



Mali: the UN takes over

by Thierry Tardy

On 25 April 2013, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2100 establishing the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, known by its French acronym MINUSMA. The operation will take over from the African-led mission (AFISMA) on 1 July if the security situation in Mali so permits and will consist of up to 12,640 uniformed personnel, including 11,200 troops and 1,440 police. Its budget is expected to be approximately \$800 million per year, significantly lower than the budgets of the large operations carried out in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or Darfur.

MINUSMA is mandated to assist the Malian authorities in the stabilisation of key population centres and the re-establishment of state authority throughout the country; support the political and electoral process; protect civilians; and assist in the promotion and protection of human rights and humanitarian assistance, as well as national and international justice. To carry out its mandate, MINUSMA is authorised to use 'all necessary means'. This is also the case for the French troops of Operation Serval – set to number 2,000 by the summer and 1,000 by the end of 2013 – that will be deployed in parallel with the mandate to support MINUSMA when it is placed under 'imminent and serious threat' and upon request of the UN Secretary-General.

Although most of the AFISMA troops are expected to be re-hatted as blue helmets, a new force generation process will have to find additional personnel

as AFISMA only consists of some 6,500 troops. Most interestingly, some European countries may return to UN peacekeeping on this occasion after a long period of absence - and in some cases resentment *vis-à-vis* the UN institutional 'culture' and command and control structure. Finally, in supporting the Malian security and justice sectors, MINUSMA shall operate in 'close coordination with other bilateral partners, donors and international organizations, including the EU.'

The comparative advantage of the UN

The UN takeover of the African operation is confirmation that the UN is, theoretically, the only organisation capable of undertaking the type of multidimensional activities assigned to MINUSMA. This is not to imply that the UN will necessarily be more successful than other organisations. However, there is no other institution that has the wherewithal and experience to embrace such a broad range of responsibilities, the tools to coordinate with other local and external actors, the capacity to finance the mandated tasks in a sustainable manner, and with the necessary legitimacy to do all that. As happened in the 1990s and early 2000s in West Africa (namely Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire), inter-institutional cooperation takes the form of a transition between a sub-regional organisation (notably the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS) that comes in first in a rather narrowly-defined security function, and the UN that takes over at a later stage with a much more comprehensive agenda.

In this context, MINUSMA's mandate is about 'robust' peacekeeping. What this means is that the blue helmets may resort to force in self-defence or, more importantly, in defence of the mandate. Practically, this implies that force can be used at the tactical level and in response to 'spoilers' that may oppose the implementation of the mandate; yet it should fall short of any kind of war-fighting or counter-insurgency tactics. "This is not an enforcement mission, this is not an anti-terrorist operation" said Hervé Ladsous, UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. Yet he also added that "it is clear that in an environment which will certainly see asymmetric attacks, the stabilisation mission will have to defend itself and its mandate." In other words, while peacekeepers may act robustly in the implementation of their mandate, they should not engage in direct and/or sustained military confrontation with the armed groups present in northern Mali. This kind of task will be the responsibility of the French operation, whose legal basis is now a combination of the Malian invitation and UNSC Resolution 2100.

How robust – and for how long?

This being said, for peacekeepers operating in northern Mali, as well as for the Malians themselves, the theoretical distinction between robustness and peace enforcement might be difficult to make on the ground. In a situation where the activities of armed groups may be recurrently curbed through a certain level of coercion, the threshold between resorting to force in a robust manner and peace enforcement is likely to get blurred. The confusion between the two levels of coercion has already raised some concerns from troop-contributing countries and members of the Security Council about the possible impact of this robustness on the key principles of peacekeeping (impartiality, non-resort to force, and consent of the host state).

Interestingly enough, it is partly to address these concerns that the UN peacekeeping mission is distinct from the French-led peace enforcement operation, in a configuration that seems to be emerging as a template for inter-institutional cooperation in military crisis management. Indeed, this juxtaposition of a peacekeeping operation working alongside an openly more coercive supporting force was put in place most recently in the DRC (with the Intervention Brigade in support of the MONUSCO established by UNSC Resolution 2098/2013), in Côte d'Ivoire (with Operation Licorne in support of UNOCI) or - to take examples of EU involvement - in Chad and again the DRC with the EU-led missions in support of the UN operation. Besides the merits of such mechanisms in terms of military

effectiveness, this also allows European countries that do not necessarily want to operate under the UN chain of command to contribute to the broader stabilisation efforts under a framework that better suits their requirements.

Still, the question arises of how keen MINUSMA troop contributors - let alone the Malian army - will be to assume the risks of a robust mandate across the entirety of the Malian territory. Although it is not supposed to engage directly with terrorist groups, MINUSMA is the first UN peacekeeping mission that will be exposed to attacks from groups linked with Al-Qaeda. It is thus likely that the determination of UN troops will be tested from the start: how this will shape their mindset and propensity to act robustly remains to be seen. Over the last months, along with the French troops, Chadian forces have demonstrated their capacity and intent in this respect, and a few other countries might be willing to embrace the 'robust' logic in the short term.

However, the vast majority of post-Cold War UN operations have amply demonstrated that a sustained effort to act robustly against determined spoilers is in short supply. Yet from the UN mission confronting the militias in the Kivus in the DRC to the UN operation facing the Janjaweed in Darfur, peacekeeping observers know for a fact how robustness suffers as a method of protecting civilians and handling spoilers. At best, it may come in support of a political process - but in no way can it be a substitute for it.

Finally, what the UN mission in the DRC over the last decade has revealed is the difficulty to remain impartial *vis-à-vis* national armed forces when these are responsible for human rights violations. Over time, the legitimacy and credibility of MINUSMA will depend upon its capacity to ensure that all actors, including the Malian armed forces, act responsibly. This also applies to the MNLA and how the UN operation and French troops respond to the danger of confrontation between the Malian army and the separatist movement.

At these different levels, were European states to contribute to the MINUSMA with more than staff officers, their political weight and military skills would no doubt help strengthen the operation (despite the limits of determination shown by them e.g. in Lebanon). As they progressively pull out of Afghanistan and potentially look to make a direct contribution to peace and security in Africa, participation in MINUSMA in parallel with the EUTM may appear as an option to consider seriously.

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