal in December to Headquarters aimed at expanding female accommodation and sanitary infrastructure in all 11 camps housing its formed police units.

The Mission is recognizing the outstanding performance of uniformed personnel, in line with integrated peacekeeping performance and accountability framework performance priorities. During the reporting period, MINUSMA police nominated two formed police units for the risk premium award for performing above and beyond the call of duty, for having escorted civilian and other personnel in areas where there are no local security forces to offer support, and providing effective crowd control during protests against the presence of MINUSMA and other international forces.

### **Implementation of the adaptation plan**

MINUSMA continues to implement its force adaptation plan, which increases Mission capabilities in central Mali, following delays due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the force generation process. The level 2 hospital in Mopti became fully operational on 1 October. The explosive ordnance disposal capacity also grew in the past six months, with six teams now deployed in theatre. A medium utility helicopter unit was deployed to Gao. In the next six months, additional units are expected to arrive in the Mission or change from their current configuration,

following planned rotations. In addition, the Mission stood up a commercial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability in Timbuktu, greatly increasing its monitoring and intelligence-gathering capacity.

This progress notwithstanding, the lack of sufficient and adequate air lift capability, in particular with regard to medium utility and armed helicopters, continues to hamper the Mission's performance. These enablers are critical for MINUSMA to continue to implement its mandate across its area of operation and to ensure the safety and security of its personnel and installations in the light of the increasingly complex threats, especially in the context of the closure of Operation Barkhane camps in the north, although French forces continue to provide critical air support. I renew my call for all Member States to continue to support the Mission's adaptation plan and actively contribute to the generation of outstanding air assets.

### **Evaluations of the Mission's force and police components**

During the reporting period, in line with integrated peacekeeping performance and accountability framework performance priorities, a total of seven evaluation reports were completed, for three military infantry, two aviation and two engineer units. A further eight are close to completion. The overall performance of the evaluated units was satisfactory, including comprehension and support of the Mission mandate, training, logistics, protection of civilians, training and discipline, sustainability and health.

Shortfalls identified in the Force Commander's evaluation reports included the need to increase the number of female peacekeepers; to adhere to scheduled major equipment maintenance plans; to report in a timely fashion on serviceable and unserviceable mine-protected vehicles; and to replace and increase the number of mine-protected vehicles and/or replace damaged ones. During the reporting period, six mine-protected vehicles and armed personnel carriers were destroyed as a result of improvised explosive device incidents. MINUSMA convoy combat battalions are particularly affected: 23 of the 85 mine-protected vehicles and armed personnel carriers belonging to combat convoy companies currently in theatre have been destroyed. Considering the evolution of attacks against peacekeepers, adequate mine-protected vehicles remain key life-saving equipment to prevent higher numbers of fatalities and severe injuries. Performance improvement plans are in place to address these shortfalls and recommendations for improvement provided to troop-contributing countries.

MINUSMA police conducted 20 performance assessment and evaluation reports. These revealed generally satisfactory performance of the formed police units. Areas for improvement included the quality of equipment, in particular vehicles, and the units were directed to undertake remedial action to improve their operational readiness. All 10 formed police units continue to undergo an operational inspection every month.

### **Troop rotations**

The Mission made progress in speeding up the operability of battalions by halving – from 16 to 8 weeks – the rotation cycle for infantry battalions. These eight weeks will still consist of two weeks' mandatory quarantine for COVID-19, a maximum of one week of preparation and screening and one week of in-theatre training. While effective in containing the spread of the virus, the mandatory two-week in-mission quarantine period continues to significantly affect the Mission's operational capacity.

MINUSMA police completed two rotations. The incomplete deployment of the second Egyptian formed police unit based in Mopti remains of concern as a result of

its equipment having been grounded in Dakar since March 2020 owing to a financial dispute between the contractor and the subcontractor.

### **Challenges and efforts to overcome them**

The myriad challenges facing the Mission require a dedicated focus on enhancing mitigating measures. Of particular note are efforts by MINUSMA to mitigate risks associated with improvised explosive devices and mines and investigating, reporting and putting in place strategies to minimize fatalities and injuries while maintaining the operational tempo.

The threat posed by improvised explosive devices and mines is evolving and remains one of the main challenges to MINUSMA. Recent attacks with such devices indicate a clear evolution in the threat in terms of both tactics and the lethality of devices. The intensity and nature of explosive incidents affecting MINUSMA so far in 2021 have resulted in the largest number of peacekeeping casualties since 2013: 136 in 2021 as at 13 December (15 killed and 121 injured) compared with 102 victims in 2016. In 2021, attacks on main routes, convoys and temporary operating bases increased, including the two suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attacks against MINUSMA temporary operating bases in Kerena, Douentza and near Ichagara in Bourem *cercle*, Gao Region, earlier in 2021 that caused the death of 1 peacekeeper and wounded 40. MINUSMA responded to the increasing threat with a comprehensive approach, including the reinforcement of explosive threat mitigation planning along with threat-specific specialist training and support for peacekeepers deployed in northern Mali. MINUSMA police have been regularly involved in post-blast investigations, and the Mine Action Service continued to provide training on post-blast investigations to MINUSMA military and police personnel in the regions.

These efforts have resulted in a high percentage of explosive devices being detected and neutralized, preventing numerous peacekeeper casualties and the destruction of assets. Since January 2021, of the 98 improvised explosive devices targeting MINUSMA, 45 were collected and neutralized by the Mission and 53 exploded.

The high numbers of fatalities, serious injuries and damage to United Nations and contingent-owned equipment call for robust prevention mechanisms. The Mission revised the standard operating procedure on the collection, analysis, management and transfer of evidence and/or information and put systems in place to enhance efficiency, improve coordination between components and raise awareness and capacities. Overall, MINUSMA significantly increased the number of Board of Inquiry reports completed, from 48 in 2018 to about 80 (out of over 100 cases) at the end of 2021. Several challenges remain, including the lack of specialized skill sets among uniformed personnel to conduct complex investigations, as well as difficulties with some contingents in accessing information as well as victims and witnesses.

The Mission recognizes the importance of enhancing the capacity of national counterparts in countering improvised explosive devices. During the reporting period, the Mine Action Service delivered and advised on specialized training on improvised explosive device disposal and threat mitigation to 136 Malian Defence and Security Forces personnel (58 were trained by Malian personnel previously trained by the Mine Action Service, while 78 were directly trained by the Service). MINUSMA police also carried out specialized training for 739 personnel (including 92 women) during 66 sessions, in improvised explosive device threat mitigation, post-attack investigations, crime scene management, international humanitarian law, counter-terrorism, the use of telephony in criminal investigations, judicial investigation acts, shooting incident reconstruction, general intelligence, intelligence in the fight against terrorism and the training of trainers. In addition, the Mission continued to collect

and process material evidence from various crime scenes. The MINUSMA police laboratory is also functional, enabling forensic analysis that can be handed over to the Malian authorities to assist in prosecutions. Six cases were processed and analysed during the reporting period.

As outlined in my previous letter (S/2021/520), the full operationalization of the Mission mobile task force, a core piece of the adaptation plan, is hampered by concerns expressed by some troop-contributing countries, including regarding casualty evacuations, thus significantly restricting the areas of deployment of the contingents comprising the task force.

At the same time, MINUSMA continued efforts to enhance its casualty evacuation procedures, including through a Headquarters review in July. In December, the Mission launched an e-performance tool to allow it to better measure and monitor its capacity. Casualty evacuation continues to constitute an important aspect of the Mission's support to the Malian Defence and Security Forces: since January 2021, MINUSMA has undertaken the evacuation of at least 187 individuals on behalf of the Malian Defence and Security Forces.

### **Implementation of the integrated strategic framework and transition plan**

The Mission increased its cross-component coordination by strengthening relevant mechanisms and initiatives for integrated strategic planning and operational coordination. Integrated planning and cross-component coordination efforts were enhanced through the revised mission concept and the subsequent development of a mission plan. In articulating the vision and key considerations for mandate implementation in the evolving context, the mission concept and mission plan have provided for clearer strategic prioritization and sequencing of Mission interventions, as well as providing a results framework against which to assess performance on an ongoing basis, in line with integrated peacekeeping performance and accountability framework accountability priorities.

MINUSMA and the United Nations country team strengthened integrated support for the current political transition process and return to democratic constitutional order. Phase I of the Mission's road map for mandate implementation (S/2021/300, annex) is focused on key objectives to be achieved during the political transition, which is expected to culminate in national elections. The conclusion of phase I will be defined by the achievement of the political transition benchmarks and conditions set out in the road map. During this phase, the Mission is coordinating joint action with the country team in the framework of the integrated transition support plan developed in late 2020. The plan meets the requirements of an integrated strategic framework for phase I, including an overall vision, joint priorities and the division of labour to sustain peace in Mali that ensures complementarity of efforts between MINUSMA and the country team. Once the political transition has been concluded, MINUSMA will move to phase II, which will, among other things, continue to address major remaining challenges in the north and the centre. Longer-term transition planning under phase II will be a strategic and collaborative process with the Government of Mali and other partners, including the country team, to consolidate peacebuilding gains and prevent future conflict. It is in this context that the development of a new integrated strategic framework and transition calendar, aligned with revised system-wide policy guidance on integration, is envisaged.

As part of the integrated United Nations-wide effort to provide dynamic and results-oriented support to the Government throughout the political transition, a joint MINUSMA-United Nations country team senior leadership forum retreat was held in July to assess priorities and better focus coordinated efforts for phase I of the political

transition period. To this end, MINUSMA and the country team jointly identified a set of flagship projects for integrated action during the political transition.

For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and MINUSMA, in partnership with other United Nations entities and main international actors, recently developed the Programme d'appui à la stabilisation du Mali à travers le renforcement de l'état de droit for the next four years (2021–2024) to bring support to the Malian population to improve their resilience in the face of the conflicts and allow them to live in an environment respectful of the rule of law. In addition, the United Nations Integrated Electoral Team, composed of MINUSMA, UNDP and UN-Women, has supported voter registration exercises, including by deploying material and expertise and training Malian Defence and Security Forces as well as Malian officials, in support of the electoral process.

The United Nations Integrated Electoral Team has also provided experts and technical advice on the electoral cycle to the transition legislative body, the National Transition Council, and the Constitutional Court. Technical and financial support also continues to be provided under this integrated approach to government ministries responsible for political and institutional reforms for consultations with political parties, signatories to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, civil society, professional associations, traditional and religious leaders and the diaspora.

Another example of integrated United Nations action is a joint project under way between MINUSMA and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to support improved transhumance management in Djenné *cercle* to restore social cohesion and reduce tensions between sedentary farmers and pastoralist herders. Integrated efforts are being undertaken to better demarcate transhumance corridors, promote community-level consensus-building and support local community members in establishing village and municipal transhumance management committees. In a separate initiative, MINUSMA coordinates closely with UNDP on projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of municipal and village land commissions, ensuring complementarity in geographic coverage throughout the centre of Mali.

In conclusion, in spite of the increasingly challenging environment, MINUSMA and the United Nations country team have worked effectively with their partners to implement their mandate in support of the people of Mali. This includes efforts to foster greater national ownership of the processes under way. To this end, in August and September, the Mission held a series of workshops and meetings with the Government, signatory movements, civil society and the media as part of efforts to improve understanding of its mandate and promote mutual accountability based on respective responsibilities.

I wish to commend the men and women of MINUSMA for their tireless efforts, in spite of the challenges and the daily dangers that they face. Their role, and the role of MINUSMA, remain critical to support the implementation of the Agreement, as well as the stabilization of the centre of Mali. The Mission's good offices, together with the mediation by the Economic Community of West African States, continues to be invaluable during this extended period of political transition.

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

(Signed) António Guterres