

Doing Less with More? The Difficult 'Return' of Western Troop Contributing Countries to United Nations Peacekeeping

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Abstract

Among others, the deployment of the UN stabilization mission to Mali (MINUSMA) in 2013 has been characterized by a number of researchers as a 'return' of Western troop contributors to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping in Africa. The aim of this report is to look at the reality of that 'return,' and whether it has enhanced the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping overall and of the UN mission in Mali in particular.

In policy and academic circles, the return has been hailed as an opportunity for Western member states to contribute niche capabilities such as ISRs including surveillance drones, military transport and attack helicopters, special forces, and to share experiences and practices developed over a long period of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism warfare in e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq.

In Mali, the UN mission is mired in a situation where these experiences were considered as relevant, all the more so as some considered that new UN peacekeeping missions could be deployed to Libya, Somalia, Syria, or in Yemen, thereby making Mali a key testing ground for the future from this perspective.

However, while Western countries may indeed have lessons to share, the report argues that so far their contribution to MINUSMA has been a very mixed blessing. The report explores these challenges and impact of them on the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping, defined as the ability to sustain peace over time.

Keywords: counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, Mali, peacekeeping, troop-contributing countries, United Nations.

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1. Introduction

The participation by Western troops in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was, in 2013-2014, referred to as a possible return to UN peacekeeping, (1) just as the re-engagement by European troops in UNIFIL in 2006-2007 ignited hopes for a similar move. Such return is in reference to the time, the early 1990s, when the Europeans constituted the bulk of the contributions to UN peacekeeping in the Balkans and Somalia in particular.

This report explores the reality of this most recent return, in particular in Mali, and whether it has enhanced the effectiveness of current UN operations.

It considers this question from material, discursive and doctrinal aspects, and assesses the impact of the Western contribution on MINUSMA itself, but also on the wider category of UN peace operations. Said differently, we look at whether Western countries contribute positively or negatively to the ability of MINUSMA to reach its mandated tasks – 1) in terms of capabilities and 2) in terms of engaging with other troops and colleagues in the mission; and 3) what impact Western contributions to MINUSMA have on the larger UN peace operations ecosystem, in particular in terms of doctrine (2).

This report argues that the participation of Western peacekeepers – with their high-end capabilities – may promise more than it delivers and may also lead to other countries keep taking a disproportionate part of the risks in missions. Western countries have contributed troops to MINUSMA as they considered that security challenges faced in Mali are directly related to their strategic interest.

Through the increased engagement in MINUSMA, Western countries have brought along their understanding of how international interventions should be conducted, and what tools are necessary to conduct such interventions.

They have pressed for the inclusion of an explicit intelligence unit, for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) companies, for keeping their military aircrafts and vehicles green instead of white, and for a massive increase of surveillance drones – or unmanned unarmed aerial systems (UUAS) in UN parlance.

At the UN, there has been a growing feeling that “the Europeans try to ‘NATOnize’ the UN as much as possible” with the aspiration to update and add doctrines, policies and capabilities, without looking at the budget implications (3).

(1) Joachim Koops and Giulia Tercovich (2016) “A European return to United Nations peacekeeping? Opportunities, challenges and ways ahead,” *International Peacekeeping* 23:5: pp. 597-609, John Karlsrud and Adam Smith (2015) “Europe’s Return to UN Peacekeeping in Africa? Lessons from Mali,” *Providing for Peacekeeping* 11. New York: International Peace Institute. We will refer to Western countries throughout the report, as Canada also has contributed troops to MINUSMA (2018-2019). Of course, and as we detail in the report, the participation of Western countries in Mali is not a return to UN peacekeeping per se, as Western countries have long contributed troops to the missions in e.g. Lebanon and Cyprus. However, on the African continent the contributions could be considered a ‘return’ as they marked a significant uptick in the number and duration of Western contributions. (2) We define Western countries as UN member states from Europe and North America, as well as Australia and New Zealand. (3) Interview of a UN official, 15 February 2017.

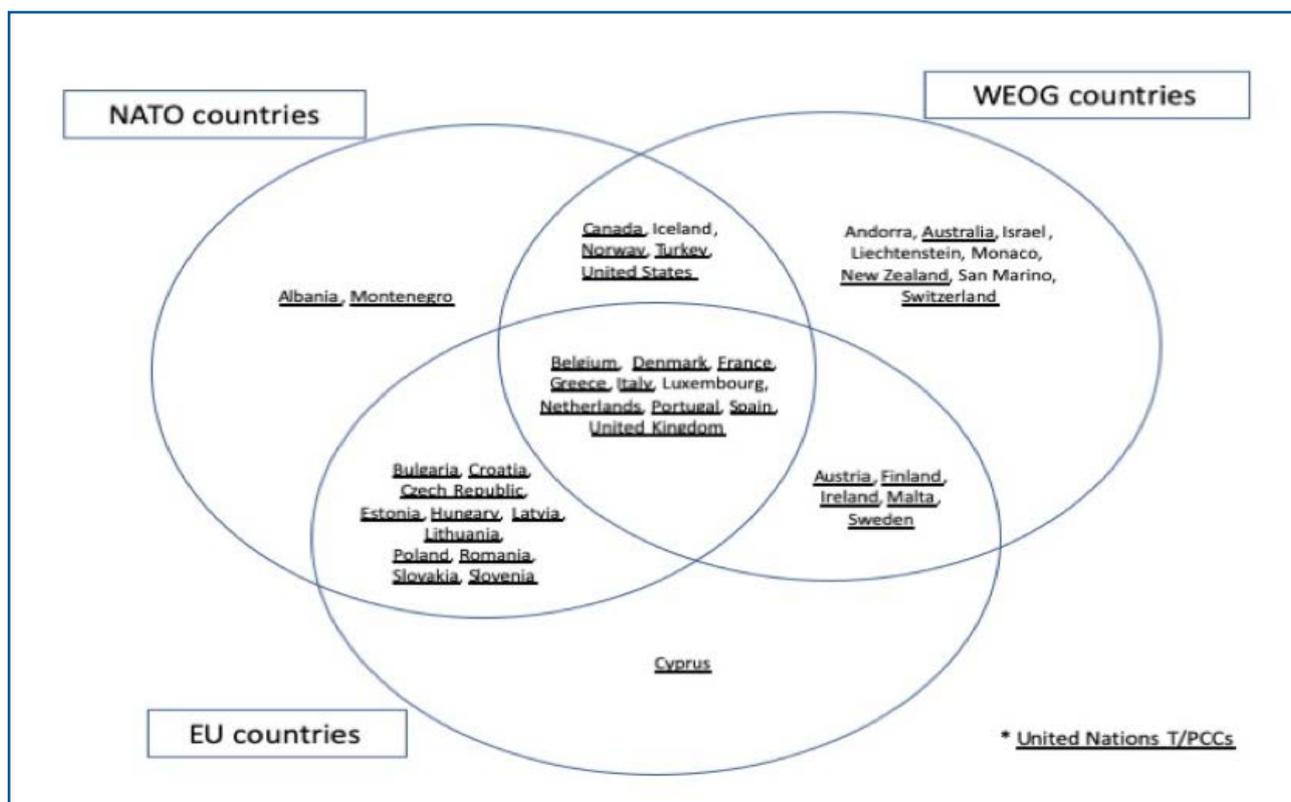
First the report will provide some background to Western participation in UN peacekeeping (4) (what Richard Gowan named “a tortured history in engaging with UN peacekeeping”), and the rationales that sparked the contributions to MINUSMA and other UN missions in 2013-2014.

In the second section, the report will describe more closely the contributions that various Western countries have made; it will also contextualize these contributions by looking at the relationship between Western troops and other troops in the mission, and detail the relationship with other stakeholders and actors engaged in the security domain in Mali and its neighborhood.

In the third section, the report provides an analysis of these contributions looking at whether they allowed the UN mission to be more effective or not. It also questions whether the UN should aim to sustain European engagement into peacekeeping and under what conditions.

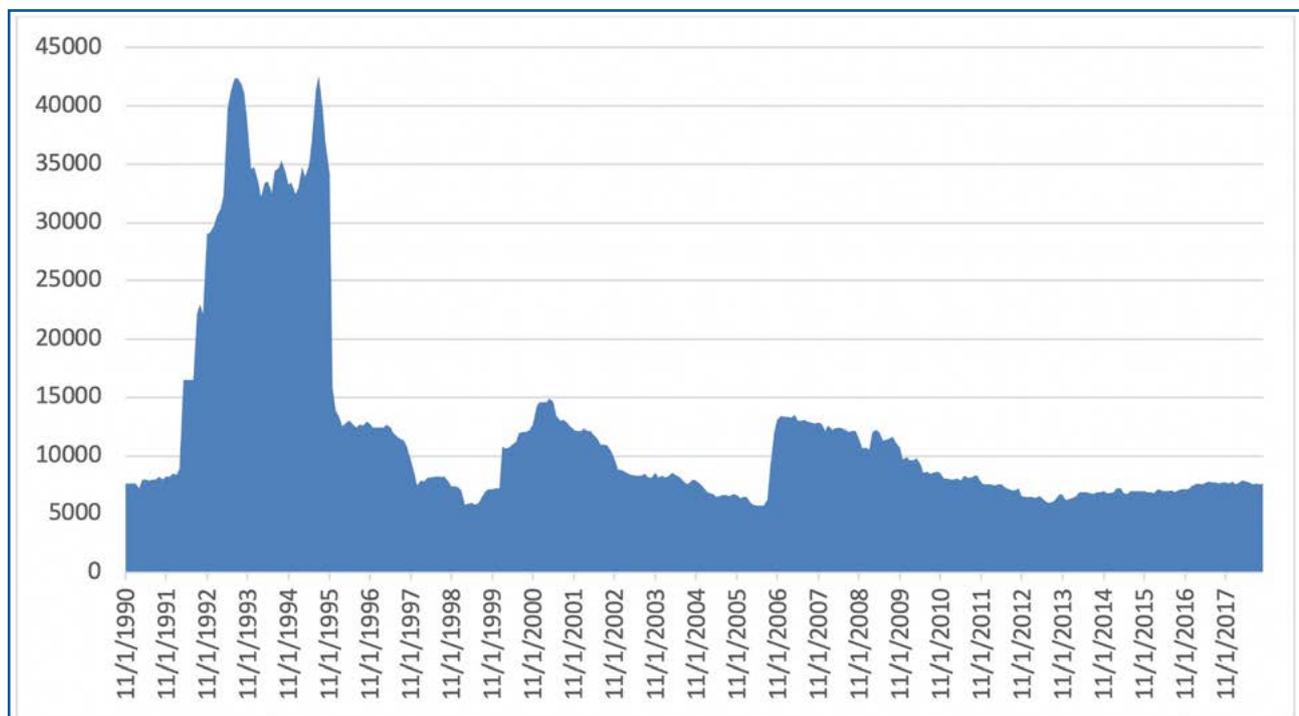
(4) Richard Gowan (2018) *European Involvement in United Nations Peacekeeping*, in Hugo Meijer and Marco Wyss (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of European Defence Policies and Armed Forces*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, available online at <https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198790501.001.0001/oso-9780198790501-chapter-50>

[Graph 1 on Western Countries at the United Nations] | Source: Created by the authors



2. The Context: 70 years of Ups and Downs of Western Contributions to UN Peace Operations

[Graph 2: Evolution of Western Contributions to PKOs from to 30 Nov 1990 to 31 Oct 2018] Source: Combined troops, police officers and observers provided by European and North American member states, as well as Australia and New Zealand. Data from International Peace Institute, IPI Peacekeeping Database, [12 December 2019], available at www.providingforpeacekeeping.org



There was a relatively strong engagement by Western countries during the early years of UN peacekeeping.

The operation in Cyprus (UNFICYP) was the only peacekeeping mission occurring on the European continent, and in the 1980s it was exclusively composed of Western countries; half of the other missions were created either in the Middle East or in Africa.

During the Cold War, the so-called “neutral” countries in the two ideological camps, were the most frequent to contribute to peacekeeping operations (see table 1 below).

Table 1: Troop-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping operations up until the end of the Cold War

| Date | Peacekeeping operation | Troop-contributing countries |
|-------------|--------------------------------|---|
| 1948- | UNMOGIP (Kashmir) | Croatia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Thailand, Switzerland, Uruguay, Chile, Italy, Romania |
| 1948- | UNTSO (Jerusalem) | Finland, Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Ireland, Denmark, Netherlands, New Zealand, China, Sweden |
| 1956-1967 | UNEF I (Sinai) | Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, India, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden, Yugoslavia |
| 1958 | GONUL (Lebanon) | Afghanistan, Argentina, Burma, Canada, Ceylon, Chile, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Thailand |
| 1960-1964 | ONUC (Congo) | Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Burma, Canada, Ceylon, Denmark, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Liberia, Malaya, Mali, Morocco, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Sweden, Tunisia, United Arab Republic, Yugoslavia |
| 1962-1963 | UNSF (West New Guinea) | Pakistan, Canada, United States |
| 1963-1964 | UNYOM (Yemen) | Australia, Canada, Denmark, Ghana, India, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Sweden, Yugoslavia |
| 1964- | UNFICYP (Cyprus) | Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, United Kingdom |
| 1965-1966 | DOMREP (Dominican Republic) | Brazil, Canada, Ecuador |
| 1973-1979 | UNEF II (Sinai) | Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, India, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden and Yugoslavia |
| 1974- | UNDOF (Golan Heights) | Austria, Canada, Peru, Poland, Iran, Finland, Japan, India, Slovakia, Sweden, Nepal, Philippines, Croatia |
| 1978- | UNIFIL (Lebanon) | France, Norway, Netherlands, Ireland, Ghana, Fiji, Senegal, Finland, Nigeria, Sweden, Italy |
| 1988-1990 | UNGOMAP (Afghanistan-Pakistan) | Austrian, Canada, Denmark, Fiji, Finland, Ghana, Ireland, Nepal, Poland, Sweden |
| 1988-1991 | UNIMOG (Iran-Iraq) | Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ghana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Poland, Senegal, Sweden, Turkey, Uruguay, Yugoslavia, Zambia |
| 1989-1990 | UNTAG (Namibia) | Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Canada, China, Congo, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, Federal Republic of Germany, Fiji, Finland, France, German Democratic Republic, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Soviet Union, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia |
| 1989-1991 | UNAVEM I (Angola) | Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Congo, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, Hungary, India, Ireland, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Yugoslavia, Zimbabwe |

Source: Created by the authors

The end of the Cold War and the crisis in the Balkans led a number of Western countries, in particular the permanent members, to engage in an even more significant way in UN peacekeeping (5).

They contributed to UN operations but also to parallel forces through NATO or coalitions of the willing. (6) The difficulties of some of the operations they contributed to in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia led most of Western countries to move away from the UN framework.

Instead, they relied even further on other organizations (NATO, and then the European Union) or engaged bilaterally (Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire), between 1995 and 2005, to conduct crisis management operations.

During this period, European countries began to be more engaged in the development of a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), partly built on what Europeans considered as the failures of UN peacekeeping, even if these were never fully analyzed.

As Richard Gowan explained: "European generals and governments arguably bore a major part of the responsibility for the failure of UNPROFOR in particular. Yet the majority of European armed forces placed the blame on UN officials, creating a legacy of mutual suspicions that would overshadow later UN operations." (7)

The security and defense structures built by the European Union have been built in a way as the opposite to the UN secretariat structures in which member states have little say in the way operational documents are written.

This is what in essence European countries miss when they put troops at the disposal of the UN. In order to operationalize ESDP, the European Union stood therefore ready, in 2002-2005, to

take over UN missions (like in Bosnia with EUPM, and later in Kosovo with EULEX) or to launch parallel missions to support the UN in areas where it may have had weak capacity such as rapid deployment (EUFOR RD Congo) or security sector reform (EUPOL Kinshasa and EUSEC in DRC for example).

In 1999, after the failures of UN peacekeeping in Srebrenica and Rwanda, and before the crises in Timor and Kosovo, there were only 12,500 peacekeepers deployed around the world.

As Western countries had moved away from UN peacekeeping after the abovementioned failures, the space was taken by developing countries, coming in particular from South-East Asia.

This situation generated a widening gap between those who contribute (South East Asian, and later African countries) and those who decide

(5) *During bipolarity, the permanent members limited their engagement in peacekeeping for obvious impartiality reasons. As missions were dealing with intrastate relations and ceasefire agreements, the respect of the principle of impartiality was all the more important.*

(6) *"NATO was the first actor to be delegated the task of supporting a peace operation, first as a provider of air power in the former Yugoslavia, then as an implementer of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement." China has been the only permanent member that never participated in a parallel force. For a detailed research on the role and challenges of forces deployed in parallel to UN operations, see Alexandra Novosseloff and Lisa Sharland, "Partners and Competitors: Military Forces Operating in Parallel to UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, November 2019: <https://www.ipinst.org/2019/11/partners-and-competitors-forces-operating-in-parallel-to-un-peace-operations>*

(7) *"Richard Gowan (2018) op.cit."*

(the members of the Security Council, and in particular its permanent members) (8). This imbalance has regularly put on the table the issue of broadening the base of peacekeeping contributors (9). In parallel, tension has arisen between, on the one hand, Security Council members and Western member states in general who wish to move towards more robust peacekeeping on the one hand – while making up only 8.4% of all troop contributions – and, on the other hand, the traditional major troop-contributing countries (TCCs) (10).

But in situations where their direct strategic interests are not at stake, the majority of current contributing countries do not want to take the route of increasingly robust peacekeeping that verges on peace enforcement, as their public opinions are not ready to see body bags coming home.

An interesting factor in this development is the continuing increase over the last decade of African troop contributions to UN peacekeeping, in particular many neighboring states to UN missions. It is thus not a surprise that there has been increasing calls for more robust mandates among these TCCs, as they want the missions they deploy to align with their national security objectives. As a result, there has been a growing alignment between Western and these African states to equip UN peacekeeping operations with more robust mandates (11).

During the last two decades, each reengagement by Western countries – in 2006-2007 in Lebanon (12), in 2009-2010 in Chad and CAR (13), in 2013-2014 in Mali and CAR and in 2017 South Sudan – has raised the question of whether that engagement would constitute a genuine ‘return’ to UN peacekeeping or if it would just be a targeted and short-term commitment.

The latest wave of Western contributions also took place in a context where the US administration showed a new interest in UN

peacekeeping, releasing a new policy on US support for UN peacekeeping operations, twenty years after the one issued in 1995 (14), and organizing the first peacekeeping pledging summit (September 2015) (15).

It concerned mainly contributions to Mali (see next section), but not only. Europeans have contributed to other multidimensional missions as they, at the same time, maintained their more traditional contributions to the missions in the Middle East and in Cyprus.

In 2016, the UK deployed 30 to 40 military personnel to the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) to carry out medical, logistical and

(8) See Philip Cunliffe (2013) *Legions of Peace: UN Peacekeepers from the Global South*, London: C. Hurst & Co Publishers.

(9) See Alex J. Bellamy and Paul D. Williams, “Broadening the Base of United Nations Troop- and Police-Contributing Countries,” *Providing for Peacekeeping* n°1, New York: International Peace Institute, August 2012.

(10) As of 31 October 2018. Data from International Peace Institute, IPI Peacekeeping Database, [12 December 2019], available at www.providingforpeacekeeping.org.

(11) John Karlsrud (2018) *The UN at War: Peace Operations in a New Era*, London: Palgrave Macmillan

(12) See Alexandra Novosseloff (2015) UNIFIL, in Joachim A. Koops, Norrie MacQueen, Thierry Tardy and Paul D. Williams (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(13) See Richard Gowan / Alexandra Novosseloff, “Security Council Working Methods and UN Peace Operations: The Case of Chad and the Central African Republic, 2006-2010” (New York: Center on International Cooperation, 2012), 35 pages.

(14) United States Support to United Nations Peace Operations, The White House, 28 September 2015), <http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015peaceoperations.pdf>.

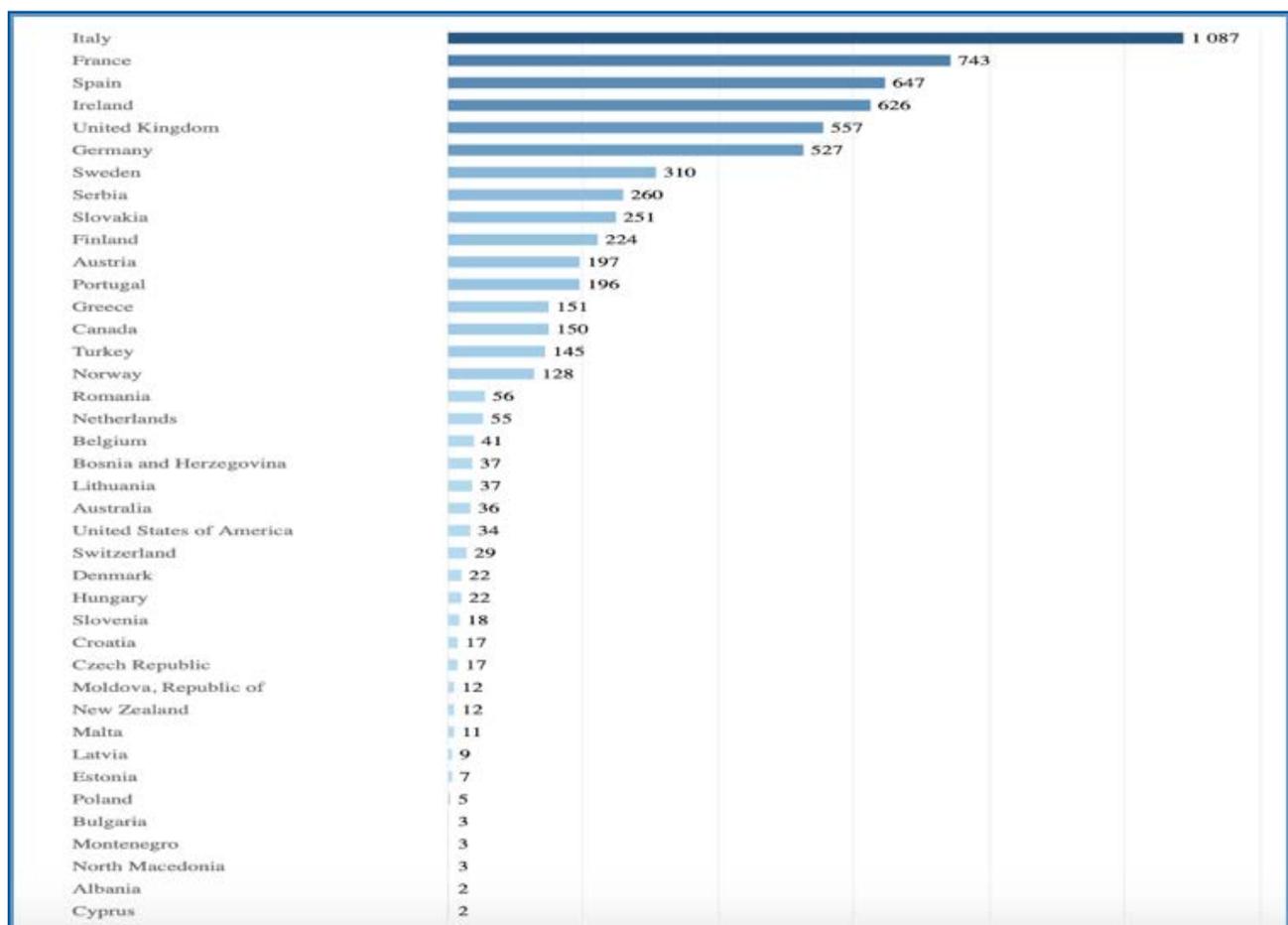
(15) *The Leaders’ Summit on Peacekeeping was co-organized by the United States in cooperation with Rwanda, Uruguay, Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Japan, Pakistan and Indonesia.*

engineering duties (16). In 2017, the United Kingdom deployed to the UN mission in South Sudan “Operation Trenton” of 300 troops as part of an engineering unit (“39 Engineer Regiment”) and a Level 2 field hospital spread in three bases: Juba, Malakal and Bentiu (contribution that was extended until 2020) (17) ; and Portugal deployed a quick reaction force to the mission in the Central African Republic, where a Serbian Level 2 hospital has also been present since the end of 2014. And in 2019, Canada agreed to provide a C-130 transport aircraft to be deployed in Entebbe in order to serve all peacekeeping operations deployed in Africa.

Despite this diversity of contributions, the bulk of Western contributions remains within UNIFIL, even though the share of European contributions to that mission has diminished since 2006-07, from 70% to less than 30% today. MINUSMA is the second mission where Western countries contribute and invest, and where they are also part of parallel forces (from Barkhane (18) to EUTM and EUCAP).

Since its commitment in 2006-07, Italy remains the strongest Western contributing country to UN peacekeeping, with France as second, Spain as third and Ireland as fourth.

[Graph 3: Ranking of Western Contributions to UN Peacekeeping, as of 30 September 2019] | Source: UN peacekeeping resources data: : <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

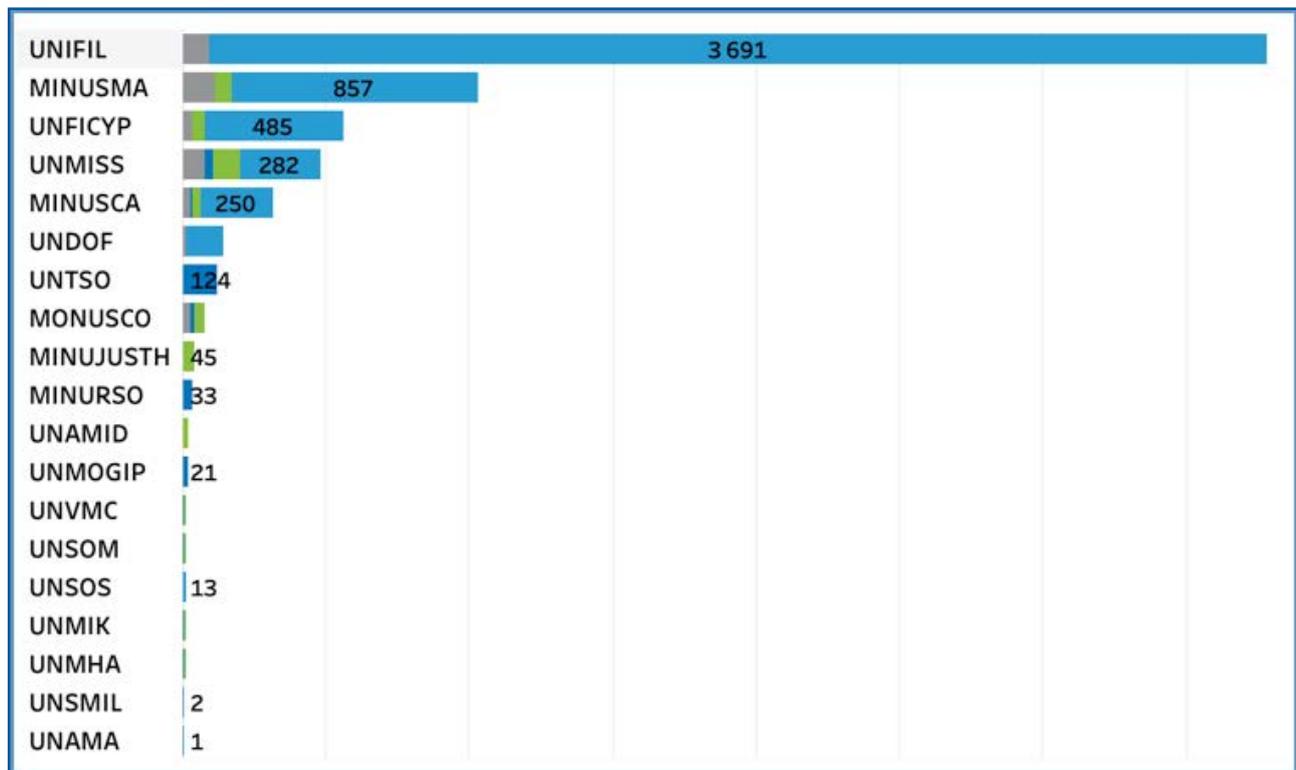


(16) See <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-36183932>

(17) See <https://www.forces.net/news/operations/south-sudan-joining-hundreds-british-soldiers-un-duty>

(18) To which European countries have also been contributing: the UK with three Chinook helicopter and around 100 British RAF personnel, Estonia with 50 soldiers and possibly Denmark with 2 transport helicopters. See <https://www.rotorandwing.com/2019/07/22/french-armed-forces-herald-uk-chinooks-participation-mali-operations>

[Graph 4: Western Contributions by UN Peace Operations, as of 30 September 2019] | Source: UN peacekeeping resources data: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>



3. MINUSMA: The New Playground of Western Contributions to UN Peacekeeping?

3.1. Reasons Behind Western Contributions to the UN Mission in Mali

The latest engagement of Western countries was in part triggered by the drawdown of these countries from ISAF in Afghanistan as that NATO mission was transforming itself to a training mission (19). As a result, some countries looked for other potential theaters to keep their troops operational, and UN peacekeeping became for some a possible new framework for deploying troops. Another relevant factor was the engagement on UN peace operations by the Obama administration in 2014-15 which led to launch a few initiatives to make UN

peace operations more efficient and building more adequate capabilities, as UN operations had grown once again in size and complexity (with a peak of 107,800 uniformed personnel in April 2015). Following the US-supported peacekeeping summit in September 2015, the UK increased its support, inter alia hosting a UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial meeting in

(19) In 2014, the then US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, was “encouraging European militaries, many of which are drawing down from Afghanistan, to return to U.N. peacekeeping where they played a very active role in the 1990s.” Louis Charbonneau, Michelle Nichols, “U.S. urges Europe, Asia to do more for U.N. peacekeeping,” Reuters, 7 November 2014. See also Peter Nadin, “After Afghanistan: A Return to UN Peacekeeping?,” UN University, 5 March 2014: <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/after-afghanistan-a-return-to-un-peacekeeping.html>; and Adrian Johnson, “After Afghanistan: A British Military Return to Peacekeeping?,” <http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/event/symposium/pdf/2014/E-04.pdf>.

September 2016 (20). In November 2017, the Canadian government organized the third Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial meeting in Vancouver (21).

However, most importantly Western countries have been willing to contribute to the UN mission in Mali (and to a lesser extent to CAR) for a number of more fundamental reasons: the danger of the blossoming of jihadist groups in the Sahelian-Saharan belt for the stability of Mali and of the whole sub-region; the combination of jihadism, organized crime and organized migration which has been continuously rising on the European policy agenda during the last decade. Some of them also wanted to keep some of their capacities operational.

For example, in the case of the UK, its engagement in UN peacekeeping follows a continued commitment to tackle instability in the Sahel. As the British Secretary of State for Defense stated: “[t]he UK is committed to supporting the international community in combating instability in Mali, as well as strengthening our wider military engagement across the Sahel region.” And as Abigail Watson and Liam Walpole added, “The UK engagement is also positive for its bilateral relations with France; and builds the British armed forces’ reputation as a willing and able partner in the fight against international terrorism” (22).

Indeed, France requested support from a number of countries in order to help share the burden in parallel to its own deployment (Barkhane) (23). Such requests have been reiterated to Europeans in particular after the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks through the activation of the mutual assistance clause of Article 42(7) of the Treaty of the European Union (24). Both in Mali and the Central African Republic, France also pushed European countries in particular to take their share of the burden to stabilize the security situation there and to provide capacity to reforming the security sector. As a result, in the Central African Republic (CAR) the French operation Sangaris

was quickly replaced by a European Force and then by a European Training Mission (EUTM); in Mali, an EUTM was launched as well as an EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP), and a number of European and Western countries decided to contribute to MINUSMA directly.

Requests to increase Western contributions to peacekeeping also came at a particular moment – all countries except Denmark have been aiming for a seat at the UN Security Council: Sweden campaigning for 2017-18, the Netherlands for 2018-19, Germany for 2019-2020), and Canada and Norway for 2021-22. Countries are also contributing when one of their national is part of the leadership team of a Mission.

SRSB Bert Koenders helped in 2014-15 to secure the Dutch contribution, and DSRSG/Political Koen Davidse helped secured the continuation of that contribution between in 2016-2018. Currently, DSRSG/Political Joanne Adamson has helped secure the British commitment to

(20) Gov.uk, “UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial: London Communiqué”, Gov.uk, 8 September 2016. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/un-peacekeeping-defence-ministerial-london-communication>. Accessed 8 November 2019.

(21) <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/campaigns/peacekeeping-defence-ministerial.html> No such conference was organized in 2018. On March 2019, a UN Peacekeeping Ministerial on Uniformed Capabilities, Performance and Protection was hosted at UN Headquarters in New York. The next peacekeeping ministerial conference will be hosted in Seoul in April 2021.

(22) Abigail Watson and Liam Walpole, “Why is the UK going to Mali?,” Oxford Research Group, 30 July 2019: <https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/why-is-the-uk-going-to-mali>

(23) Voir Yves Petit, “Le rôle de l’Union européenne dans la crise malienne”, *Civitas Europa*, 2013/2, n°31, pp.181-209: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-civitas-europa-2013-2-page-181.htm>

(24) European Council Briefing, “Activation of Article 42(7) TEU: France’s request for assistance and Member States’ responses,” July 2016 : [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/581408/EPRS_BRI\(2016\)581408_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/581408/EPRS_BRI(2016)581408_EN.pdf)

sending 250 troops in early 2020 (25).

And when Western member states contribute, they are able to get more easily to get the top military position: this was the case of Force Commander Michael Anker Løllesgaard from Denmark (26), and of Force Commander Jean-Paul Deconinck from Belgium (27).

3.2. Western Contributions to MINUSMA: low and decreasing

The total size of the Western contributions to MINUSMA have been overall relatively modest, and African troops, from the neighboring countries in West and Central Africa, still make up the majority of the troops in the mission (28). In September 2019, a total of 13,997 uniformed personnel was deployed in MINUSMA (29).

Of these, 8% were from Western countries, down from 10% in 2017. 71% of the uniformed personnel were from Africa, and of particular importance, as much as 61% hailed from West and Central Africa (30).

MINUSMA is also the deadliest UN peacekeeping operation deployed today: contributing 70% of the troops, the African countries account for 84% of the fatalities.

With the exception of three Egyptian fatalities these fatalities are all from countries from the sub-region, when including Chad.

October 2018: <http://www.opex360.com/2018/10/08/la-belgique-va-deployer-50-soldats-au-mali-et-lancer-une-mission-dappui-au-niger/>

(28) This is an increasing trend in UN peacekeeping missions on the African continent, and breaks with the previous principle that neighboring states should not be brought on board as TCCs as they would be likely to be partial to the conflict. See Paul D. Williams and Thong Nguyen, "Neighborhood Dynamics in UN Peacekeeping Operations, 1990–2017," *Providing for Peacekeeping Report n°16*, New York: International Peace Institute, April 2018: <https://www.ipinst.org/2018/04/neighborhood-dynamics-in-un-peacekeeping-operations>

(29) <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

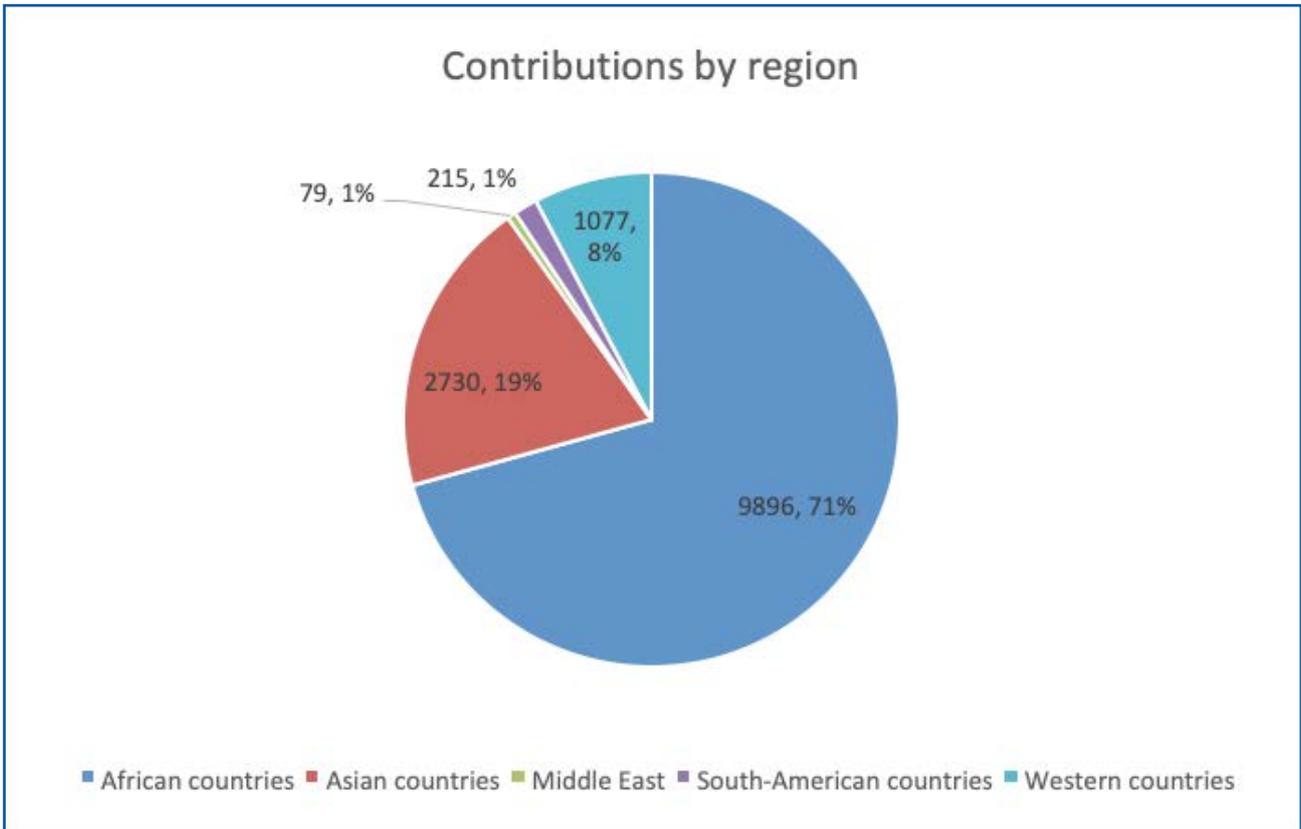
(30) When calculating this figure, we included Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo. Burundi, Egypt, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar or Tunisia were not included. Although Chad is not a neighboring country, it is part of the Group of Five Sahel together with Mali.

(25) "UK to deploy 250 troops to Mali on peacekeeping operations," 22 July 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-deploy-250-troops-to-mali-on-peacekeeping-operations>

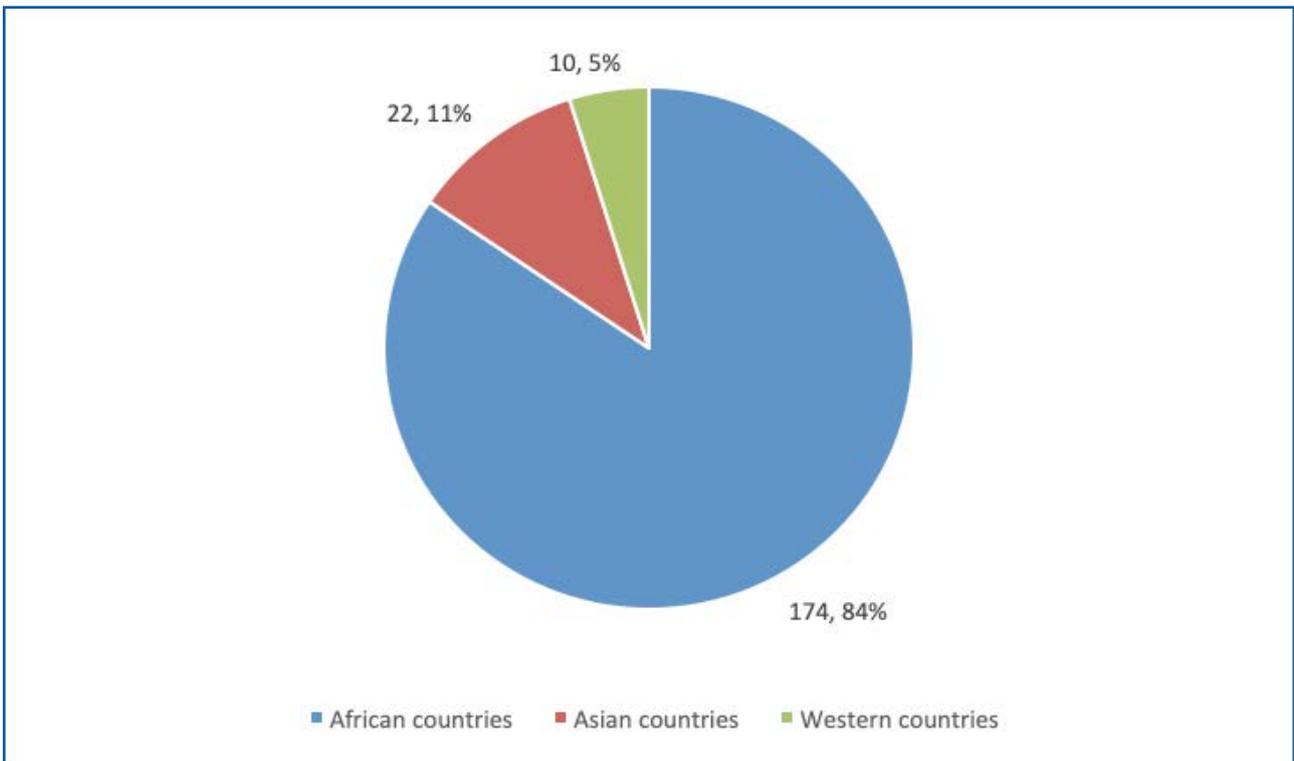
(26) "Danish troops wanted for dangerous Mali mission," 22 October 2015: <https://www.thelocal.dk/20151022/un-wants-danish-troops-for-dangerous-mali-mission>

(27) Laurent Lagneau, "La Belgique va déployer 50 soldats au Mali et lancer une mission d'appui au Niger," 8

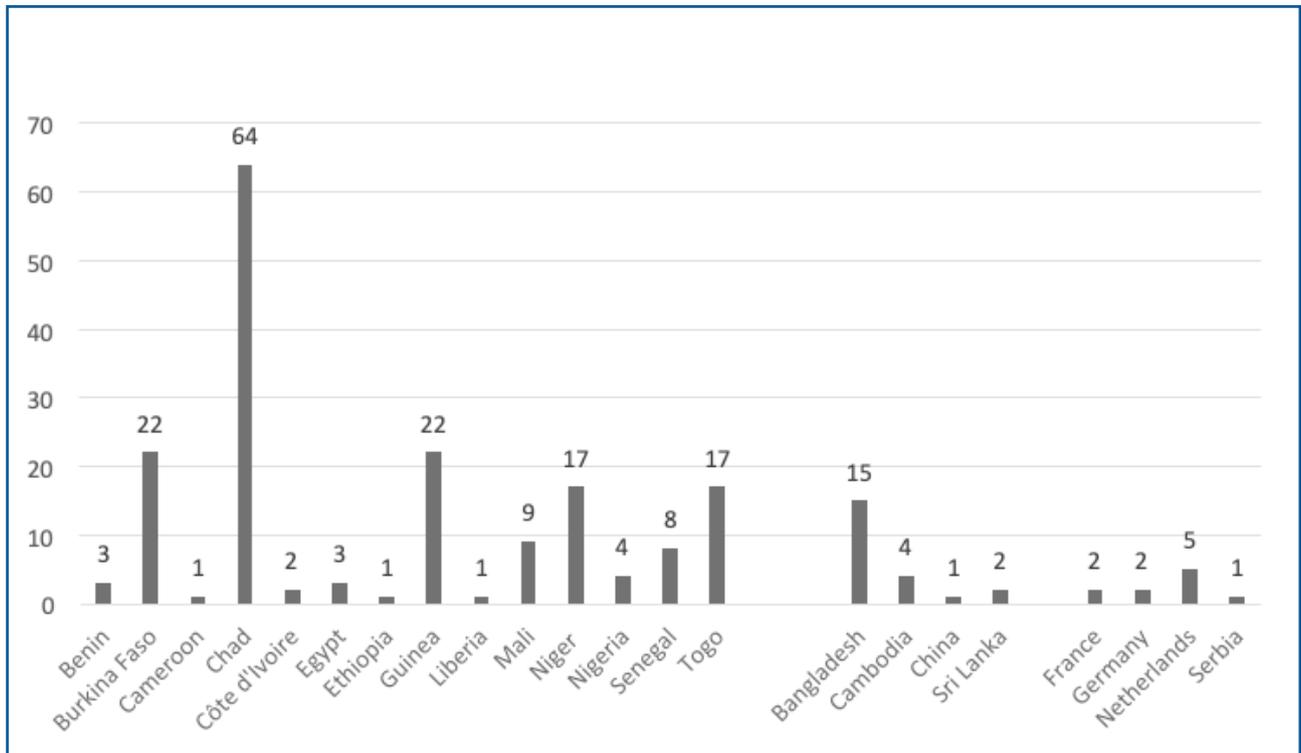
[Graph 5: MINUSMA: Uniformed contributions by region up to 30 September 2019] | Source: UN peacekeeping resources data: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>



[Graph 6: Share of fatalities per region] | Source: UN, '(2) Fatalities by Nationality and Mission up to 31 October 2019'. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/statsbynationalitymission_2_33.pdf.



[Graph 7: Fatalities by nationality and region up to 31 October 2019] Source: UN, '(2) Fatalities by Nationality and Mission up to 31 October 2019'. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/statsbynationalitymission_2_33.pdf.



The Western countries have provided high-end capabilities to MINUSMA. In 2014, the Dutch deployed 450 military personnel, Special Operations Forces (SOFs), an intelligence unit, three Chinook and four Apache helicopters, police officers (31).

In 2015, Sweden pledged to send “a 250-person intelligence and reconnaissance group to MINUSMA.” In 2016, Norway initiated the multinational rotational concept for transport aircrafts in 2016, in which currently Norway, Denmark, Belgium and Portugal contribute with an aircraft on a rotating basis; Norway has recently decided to extend its contribution to the UN peacekeeping operation in Mali for two new years, until 2022 (32).

In 2016, Germany decided to support the Dutch contingent on the ground in northern Mali, focusing on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR).

In March 2017, German NH-90 transport helicopters and Tiger attack helicopters replaced the Dutch helicopters based in Gao, and in December of the same year, Germany took over the management of the UN camp in Gao.

As a result, “[w]ith up to 1,100 soldiers and up to 20 police officers, MINUSMA is currently the largest deployment of the Bundeswehr abroad within the framework of a UN mission (33)”.

In 2018, the government of Canada deployed one military unit and only for a short-term: a

(31) Niels van Willigen, “A Dutch return to UN peacekeeping?,” *International Peacekeeping*, volume 23, 2016, pp. 702-720.

(32) See <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norge-stotter-fn-operasjon-i-mali-i-to-nye-ar/id2639086/>

(33) See <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/mali-node/maas-gao-minusma/2194134>

highly capable task force in Mali. Operation “Presence” included two Chinook helicopters to provide urgently needed transport and logistics capacity for MINUSMA, as well as four Griffon helicopters to provide armed escort and protection (34).

In July 2019, the UK announced the deployment of 250 troops to MINUSMA by 2020, with in particular “a long-range reconnaissance capability.” The contribution should be complemented by UK staff officers in the UN mission headquarters and new training programs with troops from other partnering nations who should be deploying to the UN operation (35).

4. Western Contributions to MINUSMA: Mixed results and a lack of integration

As previously mentioned, MINUSMA is quite different from past and contemporary UN peacekeeping operations. MINUSMA is not the first UN operation to be deployed in a terrorist threat environment (the ones in Lebanon, Iraq, and Afghanistan share this feature), but it is the first that has blue helmets operating in the same area of operation of another international military force, and therefore can be operationally involved in countering that threat (even though it has neither the doctrine, nor the means to do so).

In that context, what Western countries have done was to try to fill some of the gaps that peacekeeping operations have in such a threat environment, but following a model of favoring high-end but low-risk types of capabilities, intelligence, special forces and air assets (36). However, they have had mixed results in adapting their assets and their mindset to the

specificity of UN operations and to the benefit of MINUSMA, and therefore in generating greater effectiveness for the mission in dealing with a challenging environment.

(34) See <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/country-pays/mali/relations.aspx?lang=eng> According to the Canadian government, “the task force operated for a year out of Gao in northern Mali, conducting 11 medical evacuations and more than 100 transport missions. Canadian helicopters accumulated more than 4,000 flying hours, transported approximately 2,800 passengers and delivered more than 370,000 pounds of cargo.”

(35) See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-deploy-250-troops-to-mali-on-peacekeeping-operations>

(36) Arthur Boutellis / Michael Beary, “Sharing the Burden: Lessons from the European Return to Multidimensional Peacekeeping,” *International Peace Institute*, January 2020, p. 4: <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/01/lessons-from-the-european-return-to-multidimensional-peacekeeping>

Source: UN, "MINUSMA Deployment December 2019". New York: United Nations. <https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/dpko/MINUSMA.pdf>



4.1. Example of an Additional Operational Capacity: MRC

One of the most innovative and useful contributions of Western countries to peacekeeping has been the deployment by Norway, along with Belgium, Portugal and Sweden, of a C-130 transport plane to MINUSMA, which the UN was not able to generate from one single TCC over an extended period of time. The initial rotation period 2016-2018 was extended through 2020. Not only was this a much-needed capacity, it was also provided in a new modality: as a multinational rotation contribution (MRC) (37). This was seen as a new type of partnership that could enable the UN to source predictable supply of niche capabilities in high demand and short supply (38). In return, MRCs respond to

the need of Western countries of predictable and relatively short duration deployments, field testing of new and niche capabilities, and joint operations with key allies. However, MRCs are only an apt solution for very specific capabilities,

(37) This paragraph builds on John Karlsrud and Arthur Boutellis (2017), *Plug and Play: Multinational Rotation Contributions for UN Peacekeeping Operations*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). Available at: <https://nupi.brage.unit.no/nupi-xmlui/handle/11250/2443103>.

(38) Hervé Ladsous, former Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping, speaking at the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in London on 8 September 2016. UN (2016) "London conference on UN peacekeeping sharpens focus on planning, pledges and performance," UN News Centre, 8 September 2016: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54886#.WNkPBRmTLXM>.

can facilitate group-think and “cultural bubbles”, and may raise expectations to the type and quality of infrastructures and national support provided by TCCs (39). The member states in an MRC may and probably will also have very different caveats and appetites for risks, resulting in strong variations of what the UN can expect to be delivered by what is nominally the same capability (a C-130 in this instance). The lessons from the C-130 MRC to MINUSMA are thus mixed and need to be considered very carefully before being applied to other cases.

4.2. Example of an Inadequate Capacity: ASIFU

In a context where Western countries in particular pushed for the development of an intelligence policy for UN peacekeeping operations (published in May 2017 and reviewed in May 2019 (40)), the All-source Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU) was the first dedicated intelligence cell in a UN peacekeeping operation. It was conceptualized during 2012 by an Italian staff officer on secondment to the Office of the Military Adviser (OMA) at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in New York (41), and modelled on Western experiences in stabilization, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) special operations forces (SOF) Fusion Cell (SOFFC) (42). MINUSMA was indeed “the first peace operation in history to include a stand-alone unit for collecting and analyzing information within the mission’s military structure.” (43)

The ASIFU was provided as part of a larger intelligence package where particularly the Netherlands and Sweden provided one intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance company (ISR Coy) each, deployed to Gao and Bamako, in the shape of special operations forces, transport and combat helicopters and surveillance drones (44). To store and manage the information generated by these capabilities, the Netherlands included an information management and communications system, the TITAAN Red System, meeting information

management and classifications standards at the NATO Secret level. The contributions were not entirely altruistic, the package was put together to enable intelligence-led operations, robust force protection and to ensure that Western countries would be able to extract and provide medical assistance to wounded troops according to the NATO 10-1-2 principle (45), as this would be a critical precondition for their participation and deployment.

ASIFU faced from the start issues of integration within the UN mission it was supposed to serve. Because it was created, managed and handled by NATO countries, the ASIFU was only open for NATO member states, as the staff were using the

(39) *Ibid.*

(40) UN (2017) *Peacekeeping Intelligence*. New York: United Nations: <http://dag.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/400647/2017.07%20Peacekeeping%20Intelligence%20Policy%20%28Final%29.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

(41) *Interview of a UN official, 3 October 2017.*

(42) United Nations, *Lessons Learned Report. All-Sources Information Fusion Unit and the MINUSMA Intelligence Architecture: Lessons for the Mission and a UN Policy Framework. Semi-final draft for USG Ladsous’ review, 1 March 2016* (New York: United Nations, 2016): p. 3. *On file with the author.*

(43) See Olga Abilova and Alexandra Novosseloff, “Demystifying Intelligence in UN Peace Operations: Toward an Organizational Doctrine” (New York: International Peace Institute, July 2016), p. 17: <https://www.ipinst.org/2016/07/demystifying-intelligence-in-un-peace-ops>

(44) According to Boutellis & Beary, the ISRs deployed in MINUSMA channeled the information collected back to their capitals first before it is brought back to the mission after having been analyzed.

(45) The principle demands: “ensuring access to skilled first aid within 10 minutes of the point of injury or the onset of symptoms; advanced life support as soon as possible, and no later than 60 minutes; and access to limb- and life-saving surgery, no later than two hours.” UN DPKO/DFS (2015) *Medical Support Manual for United Nations Field Missions*, 3rd edition. New York: United Nations. For a longer discussion around medical support in UN peace operations, see Lesley Connolly and Håvard Johansen, *Medical Support for UN Peace Operations in High-Risk Environments*, 2017 New York: International Peace Institute: <https://www.ipinst.org/2017/04/medical-support-un-peace-ops-in-high-risk-environments>

Dutch TITAAN system requiring a NATO Secret security clearance. As an example, USG Hervé Ladsous asked Mauritania in 2014 to provide two intelligence officers to the ASIFU, but later realized that they would not be allowed access (46). Even internally in the ASIFU there was reluctance to share information between different Western countries: “the Swedish Task Force did not share its single-sensor reports with ASIFU HQ,” as it only wanted to share processed reports and not raw data (47). It initially operated out from a separate compound, and distinct from existing operational information structures, such as the intelligence branch (G2 of the military component) and the JMAC. This resulted in difficult working relationships, and “other mission components and most TCCs therefore perceived the ASIFU as an outsider. (48) ”Another consequence of that lack of integration within the mission’s structures was that the ASIFU could not provide “the mission leadership with all the required quantitative trend analyses, scenario-based documents, geospatial information-management tools, and network analysis, despite having the necessary tools to do so (49). ”Finally as there had been a misunderstanding between the UN headquarters and the TCCs on the role of such asset, “the lack of information the ASIFU provided to units on the ground in order to prepare their patrols led some to further question its role within the mission (50)”. This situation clearly showed the conundrum the ASIFU was faced with – it was developed and deployed to serve mission leadership with strategic intelligence, but most of the time it was asked to provide tactical intelligence to the units on the ground. Furthermore, there has been a widespread perception among UN personnel and a number of TCCs that intelligence reports and the ‘targeting packs’ developed on suspected terrorists by Western ASIFU officers frequently were shared with French Barkhane staff in an informal manner (51). Besides souring the relationship internally in MINUSMA it also meant that the operation may be liable if the information led to targeted strikes. In 2016 it was decided to merge the ASIFU with the U2

intelligence cell of the Force component (52), and the merger was completed at the end of 2017. Yet, a number of challenges remains. (53)

4.3. Example of a Costly Contribution with Limited Impact: ISR

In 2014, the Netherlands deployed 450 troops to Mali. These included the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) company in Gao, special forces, four Apache helicopters and three Chinook transport helicopters. When Germany agreed to replace the Netherlands, they brought up the troop number to 650 to undertake the same tasks (54). The increases in troop numbers were however not reflected in the tasks they performed. Actually, because the German helicopters were of a different type and configuration, e.g. not including extra fuel tanks, their individual and combined range was

(46) Sebastian Rietjens and Walter Dorn, “The Evolution of Peacekeeping Intelligence: The UN’s Laboratory in Mali,” in Floribert Baudet, Eleni Braat, Jeoffrey van Woensel and Aad Wever (eds.) *Perspectives on Military Intelligence from the First World War to Mali: Between Learning and Law*, 2017, Berlin: Springer, pp. 197-219.

(47) *Ibid.*, p. 213.

(48) Olga Abilova and Alexandra Novosseloff, “Demystifying Intelligence in UN Peace Operations,” *op. cit.*, p. 17.

(49) *Ibid.*

(50) *Ibid.*

(51) See e.g. United Nations, *Lessons Learned Report and John Karlsrud (2017) ‘Towards UN counter-terrorism operations?’*, *Third World Quarterly*, 38 (6): pp. 1215-1231. The practice of targeting packs was institutionalized by the Danish Force Commander Michael Lollesgaard.

(52) United Nations, *Lessons Learned Report*, *op.cit.*

(53) Interview of a UN official, 3 October 2017, New York.

(54) See UN, “Summary of Contributions to Peacekeeping.” Germany also brought a large number of National Support Elements (NSEs) – staff that they considered necessary to undertake the task, but that the UN did not reimburse the costs for. For more on NSEs, see UN policy on “National Support Element”: <http://dag.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/387380/2015.17%20National%20Support%20Element%20Policy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

less than that of the Dutch helicopters (55). For the UN, this meant that they had to reimburse and cover the costs of a much higher number of troops to perform the same or smaller task: “If you bring a sophisticated machine, [you] need to deliver in all areas: if you bring an advanced asset that only covers part of the requirements, it becomes very costly as you need to bring other aircrafts (often civilian) to cover the gaps (56)”. One UN official pointed out that the solutions and concepts that Western countries bring to the UN often ends up being significantly costlier, while the same countries are arguing for cost-cuts: “The same nations who come up with the lovely concepts also want to cut the costs of peacekeeping (57)”.

And yet, “the Dutch Apaches and commandos have not been able to counter the Islamists’ hit-and-run raids on lightly armed African units. European intelligence officers are still working out how to track events in a country riddled with organized criminal networks closely tied to the authorities. Some of their non-European counterparts are unfamiliar with how to put such high-end assets to work (58)”

When filling a capability gap, the UN normally considers various offers from member states and accepts the offer that can fill the gap in the best possible manner, capability and cost-wise. But it has been a political priority to increase the contributions from Western countries, giving the Western countries increased leverage in the negotiation process.

As an example, the Netherlands and Germany first negotiated the hand-over of the ISR company and the helicopter detachment in Gao bilaterally and then presented the deal to the UN as a *fait accompli* – it was either “take it or take it” according to a UN official working on the negotiations (59).

According to UN officials “[t]he rotational partners made [an] agreement between themselves, and then they show up at the UN and say they have already made an agreement with the Dutch and expect the UN to accept it. It doesn’t work like that (60)”.

4.4. Parallel Deployments Outside and Within MINUSMA

MINUSMA is the first UN peacekeeping mission that has been deployed in parallel to an ongoing counterterrorism operation, Serval (2013-2014) and Barkhane (since 1 August 2014), a force of 4,500 troops expected to cover the five countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. In parallel, since 2014, France supports the establishment of the Group of Five Sahel, and the deployment of a joint force, to address development and security challenges, and to enhance cooperation on border areas and around transnational threats (61). The United States is also active in the region, with a significant presence in Niger to train and mentor Nigerien and neighboring forces, as part of the larger War on Terror (62). In total, the US has 800 troops deployed to Niger, and special operations forces carrying out raids in e.g. Chad, Cameroon, Libya, Mali and Somalia, with logistical support from private subcontractors to limit risk exposure (63). A number of other Western countries including Canada, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the

(55) Interview of a UN official, 1 February 2017.

(56) Interview of a UN official 31 January 2017, Bamako.

(57) Interview of a UN official, 15 February 2017.

(58) Richard Gowan and Nick Witney, “Why Europe Must Stop Outsourcing Its Security,” *ECFR Policy Brief*, N°121, December 2014, p. 6: https://www.ecfr.eu/Page/-/Ecfr121_Why_Europe_Must_Stop_Outsourcing.pdf.

(59) *Ibid.* Even though, the UN Secretariat not been able to find a replacement.

(60) Interview of a UN official, 15 February 2017.

(61) Paul D. Williams, “Can Ad Hoc Security Coalitions in Africa Bring Stability?,” *IPI Global Observatory*, January 14, 2019: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/01/can-ad-hoc-security-coalitions-africa-bring-stability/>

(62) “An Endless War: Why 4 U.S. Soldiers Died in a Remote African Desert,” *The New York Times*, 20 February 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/17/world/africa/niger-ambush-american-soldiers.html>.

(63) Adam Moore, “U.S. military logistics outsourcing and the everywhere of war,” *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 2017, 5(1), pp. 5-27; Adam Moore and James Walker, “Tracing the US Military’s Presence in Africa, Geopolitics,” 2016, 21(3), pp.686-716;” Fergus Kelly. “US begins ISR flight operations from Air Base 201 in northern Niger,” *The Defense Post*, 1 November 2019. <https://thedefensepost.com/2019/11/01/us-isr-flights-nigerien-air-base-201-agadez-sahel/>.

United Kingdom are also participating in the operation (64). The presence of these parallel missions has a clear impact on MINUSMA. As already mentioned, Western troops have been sharing intelligence with their counterparts in these missions. The fact that MINUSMA is perceived as openly supporting a military operation with a counterterrorism mandate presents a broader problem for peacekeeping and challenges the doctrine and principles that it rests on—and its wider legitimacy within the international and local community (65). Also internally, MINUSMA is a case of parallel worlds (66). In particular, Western countries have applied “different approaches to their Force Protection requirements,” settling in therefore in a separate compound than other TCCs, and sometimes forbidding access of their camp to military and civilian staff of the UN mission (67). The relationship between Western and other TCCs (and at times civilians of the UN mission) has not been easy, and the mission has faced considerable challenges of integration. Another challenge is the experience and cultural baggage that many years of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations have provided the Western countries with, creating frustration among their UN colleagues. A number of interlocutors acknowledged that Western countries were coming with a mindset formed after years in Afghanistan, and as a result are not able to start afresh to understand the local context; they instead apply their experience directly (68). It was not only the capabilities and capacities provided that were new to the UN, it was also the manner in which they were provided. For example, Western TCCs resisted painting their military aviation assets and vehicles white and only placed a UN logo on top of the green camouflage color, arguing that to repaint them green after deployment would be a too large cost for them (69). The combined and symbolic effect of the contributions was thus an impression that MINUSMA was “going green,” both in terms of color, but also adopting a much more robust posture vis-à-vis threats in the mission area (70), and elevating the status of their troops to be in a higher combat readiness than the “traditional” peacekeepers in blue. Such a posture also created “a risk that the lines

between peace enforcement and peacekeeping become even more blurred (for the local population, the spoilers, and their respective contributors), thereby diminishing the unique legitimacy and comparative advantage of UN peacekeeping while making the UN a party to the conflict.” (71)

The experiences of Western TCCs in MINUSMA have also led to a discursive turn towards stabilization and counterterrorism in the debate on how UN peacekeeping should be reformed to be relevant to future needs of member states

Africa, Geopolitics, 2016, 21(3), pp.686-716;” Fergus Kelly. “US begins ISR flight operations from Air Base 201 in northern Niger,” *The Defense Post*, 1 November 2019. <https://thedefensepost.com/2019/11/01/us-isr-flights-nigerien-air-base-201-agadez-sahel/>

(64) Moore and Walker, “Tracing the US Military’s Presence,” *op.cit.*; Regjeringen (2018) “Forsvarets bidrag til kapasitetsbygging Sahel-regionen,” Regjeringen, 16 March 2018. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/forsvarets-bidrag-til-kapasitetsbygging-sahel-regionen/id2594019/>.

(65) Alexandra Novosseloff and Lisa Sharland, “Partners and Competitors: Forces Operating in Parallel to UN Peace Operations,” *New York: International Peace Institute*, November 2019, p. 19: <https://www.ipinst.org/2019/11/partners-and-competitors-forces-operating-in-parallel-to-un-peace-operations>

(66) See also Jair van der Lijn and al. (2019) *Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2019, p. 54: <https://effectivepeaceops.net/publication/minusma/>

(67) See Boutellis and Beary, “Sharing the Burden,” *op. cit.* p.18. These authors quoted one senior Gao staff saying: “you cannot be in the system and outside of the system.” And according to them, the attitude of “green versus white” and the creation of “Camps within Camps” created “a division between European TCCs and the rest of the mission and other TCCs, but also limits much-needed interaction, information sharing and coordination.”

(68) Exchange with UN official, Bamako, 31 January 2017.

(69) Interview of a Norwegian MOD official, January 2017.

(70) John Karlsrud (2015), “The UN at war: examining the consequences of peace-enforcement mandates for the UN peacekeeping operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali,” *Third World Quarterly*, 36 (1): p. 47.

(71) Alexandra Novosseloff and Lisa Sharland, “Partners and Competitors,” *op. cit.*, p. 25.

(72) See also John Karlsrud (2018) “From Liberal Peacebuilding to Stabilization and Counterterrorism,” *International Peacekeeping*, 26 (1): p. 1-21.

(72). Here, African and Western member states have voiced the need for UN peacekeeping operations to take on more tasks, using the challenges MINUSMA is facing as the main rationale. The African Union has repeatedly pressed for the inclusion of a regional counterterrorism force in MINUSMA, and with UN Security Council Resolution 2391 adopted on 8 December 2017, one step further was taken down this road. The resolution mandated MINUSMA to support the parallel Joint Force of the Group of Five Sahel (FC-G5S) with logistical and engineering support, as well as enhanced cooperation “through provision of relevant intelligence and liaison officers from the G5 Sahel Member States to MINUSMA. (73)”

5. Lessons from Western contributions to MINUSMA and beyond

5.1. Situation of a stalemate more than of a Western return to UN peacekeeping

Western countries have no doubt brought much needed capabilities to MINUSMA. But the provision of high-end capabilities does not automatically convert into overall increased effectiveness of a mission to have less casualties, to provide better protection against terrorist threats, and to better protect the civilians in the surroundings of the UN compound. The participation of Western countries with troops on the ground is too important to simply argue that the UN would be better off without their boots on the ground. But one can argue that if they had integrated better into the mission, their contribution would have had stronger impact. Western countries should pay stronger attention to that issue as the size of their armies does not allow them to provide battalions to UN peacekeeping, or invest much beyond niche capabilities. Indeed, European capacities are not unlimited, and Western countries face the same gaps as UN operations (e.g. in terms of helicopters, but also intelligence capacity). That is one reason why co-deployment and

multinational rotational systems are increasingly valuable options (74). This is also why Western countries should look more carefully at how to best plug into existing and more regular contributions from other continents. When Western countries have brought troops on the ground, they have also made sure that these are protected and are not exposed to high levels of risk. European countries have upped the stakes when deciding to participate in MINUSMA. They have brought new capabilities, new technology and new operational and doctrinal concepts developed over years of counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. With these followed increased expectations to what they could be able to do.

But, instead, the European countries have time and again proved to be as, if not even more, risk averse than other more traditional TCCs. Instead of being force multipliers it seems as if the Western contributions rather are token contributions, not in the traditional sense of the term (75), but in the sense that these contributions are part of longer-term material and discursive engagements in other arenas – in the competition for seats on the UN Security Council, and in the eagerness to prove that these countries assume their fair part of the global burden-sharing of international low-intensity security threats. The participation in MINUSMA also creates the ability to generate national intelligence streams from one of the key outposts in the unending War on Terror.

(73) UN (2018) S/RES/2391. New York: United Nations: p. 5.

(74) See Donald C. F. Daniel, Paul D. Williams, and Adam C. Smith, “Deploying Combined Teams: Lessons Learned from Operational Partnerships in UN Peacekeeping,” New York: International Peace Institute, August 2015; Karlsrud and Arthur Boutellis, *Plug and Play*, op. cit.

(75) *Small contributions up to 40 troops, mostly in the shape of staff officers*. See Katharina P. Coleman (2013) ‘Token Troop Contributions to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations’, in Alex J. Bellamy and Paul D. Williams (eds.) *Providing Peacekeepers: The Politics, Challenges, and Future of United Nations Peacekeeping Contributions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: pp. 1-20.

Where does this leave the UN? The UN is in dire need of the political support of Western countries, but their military contributions are in some instances proving to be a two-sided sword, creating friction and conflict at headquarters and in the field. The contributions of Western countries have somehow created a two-tier system in MINUSMA in particular, and has not helped reduce the wider gap of contributions between member states from the North paying and member states from the South putting troops on the ground who may be more vulnerable due to lack of high-end capabilities, lack of training and deployment to high-risk areas. Western countries have remained very reluctant to contribute regularly to UN peacekeeping operations. As a result, this time again, there has not been a genuine Western return to UN peacekeeping, but rather a continuous stalemate. Between 2017 and 2019, there has even been in MINUSMA a reduction of Western contributions, from 10% to 8%. In terms of effectiveness, the Western contributions may provide MINUSMA with important capabilities, but all too often these are not serving the mission as a whole, creating more friction than positive impact. While Western countries were part and parcel of developing the concept of operations of MINUSMA and pressed for the inclusion of the ASIFU and three ISR companies (in sector east, west and north), they have not come forward to deploy an ISR company to the north of Mali, where it would have perhaps been needed the most (see map of MINUSMA).

5.1. Situation of a stalemate more than of a Western return to UN peacekeeping

After many years of relative absence, mostly deploying with NATO or to coalition of the willing operations, Western countries are not familiar with the organizational and doctrinal setup of the UN. They have also been quite reluctant to adjust to the UN system, instead wanting to change the UN to become more similar to what they are familiar with – NATO. But, as Western countries only count for 8.4% of the total current troop and police contributions (and 7,7% concerning MINUSMA), one could

argue that they should be the ones adapting to peacekeeping, and not the reverse. That means that staff officers, engineers, troops or police officers that are deployed to UN missions should be trained on UN standards, rules and guidance to enable a change of mindset and avoid disruptive effects. They should be trained according to the command and control procedures applicable to UN operations to avoid friction in using a mission's military aviation assets (76). Problems arise quickly when some contingents arrive in missions thinking they know best and do not want to behave in conformity with existing UN rules. This is particularly important in the management of military air assets and during medical evacuations (77). Western countries will be inclined to insist vis-a-vis the UN that their troops should be evacuated immediately irrespective of costs and in spite of significant risks, while medical evacuation of troops from other member states could be guided by UN standards. In that sense, contributing to UN peacekeeping represents for some Western countries a greater effort than their more usual contributions through the EU, NATO or coalitions of the willing, and this should be acknowledged as such. When providing niche capabilities, Western countries should adapt to the environment of UN peacekeeping operations with a willingness to build capacities of less equipped contingents, and integrate into the operation, and not build separate camps from the rest of the mission, like in Mali. The provision of intelligence staff and assets under NATO rules is ill-adapted to a UN mission where such information would not therefore be able to

(76) In UN peace operations, the Director of Mission Support (civilian function) has the overall tasking authority for all utility helicopters, including military utility helicopters. See Alexandra Novosseloff, "Keeping Peace From Above: Air Assets in UN Peace Operations," New York: International Peace Institute, October 2017, 36 pages.

(77) As pointed by Boutellis and Beary, "all European TCCs in Gao have made direct bilateral arrangements for casevac with the Canadian helicopter task force or the French Operation Barkhane, and all European TCCs have a bilateral arrangement with the EU training mission's German-provided level II hospital in Koulikoro." Boutellis and Beary, "Sharing the Burden," op. cit., p. 7.

be provided to the (non-Western) units on the ground who need it the most. Western countries are rightly raising the issue of self-protection in UN missions, but they should match their requirements at the field level with increased political and economic efforts to reform medical evacuation and self-protection standards at UN headquarters. They should also match their demands with their policies on the financial front. When evolving in UN operations, Western TCCs have to bear the consequences of the policies made at the strategic level in terms of financial scarcity. All the more so, as for the UN Secretariat, Western contributions have added in terms of bureaucracy to its workload. When a member state contributes troops, it must negotiate the terms with the Office of the Military Adviser (OMA) at DPO. Even though many of the officers at OMA are seconded by Western countries, they have been quite exasperated with the challenges that onboarding Western contributions have confronted them with, as they are not ready to engage with UN rules and regulations, but rather want to continue doing business in the manner they are used to (NATO): “Currently Western countries are creating a tremendous amount of work for us, with the ignorance of the UN system (78)”. And some interlocutors have questioned at times whether Western contributions are worth the investment of effort by the UN (79).

6. Conclusion

It is unlikely that Western countries will ever be able or willing to contribute to UN peacekeeping much more than they are doing now. But when contributing they should make an effort to add value in the short as well as long term, by integrating with other TCCs, building capacities together with these. This would be mutually beneficial for Western and other TCCs as well as for the missions they deploy to. Contributions should be done with respect for and a deeper understanding of the nature of UN peacekeeping and in a spirit of solidarity and collegiality with other contributing countries. That would also

be a way to (re)build trust between Western countries and the UN. Also, a big challenge for Western countries is that while they would want “their high-end assets to have an impact on the ground, such an impact is not always evident in a UN mission whose goals are primarily political and not military (80)”.

While Western countries for the most part will tend to deploy for shorter periods and would like to only commit for short durations, there is evidence of more long-term engagements as well. Longer-term engagements by countries like the Netherlands and Sweden in Mali and the UK in South Sudan also opens the door for shorter engagements by other Western member states, keeping the door open for at least some form of continued contribution by Western member states to UN peacekeeping in the coming years as well.

As underlined by Koops and Tercovich: “[a] strong commitment to UN peacekeeping also does not merely find its expression in the supply of troops in absolute numbers or relative to commitments to alternative fora, but also in the official national discourse, policy guidelines and even attitudes of senior policy-makers in defence ministries and ministries of foreign affairs (81)”. UN peacekeeping is currently the best and cheapest way of managing crises, but can also present valuable opportunities for strengthening interoperability with allied troops, mission-test equipment and troops, acquire sorely needed cultural skills and contextual understanding, while increasing political capital. Western countries would do well to try to view UN peacekeeping with fresh eyes, and not view them in the faint (and dark) light of the failures of the 1990s.

(78) *Interview of a UN official, 15 February 2017.*

(79) *See developments on that issue in Boutellis and Beary, “Sharing the Burden,” op. cit., p. 15-16.*

(80) *Boutellis and Beary, “A return to Peacekeeping,” op. cit., p. 13*

(81) *Koops and Tercovich, “A European return,” op. cit., p. 600.*

Recommendations

- When providing niche capabilities, Western countries should adapt to the environment of UN peacekeeping operations with a willingness to build capacities of less equipped contingents, and integrate into the operation, and not build separate camps from the rest of the mission, like in Mali.
- Staff officers, engineers, troops or police officers from Western countries that are deployed to UN missions should be trained on UN standards, rules and guidance to enable a change of mindset and avoid disruptive effects.
- Contributing elements from Western countries should be trained according to the command and control procedures applicable to UN operations to avoid friction in using a mission's military aviation assets.
- Western countries should match their requirements at the field level with increased political and economic efforts to reform medical evacuation and self-protection standards at UN headquarters.
- Western countries should work with the UN Secretariat on increasing co-deployments and the systematic deployment of multinational rotational systems for niche capabilities.



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